



“The righteous . . . shall grow
like a cedar in Lebanon”

Psalm 92:12

Reading Companion
to the Book of
1 Corinthians

*“So they read in the book in the law of God . . .
and caused them to understand the reading”*

Nehemiah 8:8

By
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Preface

The contents of this book were the essence of a course taught in the Bible College at New Germany Baptist Church in 2009. In order to present these materials in a form more readily available for further class use we have kept the class divisions used in the course. Therefore listed separately on the following Contents page you will find the starting pages for the 20 class portions as well as for the 16 chapters of the book of I Corinthians.

A study of I Corinthians is such a vital one for our modern church. There is so much divine help here for our personal lives as well as our church life. Christians and churches have problems and this was a book aimed at the kinds of problems we face. There is crucial understanding here to set us straight on questions of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts. What was the meaning and purpose of the gift of tongues speaking? Why did this gift die out of the experience of the church? What does God's kind of love look like? What is the key method and core message of the church? How should we handle someone living in sin within the church membership? How very many such concerns are covered here in establishing God's children and church for our good and His glory and toward maintaining a winsome witness before the lost. May the Lord lift your Christian experience to an exciting new level.

Bill Daniels

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“But thanks be to God,
which giveth us the victory
through
our Lord Jesus Christ”

(1 Cor. 15:57)

Class 1 – Introduction

Paul's two letters to the Corinthian believers add vital aspects to the New Testament (N.T.) and a good deal of interest. Both letters deal with problems, especially problems in the church. The church at Corinth was indeed a troubled and troubling congregation. But how very useful the result in these epistles, providing vital help for the same kinds of concerns churches still face today. God knew what He was doing. He is so able to turn any tragedy into triumph, taking a difficult situation and turning it to gold. These precious books have carried down through the centuries such bountiful, practical instruction and correction in the proper functioning of a local church, and how to deal with problem people in that context. It was no happy situation for Paul to handle or for the church to go through. But as Joseph's words to his brothers in Egypt, *"ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good"*. Even so those ancient troubles in Corinth God meant for their good and ours, and for the health of His church throughout this age.

The City of Corinth

The city of Corinth was the capital city of the southern province of Achaia in Paul's day. It had

become a very important hub of commerce for one main reason; location. Corinth was situated on the southern end of the 6 km wide isthmus (land strip) separating the Aegean Sea from the Ionian Sea and connecting the mainland with the Peloponnesus. There are natural harbours on both sides of the isthmus. A huge amount of shipping went east and west over that little strip of land (in modern times through a canal). This transfer of cargo became the main claim to fame of Corinth and her number one business. Shippers moving cargo between Italy and Asia Minor were able to avoid the trip around the southern tip of Achaia by moving it across the narrow isthmus.



To sail around was a detour of well over 300 kms involving a route legendary for danger in the days of sailing ships. At Corinth ships were simply unloaded in one harbour and their cargo transferred across the isthmus to other ships waiting in the other harbour on the opposite side. For smaller ships they had even devised a system whereby the ship itself could be lifted out of the water and moved across the isthmus by tram or slipway. For a time Corinth was one of the wealthiest cities in the ancient world.

The city of Corinth was large in the matter of *lust* as well. Corinth was one of the most sexually immoral and indulgent of ancient cities. Modern dictionaries still reflect the notorious reputation of that carnal city;

- Webster's Dictionary defines "*Corinthian*" as "dissolute [indulgent, immoral] and loving luxury, as the Corinthian people were said to be . . . a lover of elegantly luxurious living".
- Worldbook Dictionary – "Resembling the immoral manners of ancient Corinth . . . dissipated [wastefully indulgent] . . . a gay, immoral, shameless man".

To "Corinthianize" came to mean falling to an

immoral manner of life. To refer to a woman as a “Corinthian girl” was to call her a prostitute. It was in Corinth that the temple of the Greek goddess Aphrodite (Roman Venus) stood, on the Acropolis or the raised part of the city. Aphrodite was worshipped by the Greeks as the goddess of beauty and sexual love. The carnal nature of that religion and people was evident in the hundreds of priestess prostitutes of Aphrodite and the immoral nature of their “worship” at her temple. It’s interesting how the Lord with time buries such depraved centres, leaving them a dusty ruin as He so appropriately did with old Corinth. The city was destroyed by an earthquake in 1858 and was never rebuilt on the old site.

Study of the arts, sciences, and philosophy flourished in the city of Corinth, as well as sport (Isthmian Games). Compare Paul’s reference to sport in I Cor. 9:24-27.

The Church in Corinth

We find the background for the church of Corinth in Acts 18. Paul and company planted the church there during his 2nd missionary journey, after he fled to Athens and then to Corinth due to the severe opposition he faced from the offended Jews of

Macedonia. Paul must have been about 50 years old when he first arrived in Corinth. Perhaps he was a bit discouraged at that point with such trouble in Macedonia and little fruit in Athens. Thus the Lord graciously came to Paul with an encouraging vision there in Corinth, challenging His servant to courage and boldness and speaking of the prospect of *“much people in this city”* (Acts 18:9-10). Paul continued in active outreach in Corinth for about 18 months, resulting in a church of believers there. He found good friends in Aquila and Priscilla, with whom he lived while working part-time in their tent-making business to support himself and those with him as they sought to evangelize the city.

After Paul and company left Corinth a gifted teacher named Apollos ministered there (Acts 18:27-19:1; I Cor. 1:12; 3:6). Apollos’ work for the Lord was touched by Paul’s influence as well, through Aquila and Priscilla. For he was instructed in *“the way of God more perfectly”* by them when they later met him in Ephesus (Acts 18:24-26). Because they had been taught more perfectly by Paul they were able to help another to the same. *“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also”* (II Tim. 2:2).

On the Side

Consider how very quietly Paul entered this utterly pagan stronghold of the evil one. From the perspective of the Corinthians Paul was a nobody, just another body crowding their busy streets, bringing a message light-years away from their burning interests. Yet how very powerful the impact of the gospel among such a people in such a shamefully scandalous setting. *“For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth”* (Rom. 1:16). Even in a place like that there were some who were ready to hear and believe. It should bring greatest encouragement to us in the Lord’s work, though we labour in the hardest of places among the most difficult of people.

Paul might have looked at the depths of the evil there and simply moved on thinking it quite hopeless. Yet by the power of God, by the power of God’s gospel, a church was established, and with resoundingly positive ripple effects still touching the lives of thousands throughout this age through the key corrective messages sent to that church in the form of these two letters. Compare the stunning results at Nineveh under Jonah’s ministry. Though the prospects for fruit there must have appeared quite impossible upon entering, yet never has there

ever been more powerful results recorded from a single message or mission than at Nineveh under Jonah's reluctant ministry!

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The Book of I Corinthians

Paul wrote the book of I Corinthians during his 3rd missionary journey, while involved in his three years of ministry at Ephesus (I Cor. 16:8). Paul was very much concerned with the follow-up of those he had led to Christ, and unfortunately (?) the believers at Corinth were very much in need of follow-up. Considering how raw the background from which those believers had come and the environment in which they lived we can well understand problems arising among them. While at Ephesus Paul heard disturbing reports concerning the believers at Corinth (1:11 & 5:1). And so he wrote in an effort to deal with the problems in the church and to offer solutions and to instruct his friends there toward spiritual maturity. The church at Corinth had written to Paul as well requesting answers to several questions relating to Christian living (7:1). Thus from chapter 7 onward Paul seems to move from one question to the next seeking to give answers. As a result Paul's 1st

epistle to the believers at Corinth becomes a very practical and useful guide to order in the church. But things were not resolved with his first letter, bringing the need for the second (II Corinthians).

A strong theme in the book is the cross of Christ;

- Our preaching is of the cross (1:17-18, 23; 2:2; 15:3). “*We preach Christ crucified*” (1:23).
- Our purity in view of the cross (5:7).
- Our care is because of the cross (8:11).
- Our communion is through the cross (10:16; 11:25-27).

Survey

Handling Quarrels

Chapter 1-4 – Prideful Divisions in Church

- Their pride – 4:6, 18-19; 5:2.
- Their division – 1:11; 3:3-4; 6:6-7; 11:17-18.
- “*Only by pride cometh contention*” (Prov. 13:10).
- What is the answer to pride? “*Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up . . . seeketh*

not her own" (13:4-5).

- Selfish, carnal Christians are those with a divisive spirit (3:1-4).

Chapter 5 – Evil in Church

- They, like most churches today, failed to discipline their members.
- Trouble always comes when we're more tolerant of evil than God is. Compare the church at Ephesus in Rev. 2, so highly commended for their holy *intolerance* of evil.
- The Lord through His Apostle demanded appropriate action against the offending brother.

6:1-11 – Brothers in Court

- Note how severe Paul's scorn (6:5, "*I speak to your shame*").
- A brother in Christ should be prepared to take wrong and loss rather than to take action in court (vs. 7).
- This principle;
 - Applies to our relation to all others.
 - Will keep a home at peace.

- Will keep a marriage together.
- Is good help against heartache, anxiety, bitterness, ulcers, high blood pressure, depression, etc.

6:12-20 – No to Sexual Impurity!

- Because you're changed (vs. 11).
- Because your body is for the Lord (vs. 13).
- Because the resurrection is certain (vs. 14). No self-denial is in vain. Chapter 15 will underscore this crucial point. See how our faith is such an essential element in our sanctification!!
- Because your body is a member of Christ (vs. 15-16).
- Because sexual impurity is sin against your own body (vs. 18). Compare Prov. 6:32.
- Because the Holy Spirit dwells within you (vs. 19).
- Because you're not your own (vs. 19). For a believer to use himself for himself is a form of stealing, in using for himself something that belongs to another.
- Because you're bought with a price (vs. 20).

Handling Questions

Relating to Personal Concerns

Chapter 7 – Concerning Marriage

Paul goes in a couple directions in this chapter, dealing both with our responsibilities in marriage and with the question of whether to marry at all. The basic thrust of the chapter is that the ideal situation is to remain unmarried without the need of marriage, that one might be more wholly given to the Lord and His work. Singleness is not a second rate condition but first rate, first choice (note vs. 1). Thus the “necessity” of marriage should not be a foregone conclusion. It does not have to be a have-to-be! Compare the modern girl-boy thinking that elevates the need for boy/girlfriend up somewhere close to our need for air. The reality is that most folks do in fact *need* to marry, and there’s nothing wrong with this. Avoiding marriage is not best for those who are not gifted to do so, which can lead to immorality. And marriage is not best for those gifted to be celibate.

This chapter relates directly to the previous discussion in the second half of chapter 6. Here Paul is holding up marriage partly as the legitimate

answer to the dangers he warned of there, as a hedge against moral impurity. Understand that marriage is meant to be that, and be wise to not neglect this important purpose of marital union. Be sure the need for intimacy is met within your marriage, thus serving as that proper hedge it's meant to be. See how practical God's counsel, even getting into our bedrooms. Compare Prov. 5:15-19. Compare some of Paul's other N.T. teachings on marriage, where he holds high the dignity of marriage and the physical union between husband and wife;

- Eph. 5:22-33 – Two become one.
- I Tim. 4:3 – Forbidding marriage is a doctrine of demons.
- II Cor. 6:14 – No unequal yokes in marriage.
- Heb. 13:4 – *“The bed undefiled”*.

Chapter 8-10 – Thoughts on Christian Liberty

Concerning foods (chap. 8);

- Question – Can we eat meats offered to idols (8:4)?
- Answer – *“If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth”*

(8:13). Yes, but if my freedom is going to hurt somebody then I must give up my freedom. In Christ I am free, but not free to be an offense to others. Meat is just meat and idols are no actual gods. Yet though God and I know the truth of this it does matter what other people think and how they view my actions. Compare Rom. 12:17; II Cor. 8:21.

Paul's example (chap. 9). He refused financial support due him lest some be offended.

Paul's explanation (chap. 10). "*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence . . .*" (10:31-32).

Relating to Worship Services

11:1-16 – Concerning Hair (hats?)

Behind the English phrase "*having his head covered*" in vs. 4 is the idea of "having down the head". Compare vs. 13-15 where the meaning becomes plain.

11:17-34 – Concerning the Lord's Table

Here is the fullest statement in the N.T. on the

ordinance of Communion.

Chapter 12-14 – Concerning Spiritual Gifts

- Chapter 12 – Unity in diversity. Stop demanding only the showy gifts. The Spirit of God is Lord of the gifts (12:3-11). All are important in their contribution to the whole (12:12-31).
- Chapter 13 – “*A more excellent way*” (12:31). All gifts are to be exercised in love.
- Chapter 14 – All for edification. Note the great prominence of “*edify*” or “*edification*” in this chapter.

Chapter 15 – Concerning the Resurrection

Here is the great chapter on the resurrection, a doctrine foreign to Greek thinking. S. Lewis Johnson made this statement in The Wycliffe Bible Commentary; “In general the Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, but they did not accept the resurrection of the body. To them the resurrection of the body was unthinkable in view of the fact that they held the body to be the source of man’s weakness and sin. Death, therefore, was very welcome, since by it the soul would be liberated from the body; but resurrection was not welcome,

because this would constitute another descent of the soul into the grave of the body.” The *Epicureans* denied any existence after death, like the Sadducees. The *Stoics* believed death brought the merging of the soul with deity, and thus loss of personhood. The *Platonists* denied bodily resurrection. In contrast to Greek philosophy which sees its fulfilment only in this life, Paul makes the strong point that all that is done or denied for Christ in this life will last. All labour and self-denial for the Lord *will not be in vain!*

“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (15:57-58).

Every doubt or fear concerning the future is put to rest with our belief in the resurrection. Every anxious flight to immediate pleasures is ended through our belief in the resurrection.

Ponder Points

Problems and Paul’s Prescriptions;

- Contentious divisions are answered by humility in view of Christ's judgment seat (chap. 3).
- Showmanship (sects, gifts), lawsuits, and inconsiderateness are answered by love.
- Living for selfish, sensual pleasure is answered by marriage (present) and the resurrection (future).

Class 2 – I Corinthians 1

1:1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

Paul begins this 1st epistle to the church at Corinth in the way he does most all of his epistles. His introductory comments are made up of words of greeting and then thanksgiving. Yet, as is often true, if we listen carefully, even in his opening words we're able to discern hints as to what's on his heart as he writes.

1:1-9 – Introduction

Vs. 1-3 – Greeting.

Vs. 1 – “*Paul, called to be an apostle*” – As we've discussed in our consideration of other N.T. epistles of Paul, it seems that when he was writing to deal with problems he begins with this title expressing what he was, and even who appointed him to this role. That Paul was appointed by God as an apostle affirmed his authority to do as he was doing, to step in and deal with the concerns these people were facing. The book of Proverbs (26:17) warns us away

1:2 *Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:*
1:3 *Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

from meddling with strife that does not belong to us, likening such a move to grabbing “*a dog by the ears*”. To do so is likely to result in a bad bite and rightly so. But the proper appointment of this man as God’s apostle spoke of his *right* to meddle in their affairs. As we later learn, there were those there in Corinth who were suggesting otherwise, that Paul’s appointment and authority were questionable. But he simply begins with the statement of it, finding no need to prove himself. Those who will hear would hear.

“*And Sosthenes our brother*” – Though *we* don’t know who this man was it seems those at Corinth did, or what would be the sense in his mention here. If this was the Sosthenes who was “*the ruler of the synagogue*” in Corinth (Acts 18:17) then obviously he had found Christ, just as Crispus “*the chief ruler of the synagogue*” before him (Acts 18:8).

Vs. 2 – “*Unto the church of God which is at Corinth*”

– Don't miss the subtle point here. It was the church of who? *"Of God"*! That church belonged to God, not to any particular leader or group among them. As we shall see, this was a divided church where members were taking sides. From the first words this wise counsellor was calling them back to union under God rather than division under men.

"To them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus" – Though church people come in many types, the true church of God is made up of those who are sanctified and *"in Christ Jesus"*. Many are those inside the church but outside of Christ; inside the walls, even on the roll, but outside the fold. *"Sanctified"* speaks of those separated out or set apart from the world and for the Lord. The word *"saint"* here, that common N.T. title for believers, comes from the same word. Even the word "church" expresses a similar idea. The Greek word translated church literally meaning "called out". The church of God in its purest sense is that assembly of those called of God out of the world and separated unto Him, having found refuge *"in Christ"*. These are they who have truly called *"upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord"* as Saviour, for *"whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Rom. 10:13).

1:4 *I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace
of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;*
1:5 *That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all
utterance, and in all knowledge;*

Note the great prominence of focus on the *lordship* of Jesus Christ begun here (vs. 3, 7, 8, 9, 10). This again gives the hint of the crying need Paul will soon begin to press upon these selfish saints.

Vs. 4-9 – Thanksgiving.

Paul generally always began his epistles with some expression of thanks for his readers, indicating his continual remembrance of them in prayer. Though this congregation so greatly troubled Paul, yet still he could find cause to thank God for them. We learn so much from this man about dealing wisely with people. One of Paul's very useful ways becomes evident here. He looked for *good* in others, even when it could have been so easy to allow their exasperating ways to fill his vision. Though within his two epistles to this church Paul spoke so many things aimed at their correction, severe words, yet still he loved them and made it known. And though he might have thought it enough that he was in fact loving them by correcting them, yet still he would

*1:6 Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:
1:7 So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the
coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:
1:8 Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye
may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

tell them of his tender care for them. We usually overlook that part I'm afraid. And Paul was this way toward everybody. Only in his letter to the Galatians did he neglect this, because of the great urgency of the false teachings of the legalists taking root there. If we must speak words of correction to others let it be within a context of genuine care. Let it be with an evident willingness to acknowledge and commend all that is right and good in them.

Vs. 5-7 – Notice that Paul's thanksgiving centred more on what they had from God, more on the way God had blessed them than ways they had been a blessing. We can always thank God for that in a Christian brother, can't we?

"So that ye come behind in no gift" – They had received richly of the gifts of the Spirit, gifts relating to speaking (*"all utterance"*) and awareness (*"all knowledge"*) and other forms of Christian service. We'll hear more on these gifts in chapters 12-14.

1:9 *God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Vs. 8 – “*Who will also confirm you unto the end*” – To “*confirm*” is to ground or fix or establish. Those who are truly in Christ are rooted in Him to the end. Again, it’s about what *He* does, not what *we* do to the end. It’s not a question of our keeping, only His.

“*That ye may be blameless*” – The idea of “*blameless*” is literally “not called out”, speaking of a character not called into question or unaccused. “*Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy*” (Jude 24).

Vs. 9 – “*God is faithful*” – Again our blamelessness fixed to the end is a matter of whose faithfulness? Not mine! Not yours! All depends on the faithfulness of that One who alone “*is able to keep you from falling*”. Our confidence rests in the character and promise of our faithful God. It is indeed a covenant relationship, but a one-sided covenant, an unconditional covenant.

Now stand back and look at it. Did you notice that

every single verse so far has made mention of Jesus Christ; twice in vs. 2, by name in every verse except vs. 5, His full title of our *“Lord Jesus Christ”* or *“Jesus Christ our Lord”* in most of the nine verses;

- Vs. 1 – *“An apostle of Jesus Christ”*
- Vs. 2 – *“Sanctified in Christ Jesus”*
- Vs. 2 – Calling *“upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord”*
- Vs. 3 – *“Grace . . . from the Lord Jesus Christ”*
- Vs. 4 – *“Grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ”*
- Vs. 5 – *“In everything ye are enriched by Him”*
- Vs. 6 – *“The testimony of Christ”*
- Vs. 7 – *“The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”*
- Vs. 8 – *“The day of our Lord Jesus Christ”*
- Vs. 9 – *“The fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord”*

Amazing the focus! As we always see in Paul, here was a man sold out to Jesus Christ, consumed with Him, impassioned after Him. Everything in the true Christian experience revolves around *“our Lord Jesus Christ”*.

1:10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

1:10-17 – Wrong Focus – Divisions

Vs. 10-12 – Nature of their divisions.

Vs. 10 – “*Now I beseech you, brethren*” – Paul’s great earnestness comes through from the start as he begins now to tackle the main issue among these people. There were many concerns there, but their prideful divisions were the heart of the necessary conquest. And *again* Paul pled with them in “*the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*”. He came in view of all that that glorious name means to us and suggests concerning our proper response to Him and to others.

“*That ye all speak the same thing*” – They were voicing words of disagreement (vs. 12), but Paul would have them return to words reflecting one allegiance or a united allegiance to One.

“*That there be no divisions among you*” – The word behind the English here is that from which we get

1:11 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

the word schism, expressing the idea of something torn in two. Though it seems they weren't split into separate churches as yet, they were certainly a church torn apart internally.

“That ye be perfectly joined together” – Like something torn now repaired. The word in the original Greek used here is the same used elsewhere of mending nets.

“In the same mind” – Not only *saying* the same thing and claiming the same allegiance, but really thinking the same as well. Paul's goal for them was that their mouths, minds, and opinions might all be aligned.

Vs. 11 – *“It hath been declared unto me”* – It seems some person or persons *“of the house of Chloe”* had informed Paul of the situation at the church in Corinth. Again these are folks we don't know, but obviously the believers at Corinth would have known them. This is not to be taken as a case of slander or tale-bearing. Paul was right up front

1:12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.

with them. He was making known the name of those who spoke to him, which could only be by their permission. And these folks took their concern to someone responsible, in a position to do something about it. We are wise to discern the difference between good reporting and slander.

“My brethren” – See again Paul’s gracious way of handling these people. Even as he begins to turn up the heat in confronting their wrong he does not fail to call them *“my brethren”*. He is not aloof, ever! He does not speak down to them, but as one among them. Again, it’s lessons in dealing with people. If one does not learn to handle people in love and wisdom he will not last as a leader among men. Compare Jephthah’s abrasive recklessness in dealing with the unreasonable men of Ephraim, in contrast to Gideon’s gracious finesse with the same (Judges 8:1-3; 12:1ff). Compare the difference in advice King Rehoboam received from his old and young counsellors, and the results (I Ki. 12). Confrontation is often necessary and sometimes appreciated, but never from a high-and-mighty

1:13 Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

attitude.

Vs. 12 – *“Every one of you saith”* – This divisive, party spirit had spread through the whole church, affecting *“every one”* of them. There’s a touch of a boastful spirit communicated by such statements of allegiance to particular groups or sects or parties. Paul was the one who began the work. Apollos soon followed upon Paul’s departure (Acts 18:24-19:1), a man particularly noted for his eloquence. Cephas or Peter may have appealed more to the Jewish Christians among them, he being the apostle to the circumcision (Gal. 2:7), though there is no record of Peter ever visiting Corinth. Those claiming Christ for their head seem to reflect a wish to follow no man, untrusting of faulty human leadership.

Vs. 13-17 – Paul now begins to demonstrate how silly such divisions were within the Lord’s body.

Vs. 13 – *“Is Christ divided?”* – Is He not one, and all in His body one in Him?

“Was Paul crucified for you?” – Could any man do

1:14 *I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus
and Gaius;*
1:15 *Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine
own name.*

for you what Jesus has done?

“Were you baptized in the name of Paul?” – Have you been united in and with Paul, in dependence upon a man? Of course not, on all three counts! These are questions meant to turn the focus of these people where it should be.

Vs. 14-16 – Paul had baptized only a few and was glad now that the Lord had allowed this to be so, lest his baptism be misinterpreted or misrepresented among these people. He denies having any part in helping to form any particular group or sect among them.

Vs. 17 – *“For Christ sent me not to baptize”* – It’s not that Paul denies the importance of baptism, but that his particular work was preaching the gospel or evangelizing. Jesus as well did not do the actual baptizing throughout the years of His ministry, but left this work for His disciples to perform (Jn. 4:2). Even so it seems Paul left the baptizing to his assistants. And then once the work had gotten

*1:16 And I baptized also the household of Stephanas:
besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.
1:17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the
gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of
Christ should be made of none effect.*

going in a city and people began to be saved the work of baptizing was turned over to the leaders of the church.

There is a danger implied here that is still with us today; the danger of a “celebrity salvation”. Once when I asked a man whether he was saved, he replied Oh yes, he was baptized years ago by a well-known religious leader in the area. As if that answered my question. As if to be baptized by a religious celebrity was like some special, fast-track ticket through the pearly gates. As if it were a bit more of a sure thing.

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On the Side

Notice the subtle balance on the question of baptism in this context. Paul’s rhetorical questions in vs. 13 seem to pick up on the three main elements of this gospel dispensation; Jesus Christ, Him crucified, and the need of baptism, suggesting

the same prominent place of the rite of baptism as seen in Christ's commission at the end of Matt. 28 as well. Yet as we discover here Paul didn't as a rule trouble himself with baptizing those who were saved, but left this to others. This would be a rather strange procedure if baptism were crucial in completing a soul's salvation as some teach. Thus we understand that baptism is an important follow-through after new birth as a necessary step of obedience, but the rite has no part in saving a soul.

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“Not with wisdom of words” – Paul's purpose in preaching was never to attract attention to himself through clever speech, but only in plain and simple terms to lift up the truth of Christ crucified, that He might draw all men to Himself (Jn. 12:32). Paul would not allow any shade of insight into the great subject of his preaching to be lost through the delivery. He was officially removing himself from the popularity contest happening there at Corinth.

1:18-31 – Right Focus – Christ

Having stated his great purpose, Paul now runs with it. The theme of Jesus Christ was never far from the surface for this man.

1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

Vs. 18-25 – Christ crucified is the power and wisdom of God.

Vs. 18 – *“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness”* – From the word translated foolishness here we get the English word “moron”. To those blind to the truth and captured through human “wisdom” and on their way to the eternal destruction of hell the preaching of Christ and of the cross is the work of morons. It is the work of those too dull or stupid to understand the sophistications of culture, which might deliver them from the folly of such superstitious beliefs. It’s the stuff of fairy-tales, the interest of children, not of thinking people. It’s not that the gospel is too high or too difficult for them to understand. It’s too low for *“them that perish”* to consider worthy of their attention. It’s too vulgar, too messy, too insulting.

“But unto us which are saved it is the power of God” – The assessment of the saved is quite a different story. For the lost the gospel makes no sense (*“foolishness”*). For the saved it works (*“power”*)!

1:19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

Compare in Rom. 1:16 the gospel as the “*power of God unto salvation*”, not to all, but only “*to every one that believeth*”.

Vs. 19 – “*For it is written . . .*” – Paul introduces support for his point with a quote from Isa. 29:14. The indication is that all that comes of human wisdom will perish anyway. Only what is preached according to the true message of the cross will last.

How often it is true that God’s way of wisdom does not make sense to those looking on. How often men are given to following their own wisdom or understanding of things instead of trusting the Lord with all their heart (Prov. 3:5). How often alliance with a neighbouring nation seemed the best option for Israel (to her sorrow), rather than simply trusting her defence to her Almighty God. Compare Asa in II Chron. 14 with Asa in II Chron. 16, and the corresponding results. How often what makes good sense is not according to faith, and what is according to faith does not make good sense. It didn’t make sense for a man to leave his ground

*1:20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the
disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the
wisdom of this world?*
*1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by
wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the
foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

unplanted every 7th year if he expected to survive (Lev. 25). It doesn't make sense to give of our increase to the Lord's work and expect to make ends meet (Prov. 3:9-10; 11:24-25). Except that God can be trusted in His promises.

Vs. 20 – *“Where is the wise?”* – Paul looks to the end when such a question will be on the lips of all who are truly wise with the wisdom of God, when all others will be judged and removed. *“Where are all those who had such a mouth full of arguments?”* For every mouth will then be stopped, *“and all the world”* found *“guilty before God”* (Rom. 3:19).

Vs. 21 – *“The world by wisdom knew not God”* – Consider further how very weak the wisdom of man. For in every age it has never succeeded in bringing men to a saving knowledge of God. In fact it succeeds in just the opposite, in puffing his pride and turning him away from the only true and living God. Compare the proud progression of human

1:22 *For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:*
1:23 *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;*

wisdom in Rom. 1.

“The foolishness of preaching” – This refers not so much to the method but to the message or content of what is preached. It is the message of *“Christ crucified”* (vs. 23). According to His own pleasure God has deliberately chosen a message that appears foolish to the worldly wise. Not the matter of crucifixion, but the crucified Christ, the very heart of the gospel. Unsaved man sees *“Christ crucified”* as a seemingly foolish message, for it is a test of humility for both the hearer and the proclaimer. We are called upon to preach Him anyway. For out of the mass of mockers some will hear God’s call and believe.

Vs. 22-23 – *“For the Jews require a sign”* – These reject the gospel because they’re looking for a demonstration of power and royalty and credentials, some supernatural stamp from heaven to authenticate the message and messenger. Though Jesus came with all of this yet they just wouldn’t/

1:24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

couldn't see it. But a crucified Christ indicates weakness and seems a failure, and thus this becomes for them the point of stumbling, as it does for the Muslim religion as well.

“The Greeks seek after wisdom” – The Greeks, representing all Gentiles, reject the gospel message because they're looking for something sensible or rational, something proven through a convincing argument. But a crucified Christ makes no sense at all. Simple faith is just too simple for them, involving no intellect, learning, or unusual abilities. How very humbling to human pride! How could faith in a seemingly illegitimate, convicted, and executed criminal be any kind of answer? How absurd! Both Jews and Gentiles were blinded by their preconceptions, and exalted themselves in their pride to presume to know the best way.

Vs. 24 – *“But unto them which are called . . .”* – To those who hear God's call through His Spirit, church, and words and believe, all fits and falls into place. All of the message, meaning, and method

1:25 *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men;
and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*
1:26 *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not
many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not
many noble, are called:*

makes such perfect sense. These clearly see in “*Christ crucified*” (and risen) all of the wealth of God’s wisdom and power. They understand that in this way alone God could remain both just and Justifier, that He could avoid compromising His standard of justice and yet be able to freely justify sinful man. Their eyes are opened to understand that in this way alone God could restore fallen man to His fellowship and blessing.

Vs. 25 – “*The foolishness of God is wiser than men*” – How deftly God turns the spotlight and exposes man’s “wisdom” as foolishness indeed! For it serves only to exalt man in his pride, and with human pride it will ultimately be brought to nothing. Compare in James 3 the contrast between the pure “*wisdom that is from above*” and the “*wisdom*” that “*is earthly, sensual, devilish*”.

Vs. 26-31 – The Lord alone is the One in whom we glory.

1:27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

1:28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

Vs. 26 – “*Not many wise men . . . not many mighty*” – Not many from among those considered (or considering themselves to be) wise by the people of earth will find the answer in Christ; the great thinkers, clever comedians and critics. Not many from among those considered strong will ever believe; the powerful rulers and famous actors, celebrities and sportsmen. He does not say “not any”, but “*not many*”. The narrow gate gets even narrower toward the top.

Vs. 27-28 – “*But God hath chosen the foolish things*” – He has chosen to work through people and things considered foolish and feeble among men, more among the outcasts than among the “in” crowd, that He might put to shame people and things considered wise and strong and worthy among men. As Mary spoke in the Spirit, “*He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them*

1:29 *That no flesh should glory in his presence.*
1:30 *But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is
made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and
sanctification, and redemption:*
1:31 *That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let
him glory in the Lord.*

of low degree” (Lk. 1:51-52).

Vs. 29-31 – “*That no flesh should glory in His presence*” – Here is God’s great purpose in working with men in the way He does, that all who glory would glory in Him rather than in themselves, that our boast might be in the God who has so greatly lifted we who are “*in Christ Jesus*”. For in Him we have found;

- True wisdom, with the right answers to all of the dilemma of life and death.
- God’s own righteousness, as a gift of His grace rather than through works of the law.
- Sanctification, as we grow in holiness through the power of the indwelling Spirit.
- Redemption, having been purchased out of the bondage of sin in which we had languished through the ransom price of “*the precious blood of Christ*”.

The entire work of God is for the entire body of Christ. From this grand perspective their way of personal, petty peeves and preferences there at Corinth suddenly looked pretty small!

“But as it is written,
Eye hath not seen,
nor ear heard,
neither have entered
into the heart of man,
the things which God
hath prepared
for them that love Him”

(I Cor. 2:9)

Class 3 – I Corinthians 2

If we were to look upon a church of people today who were embroiled in the kinds of concerns the believers at Corinth were involved in, what might we think of them? They were so full of pride and taking sides and talking up personalities and torn apart by a spirit of contention. Judging by the surface evidences, wouldn't we perhaps tend to question whether these were people who really know Christ as Saviour? Yet there can be no doubt that Paul wrote as to believers, to "*them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus*" and "*called to be saints*". He understood that he was writing to Christian brothers (1:11, 2:1), those who were "*in Christ Jesus*" (1:30). It speaks a measure of caution to our ready tendency to suggest others unsaved based upon the outward form of their Christianity.

As we've considered, word had reached Paul while he was ministering across the Aegean in Ephesus of serious troubles in the church at Corinth. The primary concern was that of divisions and contentions among them. It must have been a bit of an ugly atmosphere there, with verbal arguments, drawn out, boisterous business meetings, written statements of position and rebuttals and such, seeking to prove the merits of one position or

personality over another. This matter the Apostle turned to immediately following his opening greetings and thanks, speaking of urgency. Paul began by seeking to turn their attention from men to the Master, to the union that is ours in Jesus Christ. He pointed out how the entire work of God in Christ is for the entire body of Christ, and how our boast therefore is in God rather than in men.

In 1:17 Paul began as well to contrast his preaching with the wisdom of men. Obviously the matter of human cleverness, wisdom, or eloquence was a part of the contentions among these troubled people. But Paul makes the point that such things have nothing to do with a truly effective ministry for Christ. Man's wisdom does not offer solutions to man's great need. Only God can provide this in the crucified Saviour. The preaching of "*Christ crucified*" is and will ever be seen as foolishness by "*them that perish*". So we must not even try to proclaim Christ with worldly intellectualism. Such only tends to void God's power (1:17). This is good news indeed to most of us in the Lord's work with simpler, more common abilities. God is in fact quite happy to make His fundamental message of man's way to blessing to appear foolishness to the worldly wise. It's a sifter, designed to weed out those who come in pride and demand that God fit

His approach into their expectations (wonderful signs or worldly sense, 1:22). In God's wisdom He chose not to work through things men might expect, things men consider prudent and powerful. Instead He chose to work through things considered quite feeble and foolish. To those with a right heart the gospel message works, with both wisdom and power aplenty (1:24). And by this means God's gospel message effectively brushes aside human greatness, that God's greatness might be left centre stage, "*that no flesh should glory in His presence*", but that "*he that glorieth*" might "*glory in the Lord*" (1: 29-30). Though it was the way of the Jew to expect signs of the miraculous and of Gentiles to revel in worldly wisdom, the true essence of the gospel is not found in either of these. Yet isn't it true that men continually tend to run back to these very props in their efforts to proclaim their Christ?

Such is the fundamental principle of the gospel. And it is this very foundational principle that gave answer to the core problem there at Corinth, that no flesh should glory, neither in himself nor in any other flesh, that we might be united in our glorying in the Lord. It ever tends to be true that men are divided because they are united around men, around human character, human abilities, human wisdom. But when our union in Christ is

2:1 *And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.*

underscored, how much more easily we can get along with those on the other side of minor differences.

2:1-5 – Encoder – Paul’s Approach

Vs. 1 – “*And I, brethren, when I came to you . . .*” – Paul now calls them to remember his example, the manner in which he himself had come to them at the first. Compare Paul’s similar call in his other writings to consider the same in illustrating various points (Gal. 3:5; I Thess. 2; II Thess. 3:7-8). How valuable a teaching tool to be able to say “Look at me for an example, and do as I have done”. As the proverbial father commanded in pleading with his son, “*let thine eyes observe my ways*” (Prov. 23:26). Are you able to say that to your son or daughter?

“*Came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom*” – When Paul came to them he made no attempt to speak to them with the practiced eloquence of an orator or with the persuasive wisdom of a learned philosopher. He did not seek to display qualities

*2:2 For I determined not to know any thing among you,
save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

that might attract them to himself at all. As he was now instructing them, so he had displayed when among them through his own example. His purpose was never his own glory, but only to turn all attention to God.

Vs. 2 – *“Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”* – Again, he purposely determined to focus only on the reality of Christ crucified. His message was the simplicity of salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in our behalf. His *“gospel which I preached unto you”* he later puts into a concise statement in 15:3-4, *“That Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture: and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures”*. It’s just that simple. And of course out of these basic truths come a world of opportunity and display of character and emotion and devotion!

In that Paul determined to know nothing *“save Jesus Christ”*, we again see in this man one who was so entirely focused upon the Person of Jesus, his vision filled with his Saviour. It was not Jesus plus the law. It was Jesus, all the fulfilment of the

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

law! It was not Jesus plus the priesthood. It was Jesus, the great High Priest Himself, the glorious end and answer to the entire concept of priesthood. It was not Jesus added to anything for Paul. It was Jesus Himself as the whole equation, the sum and total, the very equivalent of hope and multiplication of peace.

Vs. 3 – “*And I was with you in weakness*” – Paul brought a message of humility. The message of the cross is a humbling one, for it speaks of men who are so bad that the messy death of God’s own Son was required. It’s why “proper” Christianity often leaves this aspect out or plays it down. Because the proud would like to retain their pride while offering their nod to God. But Paul came in humility carrying a humble and humbling message. He did not come as one who was strong but “*in weakness*”. He did not come brimming over with self-confidence but “*in fear, and in much trembling*”. He came with a sense of insufficiency or inadequacy in himself in the greatness of the work, rather than with the self-important bravado of a skilled orator. Again as discussed previously, Paul may have been at a

2:4 *And my speech and my preaching was not with
enticing words of man's wisdom, but in
demonstration of the Spirit and of power:*
2:5 *That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of
men, but in the power of God.*

particularly low point upon entering Corinth due to the circumstances bringing him there. And perhaps for this cause the Lord came to him in the night vision recorded in Acts 18:9-10, speaking words of encouragement to His servant, words of hope in a great harvest there. His hope for results was placed where it should be, all outside of himself, all in God's grace in Christ.

Vs. 4-5 – *“And my speech and my preaching”* – Notice again the method of God's man. No puppets, comedy, or clowns. No clattering band or drama team. Just the old way seen throughout God's Book of books; the simple *“preaching”* or *“declaring”* of God's words.

“Not with enticing words of man's wisdom” – So does a ministry require a clever argument to be effective? What about those whose ministry focus is proving the truth of creation? Is it really true that we must weaken the foundation of evolution with a reconsideration of geology from a creation

perspective before folks will listen to the Bible? Does a truly useful ministry really require two books then, the geology book and the Bible? What of those who wrangle from the angle of Christian apologetics? Must we become clever enough to argue folks out of every option but the true? I think of the Christian magazine I was recently reading that highlighted their keynote speaker and writer. Such a qualified and clever fellow that he could play 12 games of chess simultaneously, *blind-folded*. Do we really need that? Must a man sport such impressive credits before the worldly wise will listen to him? Does a man need to be highly degreed and certified that he might be qualified to have a voice? Will this make him more useful in God's work? Or must we make a point of first proclaiming the law to the unsaved world? Must people first hear the thundering condemnations of God's violated law before they will ever see their need of a Saviour? What is the true ministry of the Word? It's portions like this that set us straight and offer proper adjustment to our focus. It certainly attracts greater interest from listeners if we're able to display some superior communication ability or knowledge and high-sounding arguments in proclaiming the Christian religion. But look well where Paul kept his focus. "*Not with enticing words of man's wisdom*". The temptation to impress

people will always be with us, especially for those in a speaking/teaching/preaching role. Crowds are attracted to a clever speaker. Numbers swell around a man with powerful charisma. There is great interest in one with well-reasoned, stunningly brilliant arguments. But not so with Paul. He did not come with great oratory or clever wisdom. Some folks were even suggesting that *“his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible”* (II Cor. 10:10). He was not one who impressed people with his personal presence. He was no Apollos. Even Jesus came with the simple expression of simple truths. The lesson is here. True ministers of the gospel should speak plainly and simply in an understandable manner, keeping Christ and Him crucified at the core of their preaching. Only such preaching will find true success in the end, when the final count is made.

“But in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” – Paul’s preaching came with demonstration of Holy Spirit power, the Spirit of God working alongside the preaching, doing His *“greater works”* of inward conviction and regeneration in those who believe. This is a combination so much more wonderfully effective in working true redemption in souls than what clever men could *ever* accomplish. Yet many a modern ministry is patterned more after the way of

Apollos than that of Paul. Because for many the underlying purpose is to attract numbers rather than to lead followers to true redemption. And this in itself is among the very greatest of treacheries, to attract people to a Christian ministry and give them the impression that they are among the redeemed, when in reality they have merely connected with a movement or are caught up in a moment or intrigued by a man or manifestations of some type. With time their true heart condition is sure to lead their way out of their new-found religious trappings, through disillusionment with imperfect people or some other disappointment, but now consumed with disgust for the whole Christianity song and dance, wanting nothing more to do with it! Have not such folks been dealt a greater disservice than if they had never been swept up into a pulsating, popular “ministry” at all? Folks just need to be spoken to plainly, bluntly, without personal magnetism and polished dynamics! They need to be simply informed of their desperate need for Jesus Christ. They need to be openly confronted with their desperately sinful nature, and with the vast separation that exists between their soul and God, between their soul and safety outside of Jesus Christ. But such confrontation tends to lose people, while vivacious dynamics attracts people. And so the choice for many is an obvious one. It

just depends on who you're really serving.

On the Side

Consider the truth that spiritual leaders should not be respected or appreciated so much for what or who they are personally, but for the fact that they care enough;

- To cling to the simple message of *“Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”*.
 - To not cloud the message with personal impressiveness.
 - To proclaim the truth, trusting the Holy Spirit to do a work of power in souls.
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2:6-16 – Decoder – God’s Wisdom is Spiritually Discerned

Paul now highlights the gospel as true wisdom. Yet it is a wisdom that can only be understood through the Spirit’s work.

Vs. 6 – *“We speak wisdom among them that are perfect”* – Though the preaching of Christ crucified

2:6 Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:

is not consistent with the wisdom of the world, Paul assures us that it does represent a form of wisdom, a better or higher wisdom in fact.

“Perfect” here refers to those who are mature in the faith. As we grow up to full-grown faith we become more able to grasp and appreciate the true wisdom of God’s purposes. The more we allow the Spirit to have full reign within us, the more His teaching/illuminating work thrives in us.

“That come to nought” – The worldly wise and leaders among men, with all of their earthly power and popularity, are on their way out! Again, as implied in 1:20, the day comes when the query among the redeemed will be *“Where is the wise?”* For *“the world passeth away”* with all that *“is in the world”*, with all who love it (I Jn. 2:16-17). Consider the irony here when we compare 1:28. Though the world looks down upon the Lord’s own as *“things which are not”*, as if nothing, it is actually they who come to nothing in the end, while we who belong to the Lord shall abide forever.

2:7 *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:*

2:8 *Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

Vs. 7-8 – “*We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery*” – The wisdom of Christ and the cross is a mystery to the world. Had they been able to comprehend the true, surpassing wisdom in Jesus they never would have crucified Him. That “*the wisdom of God*” is “*a mystery*” and “*hidden wisdom*” does not refer to secret truths to which only the initiated are allowed access. As in the book of Ephesians, “*mystery*” here refers to truths previously unrevealed or only dimly revealed, but now made quite plain and available to all, truths relating particularly to;

- God’s purpose to gather all under the single Head, Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:10).
- The intimate union of all believers in Him, into the church, “*which is His body*” (Eph. 1:22-23).
- The wonder of “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Col. 1:27).

2:9 *But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*
2:10 *But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*

- Gentiles included as “*fellowheirs, and of the same body*” (Eph. 3:6), enjoying all benefits in Christ on an equal standing with Jews.

There is a sense in which access is limited to God’s mysteries in that many may read of them, but only through the work of God’s Spirit can a soul understand what he hears or reads.

“*Unto our glory*” – For we in whom Christ dwells there is “*hope of glory*”, in contrast to “*the princes of this world*” who though with a measure of glory now will “*come to nought*” (vs. 6).

Vs. 9 – This is a loose quotation of Isa. 64:4. Before this gospel era man could not have even imagined what the God of grace had planned for man in Christ, for those who sincerely seek Him. Not only does Jesus bring to us things unseen and unheard of but things utterly unthinkable in the splendour of God’s abounding goodness.

2:11 *For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.*
2:12 *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.*

Vs. 10-12 – *“But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit”* – Now with our great advantages of a risen Saviour and completed Scriptures and indwelling Spirit we have a hugely fuller revelation of all that God has planned for His children. It is the Spirit of God dwelling within every believer in this current age that gives us the ability to understand God’s words. A man can only fully know the depths of a man, his innermost thoughts and purposes, likes and dislikes, by having access to the spirit of the man. Even so through the indwelling Spirit we have access to *“the deep things of God”*, to a vastly deeper understanding of His nature than in any previous era. The point is that only through the indwelling Spirit do the things of God and wisdom of God and all that God has given us in Christ make sense.

“That we might know” – Oh listen to this purpose statement folks! Why was the Spirit given in the very special way in which we have received Him?

2:13 *Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

That we might know God! That we might comprehend more fully all of the wealth of what has been *“freely given to us of God”*. God gives, and He wants us to *fully know* of all that He has given! God reconciles unholy sinners to Himself in Christ and then wants us to more fully know Him to the core of who He really is. He wants us near and He wants us aware! He wishes me to know Him *“even as also I am known”* (13:12). The most precious treasures He gives to all who seek and find Him. *Oh the wonder of His grace!*

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On the Side

Don't miss the obvious indications here concerning the Holy Spirit;

- He is referred to as distinct from God the Father.
- He is spoken of as a Person, actively searching and knowing, rather than as an impersonal force.

2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

- He is God.

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Vs. 13 – “*Which things we teach*” – Here were the things Paul and company taught. Not worldly wisdom but God’s gospel wisdom. That which is both disseminated and deciphered by the Spirit of God Himself, working powerfully through Paul’s ministry. Thus the thought is confirmed, that to attempt to teach spiritual things through human wisdom could never work. Only to present spiritual things together with the work of the Spirit will work.

Vs. 14 – “*But the natural man receiveth not*” – Not all men are able to receive the spiritual wisdom Paul preached, namely the “*natural*” or unsaved man. “*Natural*” (or soulish) describes that condition into which all are born, with only a single birth, still under the control of the old corrupt nature and without the lifting influence of a new nature within. “*Spiritual*” describes one born a second time in new birth. For “*the natural man*” to look upon “*the*

things of the Spirit of God", such as *"the preaching of the cross"*, is to see only *"foolishness"* and to reject them (1:18). In fact he is not even able *"to know them"*. He's like a man with a completely blocked nose walking past a bakery shop without the least awareness, while the thoughts of all others in passing are of tea break. *"The things of the Spirit"* can only be *"spiritually discerned"* or understood through the inward working of the Spirit. His ears and eyes aren't enough. The unsaved soul simply does not have the "software" to be able to read God's wisdom.

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On the Side

This portion has been abused by the modern Gnostics of the Charismatic movement. For some among these suggest that one not having experienced a "2nd work of grace" in the baptism of the Spirit simply does not have the capacity to understand or discuss such an event. One just needs to lay aside his Bible and let himself go they tell us, for the experience of Spirit baptism will be proof enough. There will be no more need of explanations then. But do we see Paul using his point in this way here? And does the Bible ever encourage us to let go of self control (14:32)? Does the Spirit ever work contrary to what He has

2:15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.

authored in the written Word? Paul is talking of saved in contrast to unsaved here, not of initiated saved in contrast to their sadly uninitiated brothers.

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Vs. 15 – “*But he that is spiritual judgeth all things*” – The Greek word behind “*judgeth*” is the same as that behind “*discerned*” at the end of vs. 14, meaning “to examine” or “to examine in judgment”. The saved soul, and particularly that one walking in the Spirit, living in the bosom of his Saviour, examines all things with understanding. He is aware of all of the earthly realities of which the “*natural man*” is aware, yet he has the capacity to understand the realm of spiritual realities as well. And he is able to comprehend earthly realities in view of heavenly truths, thus keeping him straight on matters of origins and end times and all matters in between. This is the Spirit’s work of illumination or enlightenment.

“Yet he himself is judged of no man” – Though men

2:16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

may make judgments upon the redeemed in this life, even condemning them as worthy of death, yet at the last it will be the redeemed who are given the judgment of the all things. As Daniel predicts of the end, *“But the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever . . . Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the Most High . . . And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom”* (Dan. 7:18, 22, 27).

Vs. 16 – *“For who hath known the mind of the Lord”* – This is taken from Isa. 40:13. As no man is in a position to instruct God, even so none among natural men with their worldly wisdom are really in a position to fully understand or exercise fair judgment over *“the mind of Christ”* which we have received in Him. In Christ we are as much a mystery to the people of earth as is Christ Himself. And folks tend to hate that which they do not understand (Jn. 15:18-21).

Class 4 – I Corinthians 3

The fundamental nature of the gospel message is such that no flesh should glory, neither in himself nor in any other man. In chapter 2 Paul began by speaking of his own ministry approach, that he came with no eloquence or cleverness in his manner of teaching. He came with no embellishments designed to attract any measure of attention to himself. He didn't even come with self-confidence. He came as a humble man bringing only the humble and humbling message of "*Christ crucified*". Paul then turned his attention to the true wisdom of God in the gospel, that message;

- Wise above all human wisdom.
- Involving unimaginable blessing from God.
- Involving great mysteries once unknown to men, but now known in greatest fullness through the Spirit's revealing.
- Yet truths still largely indiscernible by the unsaved world without the work of the Spirit.

In Christ, through the indwelling Spirit of God, we have come to comprehend the very mind and heart and purpose of God. Thus to attempt to present spiritual things with human wisdom can never work.

3:1 *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.*

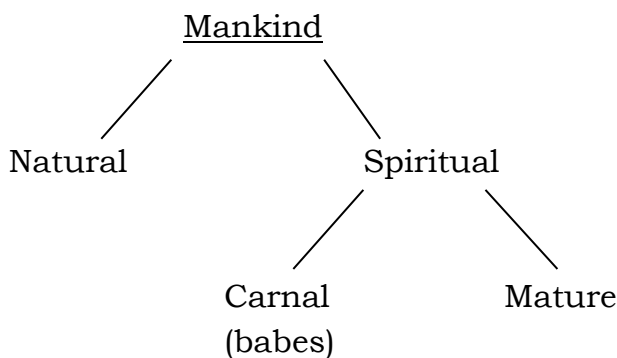
3:1-4 – Division is Carnal

At the end of chap. 2 Paul referred to the two basic kinds of people on earth, the “*natural*” or soulish man and the “*spiritual*” or saved man. Every soul is born “*natural*” and “*must be born again*” to spiritual existence or he “*cannot see the kingdom of God*” (Jn. 3). The “*natural*” man cannot see God’s kingdom in the sense of entering into it one day, and he cannot see it in the sense of perceiving the great worth and way of it today.

Vs. 1 – “*I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual*” – Paul now returns to the concern of their divided congregation and introduces a third division among men. Though he knew that he was writing to believers or “*brethren*” in Christ and thus “*spiritual*” men as opposed to “*natural*”, yet these believers were not behaving as if saved men or men of the Spirit. And so he speaks of them as “*carnal*” or fleshly in their way, explaining the meaning of his term “*as unto babes in Christ*”. While acknowledging that they were indeed “*in Christ*”

3:2 *I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.*

Paul puts their maturity on the level of babies. These were not happy words! Though born into spiritual life, they were living for themselves after their own physical interests rather than after the Lord's interests, as babies do. Therefore the divisions among them. It's selfishness that causes divisions. It's baby Christians who can't get along with each other in the church.



Vs. 2-3 – *“I have fed you with milk, and not with meat”* – As characteristic of babies, Paul was not able to feed them with the weightier truths (*“meat”*)

of God, for in their immaturity they simply were not able to grasp and apply such things. Compare those “*dull of hearing*” in Heb. 5:11-6:2.

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On the Side

The “*meat*” or solid food of God’s word perhaps relates to things such as;

- The fulfilment of all aspects of the old covenant in Jesus Christ, as discussed in the book of Hebrews.
 - The lofty discussion of victory in Christ as in a book like Ephesians, in comparison to the more practical issues dealt with in this epistle.
-

It takes the free work of the Spirit of God within a man to be able to perceive God in His fullness. And one living after the flesh has pushed the Spirit out of the centre of his existence, not allowing Him free reign within. Therefore such a one is really stunted and stagnant in his spiritual growth, becoming more troubler than teacher in every setting in which he’s found, tending to form and further “*envying, and strife, and divisions*” rather than resisting such

3:3 *For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?*

responses among believers.

“Neither yet now are ye able” – Though saved long before, these believers at Corinth were still living in spiritual babyhood. It is possible for believers to remain babies throughout the years of their salvation and never grow up. An initial baby stage for a time after new birth is quite normal, when we *“as newborn babes”* should *“desire the sincere milk of the word”* that we might *“grow thereby”* (I Pet. 2:2). But to remain long in infancy is as grotesque in spiritual realms as it would be in physical life. In the pleading words of Hebrews, *“let us go on unto perfection”* or maturity (6:1).

“Are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” – Carnal Christians live like the world or *“walk as men”*, and can often barely be discernible from the unsaved world around them. Yes, it is possible to be a Christian and live like the world, to dress like them, to worry and whinge like them, to rock and rap like them, to appreciate and depreciate what they do. But only *baby* Christians can do this, those who are

3:4 *For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?*
3:5 *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?*

living for themselves rather than for their Saviour.
Oh “*let us go on*”!

3:5-17 – True Nature of Ministry

Vs. 5-9 – Fellow farm labourers.

Vs. 5 – “*Who then is Paul . . . Apollos*” – Who are Paul and Apollos but servants of God? Together they were merely God’s instruments through whom the believers at Corinth had found Christ.

“*Even as the Lord gave to every man*” – The Lord’s servants are given by the Lord for the benefit of His church. Compare Eph. 4:11ff.

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On the Side

Consider the truth that spiritual leaders should not be respected or appreciated so much for *what* or *who* they are personally, but for the fact that they

3:6 *I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.*

3:7 *So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.*

are in their position and remain there because *God* has put them there.

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Vs. 6-7 – “*God gave the increase*” – Paul was the one who initiated the work there at Corinth as the church planter. Apollos came after, his teaching work like a spring shower helping to nurture what Paul had begun. Acts gives the fuller record of what Paul here summarizes (18:1-19:1). Paul was especially gifted at beginning churches. Apollos was a particularly gifted teacher, able to help believers in spiritual growth. Though we now discover that the work of neither man had as yet brought these believers through to spiritual maturity, because maturity has to do with the receivers as well as the feeders. The truth Paul would make known however is that the work among them could be attributed to no one man, but only to God, who applies His various servants to a work according to His will.

3:8 *Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one:
and every man shall receive his own reward
according to his own labour.*

“Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth” – The men on the ground are of little consequence. They are not the Master Farmer in any field of the Lord. They are all merely the common field workers handling hoe and hosepipe, whose individual skills and labours are only a small part of the Master’s larger plan for His various harvest fields.

Vs. 8 – *“He that planteth and he that watereth are one”* – None of the field workers are on their own mission, but are united in purpose. They are not comparing themselves among themselves in any kind of rivalry. Why then is it so among their followers? God’s true labourers are all standing on level ground, none among them claiming prominence above any other.

“Every man shall receive his own reward” – Every one who labours in the field shall be paid by the Master for his labour, according to his labour and faithfulness in it. All are responsible to God and receive from Him.

*3:9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are
God's husbandry, ye are God's building.
3:10 According to the grace of God which is given unto
me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the
foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let
every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.*

Vs. 9 – Paul makes plain here the image of God’s field and our labour together in it. The believers there at Corinth were “*God’s husbandry*” or as a field of His service. Don’t miss the emphasis on the Owner here. It’s no man’s work but “*God’s*”, and we are wise to handle with greatest care what belongs to Him and is not ours to mess with. As well, it describes in clear terms the One to whom we are responsible.

Vs. 10-15 – Fellow builders. Now the imagery of farming gives way to that of architecture. We find here a parallel portion to II Cor. 5:10, describing the Judgment Seat of Christ. For here too is assurance of our works fully examined when standing before the Lord at the last.

“According to the grace of God which is given unto me” – Paul ever considered his appointment to ministry as a gift of God’s grace, never as a tedious burden. Compare I Tim. 1:12.

“As a wise masterbuilder” – The Greek word behind *“masterbuilder”* (KJV) is *architekton*, meaning chief builder. Paul was not patting his own back, but speaks only of *“the grace of God which is given unto me”*, only of that way in which God had graciously gifted him for the pioneering work of the early church. He was the one God had appointed to begin the work there at Corinth, and now again to sketch out a blueprint for their growth in this first epistle.

“I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon” – After the earlier illustration from the field the same concept of many hands contributing to the project comes through here. Paul and company laid the foundation and threw the slab in the founding of the church there at Corinth. He didn’t hang around to continue the project, but others made themselves available to lay brick in building up the walls of that work. Paul doesn’t name Apollos this time, just *“another”*, suggesting whomever God might employ in the overall task. Obviously there is absolutely no room for private kingdom building in this representation of God’s work on earth.

“But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon” – As the field workers must be careful

3:11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

how they walk and work in “*God’s husbandry*”, even so His technicians must build with care on “*God’s building*”. Though men and methods and manners and materials may vary, let all be sure they use the same Spirit-level of God’s Word in their work on the walls.

Vs. 11 – “*For other foundation can no man lay*” – If it is indeed “*God’s building*”, the work of the only living and true God, then it will most certainly be founded on Jesus Christ. Every religion built on anything other than Jesus Christ is as a house built upon sand. When the flood waters of God’s judgment at last arise nothing will stand except those properly founded on the Rock of Christ. Are we arrogant to suggest Jesus Christ as the only proper spiritual foundation? No, we only proclaim what God Himself has said. Are we arrogant to say it while there is opportunity for folks to hear and consider? No, we are in fact loving them in so doing. Will *they* see it this way? Not likely. And here is an example of the hollow human wisdom of which Paul speaks, with its seemingly sensible, angry insistence that *we have no right* to proclaim

*3:12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold,
silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;*

our way as the only proper way, our God the only living and true God, our book the only true Book of books, and the Bible names of God His only true names. Our proper response is not to answer according to their folly, but to simply proclaim the true wisdom of the gospel. And when that living message meets with faith in a heart, together with the mighty working of Holy Spirit power within, the results are dynamic!

Vs. 12-15 – Examination of materials.

Vs. 12 – “*Gold, silver, precious stones*” – First are listed materials that will not burn. These describe sound religion, grounded firmly on the eternal truths of God’s Word, leading on to such beliefs and practices that will stand up to God’s penetrating scrutiny and will meet with reward in the end for having clearly heard and heeded the truth.

“*Wood, hay, stubble*” – Here now are things that will burn, and very readily so. We must remember that the context here (as in II Cor. 5) is of the examination of *believers*. Jesus said, “*I must work*

the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day” (Jn. 9:4). He was not busy with just any religious works, but only with the Father’s works. The reference here is to any teaching or guidance that is not founded on biblical truth, but rather incorporates;

- Human philosophy or seeming fairness.
- Hollow religious ceremony.
- Secular business sense and “success” methodologies.
- Manipulation techniques.
- Etc.

It would include as well those among God’s children who think they serve God by a life given to social helps or reforms, not founded on the great commission. Compare in Gal. 6:6-8 the idea of reaping as we have sown in using our resources toward the help of those in true ministry. Only the support of those ministries truly glorifying God, feeding the saints, and leading souls to the Saviour will count for eternity.

A shudder of warning is sent through the ranks of all worthless religion as well, even those with a surface show of being based on the Bible, full of

3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

religious pomp and ceremony, old as the woods and empty of all true meaning. Here would reside all who think their relation to God is based upon heredity, poverty, pilgrimage, or baptism. And here as well would fall all who believe their salvation to be attained or kept by their righteous life, law or Sabbath-keeping. Compare Ahab's huge counsel of lying "prophets of the Lord" (I Ki. 22). They're still with us. Compare the many other false prophets referred to in the Bible who presumed to speak for the Lord but had departed from His words. Compare the many modern cults and false religions that base their beliefs in some sense upon the Bible, but really expect God's blessing through some form of legalism. All building with wood, hay, and stubble.

Vs. 13 – *"Every man's work shall be made manifest"* – Whether it be of durable worth or perishable waste it will be known for what it is at the last. The figure now seems to turn more to the work of the refiner. And as with the refiner, fire is the tool to be

3:14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

used in consuming the dross and displaying the true gold. The fire here is not of God's condemnation but of His examination, searching out the true from the false, the chaff from the wheat, leaving the one and consuming the other.

"For the day shall declare it" – Described here is that day when believers shall stand before Christ to be judged on the basis of their works for Him. Compare 4:5 & Rom. 2:16.

Vs. 14-15 – *"If any man's work abide"* – Though a soul's salvation is a free gift received by faith, rewards in Christ's presence are a different story. These are available to God's children through a *"man's works"* performed out of a good and godly heart after coming to new life in Christ. Compare Eph. 2:8-10 & Rev. 22:12. Compare Paul's common reference to crowns of reward (9:25; II Tim. 4:8; Jas. 1:12; I Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10; 3:11). All that is truly worth keeping will stand the test and meet with reward. All that has no real worth but is based on empty principles and practices will be consumed, being turned to loss. Many a life's work, as a great

3:15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

impressive house of sticks built upon human ideals, will go up in a cloud of smoke in that fateful day. Many a true believer will be left to bewail their loss as the merchants of Babylon (Rev. 18). The warning is here, that we might be sure our lives and loves and labours are lined up where they should be.

“But he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” – Again Paul speaks here of the *believer’s* examination before the Lord. This discussion has nothing to do with foundations other than Jesus Christ. This has to do with what saints choose to build on that right foundation, nothing to do with the loss of salvation. For some, the foundation will be left completely razed and they to enter glory with nothing in their hand, like one who escapes with only his life when the house of his earthly possessions burns to the ground. Men such as righteous Lot perhaps.

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On the Side

3:16 *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*
3:17 *If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*

Some might attempt to use this portion in support of the idea of purgatory, suggesting that souls are saved by means of the purifying effect of fire. But again the context is the loss of “*reward according to his own labour*” of those properly grounded on the sure foundation of salvation by faith alone in Jesus Christ.

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Vs. 16-17 – A Word of Warning

“*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God*” – Paul seems to speak to them now as a church body, in contrast to 6:19 where he speaks of individual believers as temples of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God who indwells and works within and out from God’s church. This again places greatest value upon the holy institution of the local church in God’s sight, and speaks greatest warning to any who would dare to “*defile the temple of God*”. God’s eye of scrutiny is upon any who would damage or

3:18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

diminish or defile His church through their unsound beliefs or teachings or practices, or through their inappropriate divisiveness. Such folks will have Him to face. The same word translated “*destroy*” is behind the word “*defile*” at the beginning of the verse. God handles a man the way he handles God’s church. The idea is similar to that spoken over Israel in Gen. 12:3, where either blessing or cursing is to be dispensed depending on how one handles God’s chosen people. This thing called the local church is *intensely important* to the Lord! It’s where Christ is first seen in John’s vision of Rev. 1, among His lampstands, tending His churches. The warning here is after the figure of the sanctity of the O.T. temple, and death required upon any who would dare to violate it. Compare God’s judgment upon Nadab and Abihu in Num. 3.

3:18-23 – Turn from Worldly Wisdom

Vs. 18 – “*Let no man deceive himself*” – The very statement of this implies the possibility of it. And the statement of it to a congregation of believers

3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.

suggests that we too are not immune to deception. Let the one who considers himself wise show himself to be truly so, by accepting as true wisdom what the world considers foolishness, by receiving the wisdom of God in the simple gospel of God. Every man deceives himself when he considers himself in any way wiser than God, wiser than to receive what might appear to be foolishness.

Vs. 19 – *“He taketh the wise in their own craftiness”* – In proving the foolishness of what the world considers wise Paul quotes here from the book of Job (5:13), from the words of the first of Job’s inconsiderate counsellors, Eliphaz the Temanite. Do you see what Paul does here? He quotes from the counsel of those who considered themselves *“wise in this world”*, yet counsellors who did not give God’s man the best counsel in his time of need. Job’s “friends” brought the finest of the world’s wisdom, yet received the Lord’s rebuke in the end. Why does Paul quote the words of this man? In order to demonstrate the truth of his point from the very beginning of man’s days on earth. Part of the

3:20 *And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the
wise, that they are vain.*
3:21 *Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things
are yours;*

wisdom presented in the “wisdom literature” of Job is the bankruptcy of human wisdom. Counsel considered to be so terribly clever by the fallen men of this world is not wise with the wisdom of God. From their own lips their condemnation is spoken and recorded in the oldest book of the Bible, confirming the truth that though the men of earth profess themselves to be wise, God will ultimately show them to be fools (Rom. 1:22), turning their imagined cunning to their own confusion.

Vs. 20 – Paul quotes now from Ps. 94:11 in support of God’s awareness, not only of the details of human wisdom, but of how worthlessly void of truth it really is. Compare Eph. 4:17.

Vs. 21-23 – *“Therefore let no man glory in men”* – Paul now brings to conclusion his opening admonition in this book of I Corinthians. *“Therefore”* our glorying cannot be in men. *“Therefore”* no believer has any basis for pride over any other. God brings to nothing all such human

*3:22 Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world,
or life, or death, or things present, or things to come;
all are yours;
3:23 And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.*

high-mindedness.

“For all things are yours” – Again, Paul rather turns our attention to the bigger picture, sending our thoughts above the petty struggles and beyond to the afterward. Hope in the promise of future glory, as if it were already in our possession, is meant to be a healing balm upon all of the anxious incidentals of life.

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”

“Moreover
it is required in stewards,
that a man be found faithful”

(1 Cor. 4:2)

Class 5 – I Corinthians 4

4:1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Churches have their problems. A few years back I heard of a pastor who went away on holiday with his family and upon returning discovered his church had dismissed him and he was without a job. Wherever people are involved there are oddities, because people are oddities. The early church was no different. Things were not right among the believers at Corinth. They were much too focused on men, who were merely fellow workers in the Master's field or builders on the Master's building (3:6-10). And though divisions had formed among the believers there as they were aligning themselves with certain godly leaders and against others, where were the divisions between God's leaders (3:8-9)?

4:1-5 – Ministers Accountable to Christ

Vs. 1 – “*Let a man so account of us*” – “Let people regard us so, in this way”, Paul says, “*as ‘ministers*

4:2 *Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*

of Christ”. Let none glory in us as if we are anything among men.

The word behind “*ministers*” here speaks of a servant or assistant, as a doctor or dentist has an attendant or as the helpers of Elijah or Elisha “*poured water on the hands*” of their master (II Ki. 3:11). Paul and those serving with him were nothing but errand-boys, standing ready to run for Jesus Christ.

“*And stewards of the mysteries of God*” – A steward was a servant who managed his master’s affairs. He was one entrusted with important aspects in the keeping of His master’s household or property. We might use the word “manager”. *Servant* and *steward* are the two words with which Paul would describe himself. Neither they nor any others among God’s men were to be considered lords or masters.

Vs. 2 – “*Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful*” – Here is the main matter for one in such a position, the true standard for

judging the worth of a steward. Above all else a steward must be faithful, to the responsibilities of his office and to the will of his master. A faithful steward;

- Moulds himself to the master's will, becoming an extension of the master. As Abraham's servant (Gen. 24).
- Is able to use the master's things without abusing them. We use what the Master has entrusted. We don't mess with the message.
- Can be thoroughly trusted when not under observation (Col. 3:22-24).
- Takes personal risks for the master's cause. As David with his father's sheep and with Goliath.
- Is given to the best for his master.

There may be other qualities that would be useful in such a one, as cleverness, creativity, graciousness, discretion, etc., depending upon one's particular responsibilities in his master's service. But all such qualities are lesser things compared to this one supreme qualification. When it comes to the handling of things belonging to another, above all else faithfulness is a must. It's a guiding principle for all who are under the authority of another. It's

the primary quality for a good employee or manager or student or citizen or church member or child with his parents. It's a quality summarized so well in those words spoken of the virtuous woman in relation to her husband in Prov. 31:12, "*She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life*". I knew a man years ago who was the financial administrator of a Christian school. He was a fine and friendly soul with a fine wife and family. He was such a great asset to his school with many an admirable trait. Until the day it was discovered that he had been fiddling with the books, helping himself to the school finances. It was the same day he lost his position! Though he was a fine man in so many ways, yet faithfulness or loyalty "*is required in stewards*".

Question – Who owns your body believer with all of its members, and even your mind with all of its thoughts?

Answer – "*Ye are not your own . . . for ye are bought with a price*" (6:19-20).

Have you been faithful in the way you've handled or managed your Master's goods? Even "*bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*"?

Vs. 3-4 – It was a matter of small concern to Paul

4:3 *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.*

that others might tend to judge or examine him and find him less than an ideal specimen in their eyes.

“I judge not my own self” – Paul would not even trust himself to render a fair assessment about himself. Some folks live in the heartache of their own past failures, continually returning to inward anguish over foolish things they’ve said and done, leading their own heart in a downward spiral to despair, mourning for the kind of person they can never be, sitting as judge over their own hearts and condemning themselves as a disgrace, presuming others feel the same about them, and deeply concerned about this. But not so Paul. His self-image was of no concern to him, for he had made the sacrifice of self. He had made the decision to forget *“those things which are behind”* and to reach *“forth unto those things which are before”* as he pressed *“toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 3:13-14). He wasted none of his life in either resting on his laurels or grovelling in his shortcomings. He ever kept his focus on Christ and what might be

4:4 For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

accomplished for Him, trusting the Lord to put His finger on any aspect of his life that might need his attention, and quick to make confession of wrong that he might ever live *“in all good conscience before God”* and men (Acts 23:1; 24:16). Looking back is sure to make you stumble in your forward progress as you run the Lord’s race (Heb. 12:1-2).

“For I know nothing by myself” – Paul did not trust his own judgment to know all of the reasons for what happened in life and how he responded to it. God is quite able to use even our failures and foolishness, the things we remember and should have forgotten as well as the things we forgot and should have remembered, the things we did and said and wished we hadn’t. We must ever strive for our best, and then simply trust our God when He assures us that *“all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose”* (Rom. 8:28).

“Yet am I not hereby justified” – We are not justified before God by our self-attitude or awareness. We are not justified because we feel justified or because

4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

we judge ourselves to be right. Our standing before the only true Judge is based solely on God's word and our simple faith in His promise.

Vs. 5 – “*Judge nothing before the time*” – In view of our faulty ability to fully assess even ourselves, we must recognize the grave dangers in either idolizing or demonizing others. Everybody has aspects of their lives that are unknown to others, though fully known to the Lord. All such dark, unconfessed secrets, whether in practice or in purpose, will come to light when we stand before the Lord, and all men shall be seen for the way they really are.

These thoughts must be balanced with the need to examine and discern;

- True spirits from false (I Jn. 4).
- The deceptions of false teachers (Rev. 2:6; Rom. 17-18; Titus 3:10-11).
- The corrupt practices of those given to evil

4:6 And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.

(I Cor. 5; Rev. 2:2).

- The laziness of those given to ease (II Thess. 3).

“Then shall every man have praise of God” – N.B. Paul’s optimistic view of the results of Christ’s judgment seat. For whether believers face that day in shame or in fame, whether we find the gain of gold or dross and loss there in His presence, we will certainly be put entirely right with God and man in that day of examination, with all of the joy of full pardon and cleansing. And the result will be greatest rejoicing in the light and in utterly unhindered fellowship with God and man.

4:6-13 – Ministers are Fools for Christ

Vs. 6 – *“I have in a figure transferred”* – Paul may be indicating here that rather than speaking directly of those involved in the trouble at Corinth and naming the names of the leaders folks were meeting around

there, Paul had perhaps used his and Apollos' names to represent the various factions there. A tactful measure perhaps, that would be more considerate and yet would leave no doubt of those to whom he was referring.

“Not to think of men above that which is written” – The Bible was Paul's standard and the Bible often gives warning of the true nature of mankind;

- Our hearts *“deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”* (Jer. 17:9).
- *“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom. 3:23).
- Not one *“upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not”* (Eccl. 7:20).

We are all far from creatures worthy of veneration. No one of us is in a position to be *“puffed up”* or to be exalted over another. And no one is wise to have an inflated opinion *“for one”* of God's servants over or *“against another”*. Compare Paul's attitude toward *“them which were of reputation”* at Jerusalem. *“Whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person”* (Gal. 2:6).

Vs. 7 – *“For who maketh thee to differ from*

4:7 For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

another?” – Who is it that equips His servants with their abilities? Is it not true that what we have are merely gifts received from God’s hand, at His discretion? Can any of us really boast that anything we are or have came of our own doing? Compare James 1:17. And beyond only the matter of gifts, isn’t the Lord the One who made us and made us to differ from others? Isn’t He the One responsible for our every feature, soul and body? Are we ever in a position to be fairly idolized or demonized in any way by those who know the true God? Should we ever be involved in doing the same with others? From Hollywood actress to cerebral marvel to gospel preacher, we have little claim on any of what we’ve received, and we have small cause to gripe over anything we’ve not received. There is wonderful help here, both against feelings of superiority and inferiority. Both are selfish responses of those who would puff themselves up, either feeling successful in themselves or frustrated with their failure to match up to society’s standard.

4:8 *Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.*
4:9 *For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.*

Vs. 8-10 – “*Now ye are full . . . we are fools*” – Paul turns to a touch of irony now, revealing a degree of heat in his concern for their attitude. He chases the indications of their pride through to obvious conclusions, setting them up as if in kingly wealth in contrast to God’s lowly servants.

“*God hath set forth us the apostles last*” – The more completely one is sold out to Christ the more he is considered a complete fool by the world, indeed “*as the filth of the world*” and as “*the offscouring of all things*” (vs. 13). As Jesus said, “*If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, the servant of all*” (Mk. 9:35).

Those who would be first
Must be last and the least,

For at the last it’s the last
Who’ll be first at the feast.

“*We are made a spectacle unto the world*” – Behind

4:10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.

“spectacle” is the Greek word *theatron*, from which comes our English word theatre. The theatre was that place where games and public shows were exhibited. Paul’s use of the term here expresses his sense that he and his gospel co-workers were as if in an arena surrounded by the scorning world looking on, as if their appointment to death in shame there before the gathered crowds were the focus of the world’s mocking entertainment. The writer of Hebrews described the same impression in Heb. 10:33, where the verb form is translated *“made a gazingstock”*.

“We are fools for Christ’s sake” – While the Lord’s true servants bore the brunt of the world’s ridicule, those at Corinth who sought to keep a hand on the world’s wisdom in the practice of their Christianity refused to follow there in the realms of ridicule. As with so many in the church of our day, there was a willingness to have Jesus Christ, but without bearing His reproach. These wished to be considered *“wise”* while *“in Christ”*, whereas Paul was quite happy to be considered a fool *“for Christ’s*

4:11 *Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace;*

sake". These considered their outreach approach to involve things strong, while Paul would cling to the "*weak*" and "*despised*" message of "*Christ crucified*". The unsaved world has much to say about more effective Christian outreach methods, but usually according to human wisdom or principles. "*Carnal*" believers are sold on such suggestions. The "*spiritual*" simply cling to God's approved and proven way, though it may seem to be so "*weak*" and "*despised*".

We can well imagine the shame these words would have caused when read in the hearing of the believers at Corinth. Hard words perhaps, but a needed correction. Sometimes such hard and shaming words are the need of the hour, in order to jolt the hearer into recognition of the error of his way.

Vs. 11-13 – Paul continues with a summary description of some of the hardships he and those with him faced on a regular basis. Compare II Cor. 6:4-10; 11:23ff. To be "*buffeted*" speaks of taking a

4:12 *And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:*
4:13 *Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.*

beating with fists. To “*have no certain dwellingplace*” was as “*the Son of Man*” who “*hath not where to lay His head*” (Matt. 8:20). It was not so much the idea of sleeping in the bush, but no home he could call his own, always living with others. The church at Corinth well knew how Paul had worked with his own hands while there among them. In Corinth he stayed with Aquila & Priscilla, working with them in their tent-making business that he might help to support himself and his team while there (Acts 18:3). When those of the world “*reviled*” or cursed them with their words they spoke a good word in return, even as Paul commanded in Rom. 12:14 to “*bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not*”, and after Christ’s encouragements toward the same in Matt. 5:10-12, 44. When they suffered bitter persecution they quietly endured it, when the temptation would have been strong to quickly speak to their own defence or strike back in vengeance. When they were blasphemed they did not speak the same in return, but only spoke to the comfort and

encouragement of those who hated them, seeking to *“live peaceably with all men”* (Rom. 12:18). In every such challenging circumstance they quietly committed themselves *“to Him that judgeth righteously”* (I Pet. 2:23). They willingly endured the common consensus of their society that they were of the most worthless sort, the kind of stuff you scrape off the bottom of your boots! So are we on the right track my brothers when we’re into pop-Christianity, when we insist upon ministry approaches and attitudes and adornments and entertainments that are fashionable and win a following among the goats? True ministry for Christ is despised by the world. *“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”* (II Tim. 3:12). Paul lived a life of hardship comparable to Christ’s. It’s an image of the humility of a true servant of Christ, in contrast to all who would set themselves up as objects of honour.

4:14-21 – Warnings of a Father

From this point Paul talks of *“I”* & *“my”* rather than *“we”* & *“us”* as he draws a bit closer to his readers in seeking to win their hearts, and as he reminds them of his special status with them. Now it’s the more tender pleading of a father rather than stinging words of rebuke.

4:14 I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you.

4:15 For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

Vs. 14-15 – “*As my beloved sons I warn you*” – Though they had fallen to foolishness, Paul’s purpose was not to cast them down but to lift them up. Such will always be the purpose in every approach genuine love makes. He speaks to them now as their spiritual father to his sons in the faith, seeking to admonish them to a higher road, fearful of the depths to which their present course might lead them. It was a unique position Paul held with those troubled people, and he sought to use this special relation to them in securing their cooperation.

Vs. 16 – “*I beseech you, be ye followers of me*” – This was a common encouragement of Paul’s (11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9), but one only made possible by his own godly life, only by his truly faithful stewardship. His hope was that they might follow him as a child tends to follow his father, in his;

- Humble servanthood.
- Faithful stewardship.

4:16 Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.

4:17 For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.

- Simple recognition of God as the Giver of all that we are and have.
- Godly love and willingness to endure all for the sake of others.

Vs. 17 – *“For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus”* – It seems Paul had sent Timothy to Macedonia prior to sending this letter (Acts 19:22), partly to help in explaining and achieving among the believers at Corinth the things of which Paul writes. Timothy was the right man to send, for he himself was an example of a truly faithful servant (Phil. 2:19-23). As well, the Corinthian believers would have known Timothy, he having been with Paul when the church was begun there. Paul planned then to visit later when he was able.

“As I teach every where in every church” – What Paul would encourage of them was the same he required of all. And the things in which Paul would admonish them he consistently lived wherever he

4:18 Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you.

4:19 But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.

went. His was a consistent ministry, borne out of a stable, steady, godly life. May we all be his followers in this.

Vs. 18-21 – *“I will come to you shortly”* – Paul now warns of his imminent coming and that his primary purpose when there would be to see things put right among them, whether that required his words of affection or his rod of correction. Their “father” would do what was needed when he could more accurately assess the lay of the land there. Paul was willing for either a hard or soft approach, but wishing his visit might be in tenderness with things having been put right among them. The choice was theirs as to how things would fall when he came.

Notice that though the church in Corinth had their own appointed leadership, as their spiritual father Paul still retained the right to walk in and deal with them as a higher authority. But this was an apostolic right rather than indication of denominational hierarchy. And it seems some

4:20 *For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.*
4:21 *What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or
in love, and in the spirit of meekness?*

among the proud there were raising the question of whether Paul had such a right or would exercise it (vs. 18).

Vs. 20 – “*For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power*” – The working of God among men is not just through words, but through *living* words. It is not just a message, but the powerful, transforming, life-giving gospel message. Through the wonder-working power of His Word Christ works among men in this current age, and will establish His earthly kingdom at the end of it. When Paul was present there in Corinth and face to face with those responsible for the wayward direction there, the ones whom God was backing would become evident to all.

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Summary

Men should not think too highly of men.

Men should not think too highly of themselves.

God is the Master and Giver of all.

True and faithful ministry;

- Does not tend to exalt a man's honour before the world, but diminishes it.
- Does not tend to gather a great following, but scatters it (Jn. 6).

Class 6 – I Corinthians 5

Men are ever given to imbalance, tending to drift toward one extreme or the other. One of the vital challenges in our study of our God in His Word is to find and hold to a balanced view of Him, lest we reverse things in our thinking and end up with a God of our own making rather than comprehending the true nature of the One who made us. A very typical human tendency is to see God as either too harsh or too soft, which tends to shape the way we handle each other and the way we handle ourselves. There's a good balance in Paul, which reflects a balanced view of God. No biblical writer was more given to expressing his tender love for people than this blessed apostle, and especially for his own people, whether Jews or Christians. And yet how blistering Paul's terms when dealing with sin and sinners. While willing himself to be accursed from Christ for his people Israel, Paul levelled God's curse upon those preaching another gospel (Rom. 9:3; Gal. 1:8-9). While rejoicing in his spiritual children as his "*glory and joy*", Paul wished mutilation upon those who would butcher the true gospel message (I Thess. 2:19-20; Gal. 5:12). At many points we can trace the same balance in this man and others, and it's the heart of God that we find as we do.

5:1 It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

Paul has dealt hard with this church at Corinth so far in this epistle, because in his love for them a strong hand is what they needed. It's another case of stern handling that we now see in chapter 5, a firmness that is missing in many churches today, to our own confusion. Nobody likes to be hard. Nobody likes to proceed with the really difficult work of confrontation in the church. And if one should like doing it then he probably is not the man for the job. Yet somebody has to do this nasty work if the church is to remain pure. And so it's instruction as to the how and when of church discipline that we find here. Paul in these next three chapters deals with matters of moral purity.

5:1-5 – Discipline of a Person

Vs. 1-2 – Problem announced.

Vs. 1 – *“It is reported commonly”* – This seems to extend beyond just the report Paul had received from *“the house of Chloe”* (1:11). Seems it was a

known thing among those having contact with the believers over in Corinth that there was a serious case of immorality being allowed among them. “*Fornication*” is the general term for immorality of any kind.

“*That one should have his father’s wife*” – A certain unnamed man in the congregation was sexually involved with “*his father’s wife*”. That the woman was not called the mother of the offender indicates that she must have been his step-mother. No details are given as to the current marital condition of those involved. It may be that the man’s father had died, leaving he and his step-mother together in the same home, and one thing led to another. There may very likely have been “justifying” circumstances or reasons they would have pointed to leading them into each other’s arms. There generally are such excuses. But even in a society where fornication was a matter of little or no concern Paul’s comparative comment with things “*named among the Gentiles*” seems to suggest this an especially raw case. That action was demanded against the man involved and not against the woman would imply that he was a member of the congregation but she was not. Perhaps she didn’t even claim to be saved.

*5:2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned,
that he that hath done this deed might be taken away
from among you.*

Vs. 2 – “*And ye are puffed up*” – Notice that Paul’s strongest words in this situation were for the erring *church* more than for the erring *man*, displaying where his greater concern lay. Due to the pride and selfishness that prevailed among the people of that church they did not see the seriousness of the situation as they should have. Where they should have mourned over the offence this was to God, they rather overlooked it or at least failed to see it as worthy of action. And by their inaction they gave their unspoken approval to the situation. Pride is self-centredness, and self-centredness neglects too many of the things it should rightly act upon out of love for God and others. Undue self-awareness robs us of the proper awareness of others to which God has called us. Compare Phil. 2:4; Rom. 15:2; Heb. 12:14-16.

“*That he . . . might be taken away from among you*” – Paul refers to the removal of the man from church membership in what is commonly referred to as church discipline or excommunication.

5:3 *For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit,
have judged already, as though I were present,
concerning him that hath so done this deed,*
5:4 *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are
gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of
our Lord Jesus Christ,*

Vs. 3-5 – Proper action.

Vs. 3 – Paul had already determined the appropriate course based upon the adequate information he had. Under normal circumstances our presence would be required to make proper enquiry, as they should have done. But in Paul's case it seems through the Spirit's working it was as if he were present among them "*in spirit*", and thus quite aware and able to judge fairly.

Vs. 4 – "*In the name of the Lord Jesus*" – In their disciplinary action they would be proceeding with the authority of Jesus Christ backing them, as His own representatives on earth. They could know this was true because Jesus Himself has already given His sanction to the confrontation and removal of those living in sin in His church. Compare Matt. 18:15-17. It is implied here that the procedure Jesus specified would be followed. The man would be confronted with his wrong. And when he would

not hear fair rebuke two or more would then go together to confront him again. And when he still refused to hear, the matter would then be taken to the church. Upon refusing the church the man would be removed from membership and thereafter considered “*as an heathen man and a publican*” (Matt. 18:17).

“*When ye are gathered together*” – Church discipline is to be done publicly (within the church), through an official meeting of the church (business meeting), not privately by any individual or even by the leaders. What is done must be known to the membership, and why it is done must be made clear.

“*And my spirit*” – They had Paul’s backing in this action through his decision on the matter as already stated, as well as the Lord’s backing. The proper dealing with erring members in this way is the hardest thing a church ever has to do, therefore the significant (though invisible) comforters mentioned here in the Lord and His apostle, joining them in this most difficult assignment, and standing to oppose and condemn them as well in their failure to follow through appropriately. It’s always a question of who you wish to please, men or God.

5:5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

“With the power of our Lord Jesus Christ” – Again confirming that the Lord is with us in His presence and power when we faithfully follow His will in handling others in firm fairness. With this statement we must put together Christ’s words in Matt. 18:18-20. In the context of church discipline He promises;

- To affirm in heaven what is concluded on earth (vs. 18).
- To follow through on what is agreed upon in the church (vs. 19).
- To be there *“in the midst”* of us as we grapple with such truly hard decisions (vs. 20).

Vs. 5 – *“To deliver such an one to Satan”* – In the conduct of church discipline we are primarily taking *“away from among”* us the one involved in unrepentant evil (vs. 2, 13). But here we discover the receiving end of such removal. Not only are we removing *“that wicked person”* from our midst, but we’re delivering him into Satan’s hand as well (I

Tim. 1:20). There is implied some protective shelter within the fold of membership in a godly church family. There is implied the loss of that protection upon disciplinary removal. Not the loss of salvation. No church or church leadership has the power to either grant or remove a soul's salvation. But there is a physical threat implied in this (*"for the destruction of the flesh"*) to which removal from membership leaves one open. Perhaps the reference is to disease, disability, or death (I Cor. 11:30). So God joins the faithful church in turning the disciplined soul over to Satan's abuse. It is a measure designed for the long term good of the unrepentant offender. Though he suffer loss in this life, the hope is that his losses might lead his soul to greatest gain in glory. Implied here as well is the suspicion that this man may not have been saved though involved in the church, and therefore his shameful actions. Compare in I Tim. 1:20 Paul's hope in delivering Hymenaeus and Alexander *"unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme"*.

Now let me ask you some questions. Wouldn't such harsh action taken against this man (and his woman) be offensive to the unchurched? Wouldn't there be a grave risk of pushing unsaved folks even farther away from the Lord and salvation through such stern, Victorian principles? Remember their

vastly immoral context. Wouldn't it be wiser to go more softly, to refrain from such strong measures and rather attempt to win the heart of the unsaved, allowing the Spirit of God to then convict them of their wrong? Should we really be "playing the Holy Spirit" in such cases? Have you heard people say such things? Yet what is God's counsel here? What is the way of true wisdom? Remove him! Simple, yet always most difficult. And without the least suggestion of any kid gloves or desperately cautious procedures in handling the man. Paul leans more to the side of strict purity than sweet graciousness in dealing with problem folks. In all such confrontations those with unrepentant hearts make much of the *way* the confrontation was handled. True repentance is thankful that one would care enough to confront. A heart void of repentance looks for reasons why the confronter is the problem and is to blame for their trouble. But we have no mention of such procedural details or cautions here, speaking of the relative unimportance of such things. No mention is made of potential attitudes or responses in those confronted, again suggesting the relative unimportance of such concerns. Just get in there and begin the process of removing that one living in sin in the church. If he/she turns to repentance and right you'll know soon enough, and you will

5:6 *Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little
leaven leaveneth the whole lump?*

have “*gained thy brother*” as Jesus put it. If he/she will not repent, it just doesn’t really matter how you go about it. It won’t be correct enough for them, I can assure you. But it doesn’t matter what they think of the one(s) confronting or of the church behind them. The really vital thing is that you be rid of them, that you “*put away from among yourselves that wicked person*”.

5:6-13 – Discipline as a Principle

Vs. 6 – “*Your glorying is not good*” – Returning to his previous discussion Paul refers to their boasting in one leader over another, creating disunity, and their appreciation of human wisdom. While they were focused upon things of no real consequence truly vital things were being neglected.

“*Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?*” – Could they not see that while delighting in present trifles the principle of eventual ruin was allowed among them? This is spoken as if it was a known proverbial statement in their day. Paul uses it again in Gal. 5:9. Leaven is used in these

5:7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

contexts to describe the progressive, permeating influence of evil. Wrong cannot be allowed to easily remain without leading to the further increase and spread of wrong, until “*the whole lump*” or body is touched by it. In fact “*the whole lump*” was already touched, immediately so, for their quiet allowance of such evil implied approval of it, made them partakers of it, and brushed dark shades across the public character of the entire church.

Vs. 7 – “*Purge out therefore the old leaven*” – Though a difficult course, here is the only answer for avoiding the spreading, damaging influence of evil in any congregation of the Lord. As a cancer it must be completely removed in its early stages before its influence can spread too far. It is not to be accommodated. We must not attempt to contain or restrain it. Sin and sinners must be taken out of a Christian church as much as out of a Christian’s life if we would avoid long-term harm to our life or church life.

In speaking of “*the old leaven*” Paul makes the point

that such comes of our old life, the way we were before we found Christ. In Him we are now “*a new creature: old things are passed away*” and “*all things are become new*” (II Cor. 5:17). To allow for such evil ways is inconsistent with what we’ve become in Jesus.

“*As ye are unleavened*” – As people of God and part of Christ’s body these were declared righteous in their position before Him, even as Peter was “*clean every whit*” in Christ (Jn. 13:10). Yet as Peter still needed “*to wash his feet*”, even so these needed to keep themselves purged that they as a congregation might remain as “*a new lump*”.

“*For Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us*” – Jesus was killed on the day of Passover because He is our Passover. In His shed blood applied to a life deliverance is found from “the death angel” of God’s just judgment upon our sin. In the feast of Unleavened Bread immediately following Passover all leaven was to be removed for the 7 days of the feast from the houses of the Jews. Though the reason for this requirement may not have been clear in the old era, in Christ it becomes clear. It pictured the way of a believer in Christ. Once one has found deliverance in the Passover Lamb he is then to walk in a leavenless life of purity

*5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven,
neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness;
but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

throughout the duration of the “feast” of his new life in Christ. Jesus could only be that perfect Deliverer because there was no sin found in Him, and thus He died as the spotless “*Lamb of God*”. And so the deliverance that we now find in Him is *from sin* and its ruinous results. All that we are and have in Christ leads us away from the leaven of sin. All in Him is toward its removal, and eventually its *complete* removal (Dan. 9:24). We cannot embrace the great enemy while at the same time rejoicing in our heavenly Friend. We cannot play both sides at the same time. We cannot look with mingled sorrow and delight upon the death of our Saviour for us while continuing to dabble with that deadly poison that killed Him. Thus the leaven of evil must be removed from church and home, work place and play place if we would know the full joy of feasting in His presence, if we would eat with Him at His table.

Vs. 8 – Again, if we would joyfully “*keep the feast*” of a close walk with Christ then it must be without the “*old leaven*” of the old ways of our sin nature, when

5:9 *I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:*

we “walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air” as “children of disobedience”, when our manner of life was “in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind”, and we “were by nature the children of wrath” (Eph. 2:2-3).

“Neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness” – “Malice” refers more to an inward bitter disposition, the evil habit of vicious thoughts toward others. “Wickedness” refers to the outward practice of wicked deeds, resulting from inward venom.

“But with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” – The word translated sincerity speaks of what’s found to be true and pure of motive when examined in the full light of day. God would have us to be those who are real, even when examined with closest scrutiny.

Vs. 9-11 – Paul had apparently written previously to the church at Corinth (a letter that has been lost to us it seems because the Spirit of God did not want it included in the sacred text). And now Paul would

5:10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.

make a slight correction or clarification on that previous, uninspired writing. Where before he had made the general comment that they were “*not to company with fornicators*”, he now gives a bit more detail as to what he meant by that. It’s not that they were to entirely avoid all of the unsaved around them who were openly involved in various forms of evil. This Paul does not recommend, “*for then must ye needs go out of the world*”. We could avoid every sinner only by somehow escaping earth or at least human society. God does not advocate the human perversion of monasticism. God does not teach that we should avoid contact with sinful people in an effort to foster our own personal holiness. We are to be among them, out there in the streets of everyday life with them, rubbing shoulders with them in the work place, “*in the world*” though not of the world, mingling with the world that we might win the world (Jn. 17). We are to befriend them but not become like them or be too intimate with them. We are to get close, but not too close.

5:11 *But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.*

Vs. 11 – “*But now I have written unto you*” – What Paul meant in that previous letter is now clarified. With any who is known as “*a brother*” in Christ or a believer it is to be different. There is to be a different standard of conduct, and the reason will soon be given. If such professed believers should be involved in open evil then we who walk with the Lord are not to be involved socially with them, even to the point of not joining them for a meal, especially if they have been officially disciplined by a godly church. The danger would be in allowing our actions to suggest some implied approval or tolerance for what they do. And it’s not that we’re to get weird with this, finding cause for avoidance in every smallest vice. Therefore Paul lists some sins of a greater magnitude as a sampling.

Notice that Paul does not speak here of *believers* who are practicing open sin, but of *those who are called believers* or who call themselves such. If a “*brother*” is practicing evil then there is perhaps good cause to question the reality of his salvation.

5:12 *For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?*
5:13 *But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.*

John raises this same question in his first epistle, saying, “*We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not*” (I Jn. 5:18).

Beyond only fallen saints, there is warning here for us against getting too close to those with questionable morals and those too given to worldliness. Our closest friends must be chosen very carefully. For the calibre of their character can tend to speak of what’s in us, and of what we will soon become through their influence.

Vs. 12-13 – “*Them that are without God judgeth*” – Those “*without*” or outside the fold of God’s family are God’s business. Neither Paul nor any of God’s children have anything to do with judging the unsaved. These God will deal with in His good time and according to perfect fairness and holiness, which of course is their great problem. For no man can match up to God’s perfect holiness outside of

the gift of righteousness in Christ. But those in the church are the responsibility of the saints to deal with. God holds us responsible to help in the shepherding of His people in keeping His church pure.

“Therefore” as God’s spokesman Paul ends this chapter in issuing God’s clear command to *“put away from among yourselves that wicked person”*. Paul was actually quoting the Lord’s oft repeated O.T. command to His people, *“So shalt thou put the evil away from among you”* (Deut. 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 24; 24:7). Whenever these words were spoken it was in the context of putting to death those involved in gross evil. Under the law offenders were to be executed directly by stoning. Within this age of grace there is a sense in which church discipline hands the job to Satan. In either era how very prominent the Lord’s purpose has always been to remove evil from the congregation of His people. It is most certainly His business, that which is close to His heart, when we conduct the same.

Consider how very solemn a note this O.T. quote places upon church discipline, an action comparable in fact to stoning under the law. How unwise are the unrepentant to take such a

procedure lightly, and with a flip of the hand dismiss it as irrelevant. For it's the true and living God who makes it very relevant indeed!

“All things
are lawful unto me,
but all things
are not expedient”

(1 Cor. 6:12)

Class 7 – I Corinthians 6

6:1 *Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?*

Paul came out the end of chapter 5 affirming the responsibility of the church to “*judge them that are within*” the church. This thought then led to another concern in Paul’s heart with the conduct of the believers there at Corinth. The contentious spirit there had actually carried some among them into secular courts with legal disputes against each other.

6:1-11 – Glorifying God in Our Differences

Vs. 1 – “*Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law*” – Paul has already expressed the heightened discernment in the believer over “*the natural man*” (2:14-16), for all who are in Christ “*have the mind of Christ*”. But the unsaved cannot discern spiritual things. Thus there’s a sense in which the simplest among the saved is far more capable than the wisest of the world to discern

6:2 *Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?*

truth. Paul's point is, why would one be so foolish as to go to a lesser facility when you have access to the very best on earth in the church?

"Before the unjust, and not before the saints" – Paul does not suggest here that secular magistrates are all unjust in their dealings. He uses the term *"unjust"* to describe the general condition of the unsaved. They are not justified or made righteous in Christ, in contrast to *"the saints"* who are sanctified or set apart from the world to God. In the same way the O.T. commonly refers to saved and lost as righteous and wicked or *"ungodly"* (Ps. 1). Though an unsaved man may be a relatively righteous person, yet not having received God's righteousness by faith he still bears the wickedness of his sin.

Vs. 2 – *"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?"* – Paul raises the question of their awareness repeatedly throughout this chapter (vs. 3, 9, 15, 16, 19). Of these who considered themselves so full and rich and wise and strong and

6:3 *Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?*

honourable (4:8-10) Paul enquires whether they weren't actually quite ignorant!

The O.T. speaks on this matter of the future rule of the saints. Therefore there could be no excuse for their ignorance of it. If God has spoken then it's ours to know. As we considered previously, Daniel speaks of the days of Christ's return when "*judgment was given to the saints of the Most High*" (Dan. 7:22). The same is implied in Rev. 20, with saints sitting upon thrones. And if the saints will be judged worthy to join Christ in His kingdom rule, surely they can manage "*the smallest matters*" in the church.

We're probably not to take this so far as to say that believers should never use secular courts or seek justice from the world. Only that the world must not have a role in solving disputes between Christian brothers.

Vs. 3 – "*Know ye not that we shall judge angels?*" – This one they perhaps couldn't be faulted for missing. We will likely not find any statement to

6:4 *If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.*

6:5 *I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?*

this effect in the O.T. This may refer to involvement in the condemning of evil angels at the last, those spirits that have so troubled the saints throughout the ages. Perhaps it suggests an eventual place of authority for us higher than God's angels. In either case it certainly speaks of exalted roles to be given to God's saints in time. If we shall one day be lifted to such a level of responsibility surely we're capable of handling the relatively small concerns of everyday life on earth.

Vs. 4 – If you should have cases arising between you that require an arbitrator, then set up even those considered of no account in the church as a better option than taking the case before the world.

Vs. 5 – *"I speak to your shame"* – Where in chap. 4 Paul did not write to intentionally shame them (vs. 14), now he does. They were a people greatly at fault in this matter.

6:6 *But brother goeth to law with brother, and that
before the unbelievers.*

“Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you?” – Again this was a bit of a slam against their professed wisdom. And now Paul is asking, “So where is the wise man among you, even one, who could serve as an ombudsman?”

Though they were making choices there at Corinth as to the kind of wisdom they appreciated, see well how their lean to the world’s way of wisdom was not fostering peace among them. The world’s wisdom wasn’t working. When we walk with God in the truth of His Word there is peace, from the inside out. And when there is not peace we have good cause to question our walk. Any departure from God’s true wisdom is a departure from what works, both in life and in life eternal.

Vs. 6 – *“Brother goeth to law with brother . . . before the unbelievers”* – Paul seems to speak with a kind of shocked disbelief here. “What is this?! What kind of a testimony for Christ is it before the world when Christian brothers can’t get along with each other and must ask the world to step in and sort them out?” Yet notice the reality here, that

6:7 *Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?*

believers can be a mess, and a mess before the world, and still be believers. Again, Paul does not raise a question of their salvation, when *we* might be inclined to do so through such responses.

Vs. 7 – “*Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you*” – Paul seems to step back now from the matter of their actually taking their cases to secular court, to consider the more fundamental problem that they had cases against each other. Not just that they were going to court, but that they even had such hot issues with each other that required arbitration. Believers should not be people full of issues with people, especially with those of their own family of faith. Why such problems among you? The humble do not tend to form or foster problems. The book of Proverbs informs us that contention is due to the presence of the wicked (6:14), the wrathful (15:18; 29:22), the perverse (16:28), those loving sin (17:19), scorners (22:10), drunkards (23:29), whisperers (26:20; 16:28), and the proud (28:25). Again it was good indication of

trouble *within* them that there was such trouble *between* them. Their Christian love was not humming like a well-tuned engine but was a stop and start affair, like an old clunker with only two cylinders firing. Selfishness was running deep and patient tolerance of injustice was wearing pretty thin.

“Why do ye not rather take wrong?” – Paul seems to present this option as a higher way, even a better approach than the Christian mediator idea suggested earlier. *“Why not just absorb it?”* It’s faith in God as our Keeper that gives the strength for this most difficult option. Compare King Amaziah in II Chron. 25. When the king was planning his attack on Edom he hired 100,000 mercenaries from Israel to the north to strengthen his own army of 300,000, and paid a hundred talents or 3,420 kgs (7,500 lbs) of silver for their services. According to modern values this was worth about 11.8 million Rand, or R118 per soldier. Not a small sum by any means. But after payment had been made the Lord sent *“a man of God”* to warn the king away from using those mercenaries, *“for the LORD is not with Israel”* (vs. 7). *“But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel?”* asked the king (vs. 9). *“And the man of God answered, The LORD is able to*

6:8 *Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren.*

give thee much more than this". Don't worry about the finances. Don't worry about what you've spent or lost. Just be sure you respond according to the Lord's will and He will take care of the finances. He is quite able to make up for any losses you might incur in responding according to His way. It's good advice if we're willing to hear and heed it. Just put your trust in the Lord and take the wrong and absorb the loss. Just let yourself be defrauded. He does not deny that it really was robbery. He implies that it was indeed fraud. But He encourages us to quietly let it happen. Just move on, walk away, asking nothing in return, trusting God to make up the difference and even bless for our willingness to do His will in keeping the peace. The "*eye for an eye*" and "*tooth for a tooth*" bit is the way of the old era. The way of the new is here, painful though it may be (Matt. 5:38-42). Compare Heb. 10:34, where beyond "willingly", they "*took joyfully the spoiling of their goods*".

Vs. 8 – "*Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud*" – There is emphasis here on "You all yourselves are wronging and defrauding". While campaigning for right they

6:9 *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,*

themselves were doing wrong. Beyond just fairness, Paul was aware that their efforts with each other extended even to seeking each other's hurt. Where losses were incurred there was actual interest in levelling the score by hurting the other in return. Brothers pursuing the harm of brothers; those with whom we will spend eternity, with whom we are actually more closely tied than our blood relatives!

Vs. 9-10 – “*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?*” – Again it was the suggestion of the ignorance of these wise ones in questioning their awareness. The thought carries from the previous verse. The word translated “*unrighteous*” here is the noun form of the verb translated “*ye do wrong*” in vs. 8. “You yourselves are doing wrong, and are you not knowing that wrong-doers will not inherit God’s kingdom?” Paul is not suggesting that saints might lose their salvation by reverting to such wrong-doing, but he makes the point that our lives express the way of the unsaved in so responding.

6:10 *Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

Paul then expands the list to include other things that can be true of believers upon occasion, yet the ways of those who have no inheritance with God. True salvation does not leave people the same.

“Nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind” – “Effeminate” comes of a word meaning soft to the touch. Here it refers to a soft male, one “who submits his body to unnatural lewdness” (Thayer). The entire phrase *“abusers of themselves with mankind”* comes of one word in the Greek, a word which combines the words for “male” and “bed”, clearly expressing the idea of one involved in sodomy. These two terms together seem to convey the two sides of a homosexual relationship. The first the one in the more passive female role and the second the one in the more aggressive male role.

“Nor thieves” – There are two words in Greek commonly used to describe thieves. One refers to the robber who openly steals with the use of force, as the highwayman or high-jacker. The other refers to the one who quietly steals through subtlety, such as pick-pockets and shop-lifters. It’s the sneaky

6:11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

thief spoken of here.

Vs. 11 – “*And such were some of you*” – Paul affirms the marked change in the believers there at Corinth by using the stronger Greek term translated “but”, and using it three times. He hammers the point that things were different now with them. They were not the same people they once were.

“But ye are washed . . . sanctified . . . justified” – These words describe three great truths accomplished at the moment we were saved. In Christ we were “*washed*” from the defilement of our sin. We were “*sanctified*” or set apart or consecrated as holy and wholly for the Lord. We were “*justified*” or declared righteous before God, as if clothed with the very righteousness of Jesus Christ, our sin removed from us “*as far as the east is from the west*” and the positive righteousness of Jesus Christ given in its place. We have been placed on God’s side and His forevermore. For Paul to so lift up before them what they were in their sacred *position* before the Lord was a strong lead in

6:12 *All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.*

their sacred *practice* before men.

“In the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” – All that we have is through the authority of Christ’s name and through the inward working of the Spirit.

6:12-20 – Glorifying God in Our Bodies

Having dealt with the matter of how disputes are to be handled, Paul turned back now to the theme of immorality begun in chapter 5.

Vs. 12 – *“All things are lawful unto me”* – This is an expression of our freedom in Jesus Christ. It may be that in Paul’s repetition of this phrase he was voicing what was being said there at Corinth, but carried to an extreme by some who wished to use their liberty as an occasion for depravity. Paul now sought to curb the abuse of freedom. Our Christian liberty was never meant to be a blank check on Christian license, the liberty to walk into any dark way without caution or guilt. Compare 10:23.

6:13 *Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats; but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.*

“But all things are not expedient” – Not all things are to the best advantage. The practice of our liberty in Christ is not always the most beneficial course, for ourselves or for others. If my brother is hurt or offended by my practice of freedom it can become sin to me. Compare 10:32-33. A truly godly Christian life is a sincere quest for the very best, for *“things that are excellent”*, not just acceptable (Phil. 1:10).

“But I will not be brought under the power of any” – Though we are free in Christ, we are not free to become slaves to any influence but His.

Thus we have two principles here to help in deciding on the correctness of any course;

- Is it *“expedient”*, or to the best ends all the way around?
- Is it enslaving, or does it bring me under its power?

Vs. 13-14 – Paul seems here to be contrasting

6:14 *And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power.*

things of little concern (“foods for the belly”) and things of true concern (“*the body is not for fornication*”). It seems Paul was battling an attitude among the believers there in carnal Corinth that looked upon fornication as merely the satisfying of a physical need the same as one would eat to satisfy hunger. His point is that there is indeed a difference. Whereas the foods we eat are a non-issue, for these bodies will come to an end and be changed in the resurrection, yet the giving of our body to fornication is a very different matter, for reasons Paul now gives. With such a lofty hope before us in our bodies to be raised victorious, how could we so disgrace and degrade them through immorality. The general statement of his point is here in vs. 13. Our bodies are “*for the Lord*” and “*not for fornication*” or immoral use. Thus the practice of immorality is not included within Christian liberty. Why?

- Because we cannot bring together pure and impure (vs. 15-17). In our new birth we were made a part of the body of Christ. Paul will chase this thought further in chap. 12. Every

6:15 *Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.*
6:16 *What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.*

one of us was placed in Christ and gifted in Him to perform some function in His body, even as a physical body is a unit with many members. Yet when one is physically joined with a harlot in an immoral act he makes himself “one flesh” with that one. To this Paul quotes from Gen. 2:24, speaking of the physical relation between a man and his wife in which they physically express their oneness in heart and life. For a Christian to be so united with a prostitute is to bring together in his body that which is holy and that which is unholy. Such a man in such an act makes himself the meeting point of two things that cannot agree, like putting Jesus together with that harlot in a sense. For “*what fellowship hath light with darkness*”. There can be no spiritual walk with the Lord in the light while in the arms of immorality.

- Because it is God’s *command* that we “*flee fornication*”. Paul’s command to flee goes

*6:17 But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.
6:18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is
without the body; but he that committeth fornication
sinneth against his own body.*

beyond just the actual practice of immorality to include every visit there through our eyes and ears and thoughts as well. And this command to flee assumes we are simply not able to be strong against temptation's pull. He does not tell us to stand. The command is to get away and to get away *quick!* Don't allow yourself to remain under the power of temptation's attractions even for a moment. Compare Joseph's faithful flight from the arms of Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39).

Because fornication is a sin against one's own body (vs. 18). There is something different in immorality from all other sins. There is some especially damaging or shaming aspect involved. Compare Prov. 6:32-33. A man was only meant to be physically involved with one living woman at a time within the sanctity of marriage. Anything outside of this biblical specification is immorality and a stroke or blight against one's own life.

- Because our body is purchased by God as His

6:19 *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*
6:20 *For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

own dwelling place (vs. 19-20). Our bodies as believers are God's temple because the Spirit of God indwells us from the moment of our salvation. Therefore our body is no longer ours to abuse as we wish. We hold no right over it to do with it as we please. In the same way that we give up a measure of our right to our own body when we're married (7:4), even so we in a sense lost our right to our body when we were redeemed by "*the precious blood of Christ*" (I Pet. 1:18-19). "*Therefore*" reserve your body for God's glory in the same way that His temple was reserved for sacred use in the days of David's reign on earth. Paul could not have used the word "*temple*" without the thoughts of these people running to the most prominent temple of that city, the temple of Aphrodite. The contrast becomes immediately obvious between the filthy way of the world and that of Christ. "*Choose ye this day whom ye will serve*", in whose temple you will dwell.

In summary, why should we “*flee fornication*”?

- Because it’s God’s command to me.
- Because my body “*is for the Lord*”.
- Because holy and unholy cannot be united.
- Because fornication is both sin against the Lord and against my own body.
- Because my body is God’s dwelling place and special possession.

Class 8 – I Corinthians 7:1-16

With chapter 7 Paul now generally turned from his sharp dealing with the problems there in the church of Corinth (though he was not yet finished with words of rebuke for those troubled people) and he began to advise them concerning “*the things whereof ye wrote unto me*”, dealing with questions the believers there had sent in a letter to Paul. Among their concerns were queries relating to marriage and divorce and being single and such. And so, with matters of morality and purity being his general lean in chapters 5 & 6 Paul turns now to their questions of a similar theme.

Now it's easy to come to misunderstanding in this portion, to read in Paul's words a rather functional view of marriage. But we must understand that this is not all that Paul wrote on marriage. He had much more to say concerning the sacrifices and selflessness involved in the relation between a man and his wife. But the physical relationship between a man and a woman is an important factor in the marriage equation too. And if God's Word doesn't seem to line up precisely with the romance novel version of love and courtship then what needs to change? As well, we must remember that Paul is writing to answer questions in this portion, not to

7:1 Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

deal with the subject of marriage as a whole.

7:1-9 – General Principles for Marriage

Vs. 1 – *“It is good for a man not to touch a woman”* – By “touch” Paul is not talking about hugging your mother. He speaks here of the intimate relations of a man and woman in marriage. Paul’s assurance is that it’s good for a man to remain single, without the need for intimacy with a wife. So Paul begins his discussion here in defence of celibacy, or being single and remaining pure in that condition. As a rule he’s going to advise marriage, yet at the outset he would make the point clear that marriage is not a has-to-be. Celibacy is not weird, but an honourable and even preferable condition (this Paul will explain further in the last half of this chapter). There is no special, starry-eyed, to-be-sought sort of status in being married. We can probably safely conclude that the people of Corinth carried the same kinds of views concerning marriage that people do in our modern world, from those who view marriage as a kind of evil to those who view remaining single as weird and marriage a must.

7:2 Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

Vs. 2 – *“Nevertheless, to avoid fornication”* – Now Paul turns to one of the purposes of marriage, to provide a right and proper outlet for sexual desire, because God made most of us with the need for this. If men and women did not naturally desire each other and desire intimacy with each other then none would marry and have children. So our God made us with that natural attraction, an attraction so strong in fact that it can easily lead into impure relationships. This is not an evil attraction in itself, but a God-given interest. In fact from the very beginning it was God who said that *“it is not good that the man should be alone”* (Gen. 2:18). From the beginning God established marriage as a sacred institution according to His design. And from the beginning of Christ’s earthly ministry, even His *“beginning of miracles”*, He turned water to the juice of the vine at the wedding in Cana (Jn. 2), again putting His blessing on marriage. It was and is right as a general rule that a man and woman be united in marriage. And God’s apostle now clearly presents the institution of marriage as, among many other things, a kind of protection against

moral impurity. To insist upon celibacy in any kind of religious devotion not only runs against God's will but is in fact "*doctrines of devils*" (I Tim. 4:1-3).

Don't miss the obvious here. Paul said "*let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband*". The terms are clear, are they not? He is talking about a man with a woman, not a man with a man or woman with woman. And the terms are singular. He talks of one man with one woman. Homosexuality, polygamy, and promiscuity find their proper end in the gospel.

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On the Side

One of the I Tim. 3 qualifications for an elder or pastor is that he be "*the husband of one wife*" (vs. 2). Apart from this rather evidently making him a *him* and not a *her*, this indicates that a pastor must be married only to one. This obviously prohibits him from polygamy, and probably from divorce and remarriage as well. But it may also perhaps suggest that a pastor should be a married man, for the same reasons Paul gives in this context.

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Vs. 3 – "*Let the husband render unto the wife due*

7:3 *Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.*

benevolence” – Not due violence, but “*benevolence*”. The term literally means “good will” or “kindness”. But in the context here it’s a euphemism, an easy way of referring to the physical intimacy of a man and woman in marriage. Paul indicates that such “*one flesh*” involvement with each other is “*due*” or owed as the duty of marriage partners to each other. And the Lord is not just making suggestions here. The rendering of this “*due benevolence*” in marriage is written as a command. “You be active in the intimate side of your marriage!” Because again, your marriage supplies the need for this in a man and in a woman. The woman needs to receive what a woman is looking for within a marriage, and a man must find in his wife what a man needs. Notice that Paul is careful to speak to both the man and the woman directly. Proper marriage is not about meeting only the man’s physical needs, but *both* partners delighting in meeting the needs of the other. Most marital difficulties either begin with a neglect of this or result in the neglect of it. Compare Prov. 5:15-21 for similar commands toward physical intimacy. It’s to the husband God

7:4 The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.

gives command concerning his wife there, to “*let her breasts satisfy thee at all times*”. The point is that a man’s *wife* must be his pleasure, rather than any other available bodies out there. But the instruction is for the wife as well, that she express physical delight in her husband.

Vs. 4 – A mutual handing over of ourselves takes place at marriage, which includes even our physical bodies. She has a part interest in his body now, and he has a share in hers. She does not own the right to deny him what he owns shares in, nor does he have the right to deny her what she owns. And neither partner has the right to offer to an outsider what partly belongs to their spouse. There exists in marriage a mutual dependence between the two. When a man and woman aren’t getting along the tenderness of their physical relationship is often the first thing they deny each other. But we don’t rightly have this option from the moment of our marriage. Therefore we are not really at liberty to remain at odds with each other, closing the door of access to each other.

7:5 Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

Vs. 5 – “*Defraud ye not one the other*” – Again this is written as a command in the Greek. To deprive or withhold from the other what is not ours to withhold is a kind of theft. Don’t you deny them what is theirs.

“*Except it be with consent for a time*” – The husband does not have the right to take himself away from his wife for an extended period of time. The wife does not have the right to remove herself from her husband for an extended time. It’s asking for disaster. It’s overlooking one very important reason why they’re married, featuring so prominently here. Only if there is agreement between them on the matter, and for some worthy reason such as a mutual wish to deny themselves earthly pleasures in order to devote themselves to a time of prayer. Whether Paul is giving an example of worthy causes, or whether he’s suggesting only a spiritual reason as a worthy cause is unclear. The point is that we are not to be free and easy with the extended separation of marriage partners because

7:6 *But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment.*

of the dangers involved.

“And come together again” – It’s important that they return to intimate involvement that the evil one not be given opportunity to use their weakness. *“Incontinency”* is a word used today more narrowly of the loss of bladder control. But the notion here is of a lack of self-control, again referring to the fundamental inability to be celibate, which partly contributed to their seeking marriage in the first place (vs. 2).

Vs. 6 – *“I speak this by permission, and not of commandment”* – Paul is not saying here that the Lord allowed him to say these words but didn’t really command him to so speak, as if the thoughts given here were some kind of secondary revelation. Rather Paul now returns to his first statement of the honourable condition of singleness (vs. 1). He would not have his words concerning marriage to be taken as a *command* to get married. He speaks more by way of concession or permission or allowance to seek marriage in view of the fact that most are unable to safely remain single. God does

7:7 For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.

not command a man to marry any more than He commands any man to stay single. Such commands come only of man's perverted truth twists.

Vs. 7 – *“For I would that all men were even as I myself”* – Paul was obviously not married at that time. Compare a hint of the same in 9:5. His marital record is unknown to us, whether he was never married or was once married and in some way lost his wife.

Paul implies that being unmarried is not only *“good for a man”* but it's the best way to be. Yet again, *“every man hath his proper gift of God”*. Paul could remain single because he *could* remain so, without need for what marriage provides. Do you see the indication here that it's a matter of God's gifting in *both* directions, either to need a spouse or not? Paul's point is that a man must do what a man must do. But don't let your culture or family expectations or some such foolishness force you into marriage when you don't need or prefer to be

7:8 *I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.*

7:9 *But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.*

married. The *best* course is to remain just as you are, if so gifted. But if you recognize that control is lacking in the area of sexual desire, then understand this as God's call to seek marriage, and be asking Him for His direction and provision in this regard.

Vs. 8-9 – This is now a summary statement of Paul's words to "*the unmarried and widows*", to those not currently married. His words are specific here. Paul does not include those who are divorced, but only those never married or who have lost their spouse to death.

"*It is good for them*" to stay unmarried (a parallel statement to vs. 1). But if they cannot easily remain so for reasons discussed, then they are wise to look to the Lord for His answer. "*Contain*" (KJV) again speaks of self-control. "*To burn*" refers to the heart continually enflamed with sexual desire. Much of such burning has to do with what we choose to think about, look at, read, etc. We are

7:10 And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband:

wise to not wrongly encourage this natural desire before we are able to properly express it. If we before the Lord sincerely strive to bring *“into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”* we will substantially diminish the power of passion.

So the Lord through His apostle never indicates that marriage is either a right or a wrong. He never suggests either marriage or celibacy as a second rate condition. It is only a question of individual abilities as given by our God. And marriage, with the intimacy it provides, is indeed a valid answer before God and man. Again Heb. 13:4 – *“Marriage is honourable in all things, and the bed undefiled”*.

7:10-16 – Instruction for the Married

Vs. 10 – *“Unto the married I command”* – Paul now turns to those who were married, giving general instructions for them, both restating what Jesus had said as recorded in the gospels and going beyond to what the Lord now further gave through Paul.

7:11 *But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.*

“Yet not I, but the Lord” – Paul begins with a simple statement of what Jesus said. His words are brief and to the point, giving the general rule for those who are married.

“Let not the wife depart from her husband” – Literally “a woman from a man not to be separated”. Clear and simple. Yet recognizing practically that we don’t live in an ideal world and that separations may take place, Paul chases it further.

Vs. 11 – “*But if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband*” – These are commands. If separation should take place there are only two options for those separated;

- Remain in an unmarried state.
- Be restored to the spouse.

The “But . . . but . . . but’s” usually begin to boil out right about now; “But what about this other verse? But what about that passage? But what about what everybody else is doing and advising?” ***But,***

let's just listen to what God is saying for a moment, shall we? The rule is *no separation*, if we would be pleasing to God. And in the event of separation, whatever the cause, the rule is no further marriage, or restoration to the estranged spouse.

“And let not the husband put away the wife” – Again it's the same rule – *no separation!* Please lay aside the justifications and just listen. You're right, I don't know what your “ex” was like or how that one mistreated you. But what is God actually saying? That's the question before us right now. In comparing the gospel accounts Jesus said;

- *“Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband and be married to another, she committeth adultery”* (Mk. 10:11).
- *“Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery”* (Lk. 16:12).

For either spouse involved, the one who divorces and marries another is committing adultery. Obviously God does not recognize their divorce as valid. Again, the rule is *no separation*. And if

separation, *remain single* or *reconcile*.

Now many hold with a white-knuckled grip to the “exception clause” of Matt. 5:32 & 19:9 – “*except it be for fornication*”. But there are many questions that arise around this “qualifying” statement. Why is it *only* found in Matthew? Why is it “*fornication*” and not adultery? To what was Jesus referring in the more Jewish context of Matthew’s gospel? And when we come to the N.T. epistles, the doctrinal books where Christ’s life and the gospel accounts are interpreted to the church, where is this strange exception clause? If ever there was a place where this clause might have been affirmed and even explained it’s right here in I Cor. 7:10-11, especially when Paul states here that he’s expressing what the Lord commanded. But not a breath of it! Again, suggesting some exceptional meaning in that exception clause, rather than an open door for divorce and remarriage as many choose to read it. Compare vs. 39 where one “*is at liberty to be married*” to another only when their spouse dies. Compare Romans 7:1-3, where Paul affirms that the only way a woman can marry another and not be an adulterer is upon the death of her husband. Widows and widowers are free to remarry, as suggested in vs. 8. I’m not sure what to do with that “exception clause”, but it sure is intriguing that

7:12 But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.

Paul doesn't do *anything* with it, as if it just doesn't apply to us. The rule is here as stated.

Now do the principles of marriage expressed in these verses refer only to saved people? Would it not seem that the same principles would apply to the unsaved? Would the order of where divorce fell with one's salvation really make a difference in the guidelines given here? Every sin committed before salvation must bring a response of repentance before the Lord and must be put right as far as we are able.

Vs. 12-13 – “*But to the rest speak I, not the Lord*” – Paul turns now to the particular situation of mixed marriages, where only one of the spouses is saved. He spends a great deal of time on this issue (vs. 12-16), suggesting a matter that was a particular concern to them. In his comment that *he* was speaking on this matter and “*not the Lord*”, again Paul was not suggesting that he was speaking outside of inspiration. He simply meant that he was now moving to an aspect concerning which

7:13 And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

Jesus did not particularly speak. Jesus spoke only generally on the matter of divorce and remarriage.

The two phrases at the end of vs. 12 & 13, “*let him not put her away*” and “*let her not leave him*” are both commands (in fact it’s the exact same Greek word behind both phrases, the same verb as at the end of vs. 11). Again the rule is no separation. Because a marriage is mixed, of saved and unsaved, this does not require that the marriage be ended, nor does it give freedom for the saved one to leave the unsaved and marry a believer. There is no defilement of the saved through their union with the unsaved as some were perhaps thinking. The decision of whether to stay together is left with the unsaved party. If they are happy then don’t mess with it.

By the way, Paul’s instruction here does not allow for a believer to enter into marriage with an unbeliever, for this would constitute an unequal yoke against which Paul warns in II Cor. 6:14.

7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

Vs. 14 – “*For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife*” – This verse is as interesting as it is difficult, stirring as a result all manner of interesting interpretations. Some things are clear. The opening “*for*” indicates a reason why the believer should not leave a mixed marriage. “*Sanctified*” means set apart or made holy. The nature of the purifying influence upon the unsaved in the home is unclear, only that the unsaved spouse as well as the children are put under some sanctifying sway, some measure of holy influence, through the presence of the one believing in Christ. From vs. 16 we understand that this sanctifying affect does not refer to salvation or regeneration. The N.T. everywhere affirms that every individual must make his own decision to believe on Jesus for salvation. But the experiences of Lydia and the jailor at Philippi suggest that when one is saved there are much better prospects of salvation for all the family involved (Acts 16:15, 33). It may be some there at Corinth thought that a believer was in some way defiled in a mixed marriage. But Paul

7:15 But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

affirms that it was quite the other way around, that there was in fact some positive influence on the unsaved rather than negative impact on the saved in such marriages.

Vs. 15 – *“But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart”* – Again, as in vs. 12-13, the decision of whether to stay must rest with the unbeliever. The believer is *“not under bondage”* or constrained to make demands in such circumstances. We’re not obligated to preserve our marriage. That’s God’s business. We can leave even such a “tragedy” as an unwanted marriage break-up safely in His hands and happily rest in His will for us. To attempt to force the unsaved to continue in an unwanted marriage would only ruin the peace to which the believer is called, and which should ever characterize his life. Whatever this means it cannot be an open door for remarriage, for the rule has already been stated.

Vs. 16 – *“Whether thou shalt save”* – Even in accepting the departure of the other in a spirit of

*7:16 For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt
save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man,
whether thou shalt save thy wife?*

peace there is a witness to the unsaved.

Thus we find three great purposes in marriage for the saved;

- To provide a sanctifying influence in the home upon all concerned (vs. 14).
- To maintain the Lord's peace, even in greatest loss (vs. 15).
- To seek the salvation of the unsaved (vs. 16). Compare I Pet. 3:1.

“Let every man abide
in the same calling
wherein he was called”

(1 Cor. 7:20)

Class 9 – I Corinthians 7:17-40

7:17 But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches.

7:17-24 – Principle of Contentment

Paul has earlier referred to the preferable choice of those who are unmarried remaining so if they are gifted to remain so without suffering too much temptation (vs. 7-9). He as well has just encouraged saved men and women to remain in marriage with an unsaved spouse if that option is available to them. Now in this middle portion of chapter 7 Paul extends his thought more widely in a general principle of contentment.

Vs. 17 – “*As the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk*” – Whatever lot the Lord has distributed to you in life, in this be content to willingly remain. Don’t miss the point in the first statement of this verse that it is in fact God who is responsible for all distributions. It’s a restatement of 4:7.

“*And so ordain I in all churches*” – With the

7:18 Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised.

authority of God's apostle, Paul extends this principle of contentment to all believers. Indeed Paul spoke with the voice of command repeatedly (7 times) in this section;

- Vs. 17 – *“let him walk”*
- Vs. 18 – *“let him not be uncircumcised”*
- Vs. 18 – *“let him not be circumcised”*
- Vs 20 – *“Let every man abide”*
- Vs. 21 – *“care not for it”*
- Vs. 23 – *“be not ye the servants of men”*
- Vs. 24 – *“let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God”*

All written as commands in the Greek behind the English.

Vs. 18 – *“Is any called being circumcised”* – These thoughts concerning circumcision are given as an illustration or application of this principle of contentment. Being *“called”* obviously refers to the

7:19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.

moment one at last hears God's call to salvation and believes in Christ. Did one enter into salvation in Christ as a circumcised man? Don't seek to make changes in this regard.

"Let him not be uncircumcised" – I don't think I want to know how this works! Obviously this would involve a surgical procedure if referring to an actual procedure.

Vs. 19 – *"Circumcision . . . uncircumcision is nothing"* – In Christ such matters are now irrelevant, marking the change from the old covenant to the new.

In Timothy's case Paul had him circumcised upon entrance into ministry apparently as a testimony to the Jews due to Timothy's Jewish mother (Acts 16:3). It was not a religious duty but the best course in that context in view of those to whom Timothy would minister. Compare Titus not *"compelled to be circumcised"* (Gal. 2:3).

7:20 *Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.*

7:21 *Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather.*

“But the keeping of the commandments of God” – Again this marks the change from the old way. Where before circumcision was part of the obedience of God’s people, now it’s “*nothing*”. Now Jesus has given “*a new commandment*”, “*that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another*”. Our guiding principles in this current age are to love God with everything and to love others as we would naturally care for our own needs. Religious tokens or marks are nothing now, while obedience to God’s two great commands is everything.

Vs. 20 – “*Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called*” – This is essentially a repetition of vs. 17. “*Calling*” here refers generally to the condition or occupation one is in when converted to Christ.

Vs. 21 – “*Art thou called being a servant?*” – Further illustrating his point, Paul now turns to the matter of occupation. The Greek term here is *doulos*,

commonly used of one not merely hired as a servant but owned as a slave. Paul's first example expressed the main *religious* distinction of that day, between Jew and Gentile. This second example expresses the main *social* distinction of that day, between master and slave. In this way Paul spans the broad spectrum of society, both religious and secular.

“Care not for it” – Just don't let it be a concern to you, whatever condition you are currently in, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, master or slave, married or unmarried. All social distinctions on earth fall away among those on their way to glory. And besides, we who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ have been called to peace (vs. 15). We should not be ever angling for change in our situation. We should rather be unconcerned, even quite satisfied with our current condition. It's a choice we make. The world gets wrought up over degrees and status and conditions and such, never finding peace because there's no peace in them. But this is not to be our way. So the general principle is to just stay put right where Christ finds you, without being anxious for any moves, unless the Lord makes it clear that change is necessary or drops opportunity into your lap.

7:22 *For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.*

“But if thou mayest be free, use it rather” – If the chance to be freed from slavery should be handed to you, don’t pass it up. But then use your freedom in the Lord’s service. The same principle applies to every situation in which life finds us. We are called to *“use it rather”* in whatever *“God hath distributed”* to us. Let there be in you an eagerness to use your current situation for the Lord, rather than harbouring any anxious concern to change it. Live for Christ in your singleness as in your slavery. Happily use your situation to win your fellow slaves and to be a Christian testimony to your master. In the same way Paul didn’t lobby for his freedom when unfairly imprisoned for 4 years by Rome. He rather used his imprisonment for *“the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places”* (Phil. 1:12-13). That this man was captivated *by Christ* became known to all where he was held, and that he was a prisoner because of his stand for Christ. Make the decision to just stay and use the opportunities that present themselves.

7:23 *Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.*

Vs. 22-23 – One saved as a slave has found true freedom in Christ, and one saved as a freeman was actually purchased out of slavery to sin and Satan’s service with *“the precious blood of Christ”* to become the Lord’s servant.

“Be not the servants of men” – Whatever your outward condition might be, don’t let yourself be enslaved by the prevailing attitudes and negative, fearful sentiments of those around you. Let the Lord be the Master of your attitude, lifting your heart to the heights though men consider your condition the pits. As applied to Paul’s current discussion, make the choice to be happy in your current marital condition, unless outside conditions or God’s gifting force you otherwise. As applied to our current situation in this country, don’t let the common fears expressed by so many influence you to join the anxious stampede of leavers seeking a “safer” land. *“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding”*. *“Use it rather”*. Run for the Lord with all you have in ministry here, trusting Him to hold you in the hollow of His hand. Remember the precious

*7:24 Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called,
therein abide with God.*

*7:25 Now concerning virgins I have no commandment
of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath
obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful.*

promises in Ps. 91 to those who dwell “*in the secret place of the Most High*”, abiding “*under the shadow of the Almighty*”.

Vs. 24 – “*Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God*” – Again, it’s the repeated refrain in this chorus of contentment (vs. 17, 20). Choose to be happy in the Lord right where you are.

7:25-35 – Advice to the Unmarried

In these next few verses Paul returns to a focus upon those who have never been married, mentioned earlier briefly in vs. 8-9. Again we get the impression that he’s dealing with specific questions asked by the believers there at Corinth.

Vs. 25 – “*I have no commandment of the Lord*” – Again, not to suggest that Paul was now writing outside of the Spirit’s inspiration, for he indicates otherwise in vs. 40, but that the question of

7:26 *I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be.*

marriage for the unmarried was one Jesus never directly addressed in His earthly ministry. And as well, Paul was not issuing hard and fast commands on the matter, but rather offered his guidance, leaving the decision with the individuals involved.

Vs. 26 – “*I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress*” – Again the “good” and proper condition of singleness is indicated here. Compare vs. 1 & 8. Don’t let somebody else’s standards of conduct force you into the attitude toward marriage that it is a *must*. Four times in this chapter Paul employs the term “good” to describe the unmarried state. In offering reasons to stay single he begins by pointing to “*the present distress*”, some impending difficulties or threatening troubles, perhaps referring to great persecutions about to break upon the church of Christ in that day. It’s unclear what Paul referred to by this, whether some local situation or perhaps even his expectation of the Lord’s soon return, whether relating only to his time or to all time. But in view of such, his suggestion again is that it might be wiser to remain unmarried. Remaining single was clearly Paul’s

7:27 *Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed.
Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.*
7:28 *But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if
a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless
such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.*

preferred condition.

Vs. 27 – Here is the general rule, depending of course upon one’s *“proper gift of God”* (vs. 7). Don’t be anxious to change your current marital condition. If you’re *“bound unto a wife”* stay there. Work it out or wait it out. The phrase *“loosed from a wife”* some understand to refer to those who are divorced. This cannot be, for Paul now speaks to those who had not married, and he has already given the rule in the case of those separated from their spouse in vs. 11. They must either *“remain unmarried, or be reconciled to”* their spouse. The term *“loosed”* here merely expresses the opposite condition of one *“bound unto a wife”*.

Vs. 28 – But if an unmarried man or woman (*“virgin”*) should choose to get married it’s not a case of sinning or even falling to God’s lesser will for them. There is to be no guilt involved, for they have simply proceeded according to God’s original word that a man should leave father and mother and

7:29 But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none;

cleave to his wife (Gen. 2:24).

“Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh” – In marriage there is the added “trouble” of the need to be mindful of the needs of others. In marriage much more of life must be devoted to two people living life together and the resulting children than if one is single. In marriage there are duties to each other that must be seen to. A man and woman are not free in marriage to make decisions independent of the other. Compare vs. 32-34.

Vs. 29-30 – *“The time is short”* – Paul seems to refer here to the brief, transitory nature of our lives and of this age in contrast with eternity. As John proclaimed, *“Little children, it is the last time”* (I Jn. 2:18). In view of the fact that another day will indeed dawn with Christ’s return, when our *“blessed hope”* will break forth into glorious sight, after which opportunity to stand for the truth of God before neighbours, friends, family, and workmates will end, consider then the *“good”* option of never marrying. Don’t dismiss without due

*7:30 And they that weep, as though they wept not; and
they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and
they that buy, as though they possessed not;*

consideration that possible course of not allowing human relations to more completely consume your time and thoughts, so that you might more fully give yourself to the God who has so mercied you. It's an option and a "good" one and should be considered so.

"As though they had none" – Not that we should be aloof to others or family. Not that we should disregard our duties to each other, for God has called us to the careful consideration of duty earlier in this same chapter (vs. 3). Yet even in the sorrows and joys of life on earth and human relationships Paul would encourage us away from becoming overly tied or devoted to things here below. His words are perhaps similar to Christ's comments concerning His *"brother, and sister, and mother"* (Matt. 12:46-50). Even if we should choose to bind ourselves to another in marriage, earthly relationships and business must ever take second place to the Lord's business. *"As having nothing, and yet possessing all things"* (II Cor. 6:10). Contrast the consuming earthly commitments of

7:31 And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

those in Christ's parable who were invited to a "great supper" but one after the other excused themselves (Luke 14:16ff). We must allow nothing to greatly distract us from that coming "great supper" in the Lord's presence and all who might be found there through our influence. For where your heart is that's where your treasure really lies.

Vs. 31 – *"And they that use this world, as not abusing it"* – We are to be in the world but not of it. We are to access the things of earth in moderation, using them to further God's cause among men, while ever aware that this world is not our home.

"For the fashion of this world passeth away" – All below the sun is a sinking ship, and only those with connection to the One above the sun will avoid going down with it. Therefore by faith we are wise to cast the weight of our attention to things eternal, rather than to things doomed and perishable. Thus there is of necessity a certain measure of appropriate disconnection in our involvement with things of earth. In Christ this is not our home country anymore, and what we presently see will

7:32 *But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord:*
7:33 *But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.*

not permanently be. There must be in us a lesser concern for responsibilities and relationships that are passing.

Vs. 32-34 – Again, marriage tends to tie us more to earthly concerns in our responsibilities to home and family. These verses flesh out the warning of “*trouble in the flesh*” in vs. 28.

Vs. 35 – “*And this I speak for your own profit*” – It really was with their best interests in mind that Paul wrote these things. It was of their greatest happiness in the long term that he was thinking.

“*Not that I may cast a snare upon you*” – Paul would not be the enemy of our liberty, tying us up in some barrenness of singleness or denying us marital happiness in life, holding us off from God’s free allowance of marriage. But again, he would have us fully understand what we’re getting into in marriage as well, and he would have us understand that singleness is an option, and a “*good*” one.

7:34 *There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.*

7:35 *And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.*

“That ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction” – Here is a purpose statement for the whole of God’s counsel through Paul in this section. Compare the eunuchs of old who attended to their king without the distractions of any other selfish interests.

7:36-38 – Advice to Parents

In Paul’s day and society parents tended to be involved in the giving of their children in marriage, as is still true today in many countries of the east. In vs. 36 Paul now turns to a consideration of this particular slant on his current discussion. And again, this likely relates directly to questions asked of him in this regard.

Vs. 36 – *“But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin”* – Paul speaks

7:36 *But if any man think that he behaveth himself
uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of
her age, and need so require, let him do what he will,
he sinneth not: let them marry.*

now of a father who is responsible for deciding on the marriage arrangements of his children. Perhaps such a father might think he's acting harshly toward his unmarried daughter in not giving her to a man in marriage, whatever might be the circumstances leading to this impression. Maybe there's a man she loves or who loves her or both. Maybe she has expressed to her father her need or wish to be married. Such a father must understand that he may do as he feels best in dealing with his daughter. If she should be at a marriageable age and beyond and he feels he should allow her to marry, again it's not a matter of sin or guilt for him to so proceed.

Vs. 37 – In the same way if an unmarried girl feels no need to be married and her father thinks it best to keep his daughter from marriage, he also does well. He must not feel pressured to marry her off. In fact, in so doing he spares her from all the concerns Paul describes in this chapter and frees her to *“attend upon the Lord without distraction”*.

7:37 *Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well.*
7:38 *So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better.*

Such a thought would have been quite foreign to the Jewish culture, where failure to marry was considered a disgrace.

Vs. 38 – “*But he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better*” – Paul has not yet used the word “*better*” to describe singleness but it’s not surprising to hear him finally voice it, for this has been his lean all along in this chapter. It’s the better way from an eternal perspective, if you have this “*proper gift of God*”. It may be a disappointment to potential grandparents, but again we must let no cultural pressure force us into something we would be better off without. There’s a kind of panic that can develop in the heart of a young person, desperate to achieve “marital bliss”, willing even to compromise sound standards in order to find it. God’s strong suggestion here is to stop and ask yourself why. What is it that’s pushing you? And why not peace and contentment right where you are?

7:39 The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

7:39-40 – Advice to Widows

In the remaining couple of verses of this chapter Paul turns to the special case of widows and widowers.

Vs. 39 – *“The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth”* – The same point is made in Rom. 7:2 in illustrating our freedom from the law only in our co-death in Jesus. Only upon the death of her husband is a woman free to remarry. Again, remarriage to another does not include those who are divorced.

“Only in the Lord” – Thus a believing woman is free to marry again *“whom she will”*, but only upon the two conditions given here;

- The death of her first partner.
- The salvation of her new partner.

Obviously the same principle would apply to a Christian man whose wife has passed away.

7:40 But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.

See how the Lord clearly allows for the marriage of a believer only to another believer. For to knowingly enter into a mixed marriage is to be bound in the “*unequal yoke*” forbidden in II Cor. 6:14.

Vs. 40 – “*But she is happier if she so abide*” – Again, she will be happier if she is able to remain single as one wholly devoted to the Lord. Contrast I Tim. 5:14, where Paul actually encouraged young widows to remarry in the circumstance at Ephesus in which Timothy ministered.

“*I think also that I have the Spirit of God*” – Though Paul was giving his advice rather than issuing commands from the Lord, yet he was confident that he was speaking the Spirit’s words.

To summarize Paul’s words in this section;

- Singleness is the better condition for being devoted wholly to the Lord’s service.
- If unmarried there is no restriction against marriage if this is one’s need or preference.

Yet understand that there are losses with the gains.

- If married, stay that way! No situation justifies agitating for separation.
- If separated or divorced from your spouse, either stay that way or be reconciled. No situation justifies remarriage to another while your spouse still lives.

Understand as well that there is nothing here to offer support for monasticism or the celibacy of the Catholic priesthood. Quite the opposite in fact. There is only the expression of the better way of the single life, if this is your gift. If not, then marriage is the better way for you.

Class 10 – I Corinthians 8

8:1 Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

Paul now responds to another question he had been asked by the Corinthian believers. This one related to the meat of animals that had been sacrificed to idols and whether believers were free to use such meat. The question really concerns the nature of Christian liberty. The importance of this principle is evident in that Paul deals further with the matter in chap. 10 as well, giving a rather high percentage of the book to this theme.

8:1-3 – Love is Our Guiding Principle

Paul begins by establishing love as the guiding light by which we are to discern our way forward in such a question.

Vs. 1 – “*Now as touching things offered unto idols*” – Not all of the meat of an animal sacrificed to pagan idols was consumed by fire, leaving much that was

still useable as food. Yet it became a “used” animal through the consecration procedures, thus seemingly reducing the value of the meat for the market place. As well, it seems there were special events and feasts conducted in and around pagan temples where sacrificed or consecrated foods were served. Obviously the price of such meat or meals must have been good or there would have been no questions about partaking. But is it legitimate to eat such things as a Christian? Is there any defilement brought upon believers in doing so? Are there any spiritual powers involved in such false religion that could in any way become attached to us?

The Jews apparently refused or were forbidden to partake of anything offered to a pagan idol. In Rev. 2:14 the eating of things sacrificed to idols seems to have been part of the stumbling block of Balaam’s ancient counsel against Israel (Num. 25:2). It very likely would have been difficult for believing Jews to make the transition from this old way of thinking. Therefore it was a potentially offensive matter for them if other believers were freely eating of such things. In the church counsel of Acts 15 abstaining “*from pollution of idols*” (vs. 20) was later restated as abstaining “*from meats offered to idols*” (vs. 29). It seems this requirement was pressed upon believing

Gentiles mainly to avoid offence among the Jews. This chapter of Corinthians is going to lead to the same conclusion, yet the bigger picture or principle involved comes clear here as well. Further detail on the matter will be given chapter 10.

“We know that we all have knowledge” – There now begins great focus on our knowledge in contrast to our love. The word “know” or “knowledge” appears 11 times in this brief chapter. In Christ our eyes are opened to the wider realms of all of reality, leading us to a clear understanding of the truth concerning idols (vs. 4). Paul’s turn to a discussion of knowledge in contrast to love in these next couple of verses is a parenthesis in the progression of his thought, in which he first establishes the basis upon which to approach the question raised. He returns to their question in vs. 4, and then applies these thoughts on knowledge and love to the matter from vs. 7.

“Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth” – Knowledge on its own, as any other gift or talent, has the tendency to elevate pride in the one possessing it. Thus knowledge must be tempered by love if it is to be truly useful. Where knowledge tends to lift up self, love lifts up others. Where knowledge only sees to the needs of self, love sees to

8:2 *And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.*
8:3 *But if any man love God, the same is known of him.*

the needs and concerns of others. Where knowledge comprehends the truth concerning spiritual realities and understands our freedom, that all things are indeed lawful unto me in Christ, love looks further to the impact of our choices and actions on others. All things I might be free to do are not *best* to do for the sake of others (6:12).

Vs. 2 – “*He knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know*” – True humility tends to be unaware of its true ability. The one who thinks he has good knowledge often tends more to ignorance than the one more lowly in his self-estimation. A man who is really nothing often thinks himself to be something, and yet “*he deceiveth himself*” (Gal. 6:3).

Vs. 3 – “*But if any man love God*” – To know and love the true God is to be known by Him. And to so love Him is to love our brothers as well, for “*he that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar*” (I Jn. 4:8 & 20). The trend of Paul’s thought is that it is impossible to genuinely love God and not have a

8:4 As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.

growing love for others as well. And our love is that vital ingredient needed to complete our knowledge of the truth and make it truly useful.

8:4-6 – Knowledge Leads to Freedom

In the next few verses Paul returns to this question of sacrificed meats, expressing the overriding principle of freedom. Yet still our liberty in Christ must not violate love for others.

Vs. 4 – *“We know that an idol is nothing”* – Returning now to where he began in vs. 1, their question of the right or wrong of eating *“those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols”*, Paul affirms to us something that *“we know”* in Christ. An idol has no actual living existence. As the Lord so bluntly spoke concerning every false god and idol in His trial of the nations in Isa. 41, *“Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought”* (vs. 24). How often in the O.T. the Lord describes the nothingness of idols and thus the surpassing foolishness of

8:5 *For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)*

idolatry, even with an attitude of ridicule (Isa. 2:8-9; 40:18-25; 44:9-20; Ps. 115:4-8). An idol is just a physical image that some man has formed out of wood, metal, or stone. And as well, when Paul said “*an idol is nothing*” he very likely looked beyond the actual physical image to the imagined deity behind the image. There simply is no such thing as any actual god associated with such an image, for “*there is none other God but one*”. In our much completer knowledge of reality we’re aware that there are no other gods in existence apart from the only living and true God and Creator of all. The only other unseen spiritual beings in existence are the angels, both fallen and unfallen. Therefore the so-called “gods” operating behind all false religion can only be Satan’s wicked host of demons posing as deities (10:20-21). And if “*an idol is nothing*”, with no true god behind it, what can an idol or pagan temple or altar actually do? How could some ceremonial presentation of an animal before a piece of stone or steel affect the meat? How can something that has no true existence pollute or defile anything? How can something with no real power have power over

8:6 *But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.*

God or God's own?

Vs. 5 – “*As there be gods many, and lords many*” – Paul does not speak of the actual existence of many gods. The context makes this clear. He suggests only that in the minds and superstitions of the nations of earth folks imagine there to be many gods or masters of various types.

Vs. 6 – “*But to us there is but one God*” – Listen to the way of our relation to God as described here;

- “*Of whom are all things*” – Literally “out of whom”. All things come out of God as the source of all things.
- “*We in Him*” – “*In*” here is in the sense of into or unto Him. God is our one great object or aim, the focus of our existence and service.
- “*By whom are all things*” – “*By*” here in the sense of through or channel. Jesus is the means by which all was created and by whom all things consist or hold together (Col. 1:16-17).

*8:7 Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge:
for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour
eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their
conscience being weak is defiled.*

- “*We by Him*” – Through Jesus not only have we found earthly existence in our creation, but we have received eternal existence in our redemption.

8:7-13 – Love Limits Our Freedom

So far the direction of Paul’s words has been toward our liberty in this question of eating things offered in sacrifice to idols. As Paul wrote to the church at Rome, “*I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself . . .*” (Rom. 14:14). Thus from the perspective of our knowledge or awareness of spiritual realities there can be no dangers involved in partaking of such foods. But though we are free from such concerns not every Christian has cleared this freedom with his own conscience, and “*to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean*” (Rom. 14:14). Thus it is in view of the consciences of others that we are now called to live.

8:8 *But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.*

Vs. 7 – *“Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge”* – Convictions vary among Christians. For some there remains a vestige of feeling that there might be some danger introduced by the idol. Therefore for them to eat of things offered to an idol holds some significance (beyond what it should), rather than being a matter of no concern.

“Their conscience being weak is defiled” – There is not in such folks the firmness of conviction that would settle the issue for them that all things morally indifferent are lawful for the child of God. And if by some circumstance they should be led into involvement with that which they’ve not settled with their conscience, in this way their conscience could be *“defiled”* or offended. In participating in something which they still suspect to carry a measure of wrongness they enter into sin against the standard their conscience upholds.

Vs. 8 – *“But meat commendeth us not to God”* – What we eat or refrain from eating plays no part in our fellowship with God, either driving a wedge or drawing us closer. We are no more or less

8:9 *But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.*

“accepted in the Beloved” because we choose to eat or not. Our standing before the Lord is all about our position in the Saviour rather than our practice at the table. Compare again the indication here of the difference between the old and new covenants (7:19). Where in the old covenant there were acceptable and unacceptable meats, in this new covenant era “every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving” (I Tim. 4:4). “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17).

Vs. 9 – “But take heed . . .” – Here is the vital aspect of this whole question and the point of which we are commanded to take careful notice. What impact will the practice of our freedom have upon others? While we are indeed free to eat and drink as we please, we cannot divorce ourselves from the question of how our actions will affect others. Beware lest your so wonderfully correct knowledge of the empty nothingness of idols should actually bring harm upon other believers. “For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure, but

*8:10 For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit
at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience
of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those
things which are offered to idols;
8:11 And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother
perish, for whom Christ died?*

*it is evil for that man who eateth with offence” (Rom.
14:20).*

Vs. 10-11 – Paul gives an example of how one might lead a brother into trouble through the practice of his heightened knowledge and freedom. If a brother should observe you eating at the temple feast or enjoying food offered to idols, and if that one should be made bold by this means to partake of the same when his conscience will not allow him to freely practice such, then there is a sense in which you have actually had a part in leading that brother against his convictions. You have encouraged him to do what he considers to be wrong. You’ve helped him into sin. Your precious knowledge, which is indeed more correct than his, has actually moved you to selfishness and thus sinfulness, bringing harm upon the soul of one *“for whom Christ died”*. Though Christ died for you, the Just for the unjust, yet are you so unwilling to die to your precious freedoms or rights for the sake of others? Do you

8:12 *But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.*
8:13 *Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.*

see the ugly comparison? Would you hold to your right to a cheap meal or a nice time over the danger of bringing real harm to the soul of your brother? It's a question of whether I'm willing to give myself for my brothers after the example of my Saviour who gave Himself for me.

So we find a principle here. Though our liberty in Christ is a good thing, that good thing can so easily be turned to a bad thing if thoughtlessly, selfishly practiced.

Vs. 12 – To “*sin so against*” our brothers is actually to “*sin against Christ*”. This sends the evil of such selfishness, the refusal of such sacrifice, to the lowest level and highest offence. Therefore the great emphasis on the subject. This is no small concern.

Vs. 13 – “*Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh*” – Paul comes to a firm conclusion concerning his own conduct, proclaiming his commitment to this principle “*while*

the world standeth”, and projecting the same principle to all. Gladly he would deny himself the practice of anything that might lead another to harm or ruin or against his convictions. Love would lead Paul to this, regardless of whether his knowledge assured him of his own personal freedoms or innocence in any given practice. Regardless of whether he was confident that it related to things about which others should not rightly be concerned. If he felt his example might encourage others to do something they suspected to be wrong his rule was to refrain! As one writer put it; “To some extent we must be regulated in our conduct by the narrow-mindedness, the scruples, the prejudices, the weakness of others”. For Paul it was all for the good of his brothers, rather than all for his own rights. It was all to avoid the offence of the other. *“It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak”* (Rom. 14:21). Compare Christ’s severe warnings against offending *“one of these little ones that believe in Me”* (Mk. 9:42; Lk. 17:1-2).

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Ponder Points

Thoughts on the *“weak”* and the *“strong”*.

In I Cor. 8 and Rom. 14-15 Paul refers to “weak” brothers in contrast to “strong” (vs. 7, 9-12; Rom. 15:1). By weak he means only that these are not fully convinced of their liberty in Christ, and thus they are more burdened with things they feel they must or must not do to be pleasing to God. Paul does not mean that the “weak” are weak in resisting the temptation to do wrong. And never do we find indication in these portions that the strong have cause to think lesser of those who are weak. Again, the guiding principle is the lowly loving servanthood of God’s saints in their service of God and others.

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Thoughts on our conscience;

- To obey our conscience is to obey God, and to deny it is to deny God. This holds true even though the standards of our conscience might at present be unreasonable.
- Our conscience can be taught or corrected to a more biblical position.
- We must not force others against their convictions, lest we join the ranks of Satan’s host, becoming tempters to sin.
- We must not follow the counsel or example of others until our conscience fully agrees.

- Our conscience, as God's servant, is commissioned to either accuse or excuse us (Rom. 2:15).
- A conscience abused can become calloused as if "*seared with a hot iron*" (I Tim. 4:2).

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Consider the principle of love so strongly put forward in this chapter as applied to the use of alcoholic beverages. With the calibre of risks involved in potentially leading others (even brothers) to ruin, is it really so great a sacrifice to simply make the decision to drink something else?

“I am made all things
to all men,
that I might by all means
save some”

(1 Cor. 9:22)

Class 11 – I Corinthians 9

As Paul began in chap. 7 to deal with the questions raised by this church at Corinth he began with focus upon the good option of simply refraining from marriage and the pleasures and comforts and earthly securities and status such a union brings. It was the way Paul had personally chosen for himself and he recommended it to God's children. It's not that marriage is wrong by any means. And if one should fall in love and opt for marriage there is no sin or failure involved whatsoever. But it is an option that will reduce what one might be and do for the Lord. So we're free to choose. Marriage is a liberty we have in Christ. Yet it's a liberty somewhat shadowed by the best option, if so gifted, of refraining from marriage and all that it offers.

Then in chapter 8 we saw a continuation of the same basic theme of liberty. Yet this time the issue carried a bit of a sharper edge of right and wrong. It was the question of whether to eat meats offered to idols. On this matter there was involved the aspect of possible offence to others looking on. Again, idols are nothing. There are actually no other god's in existence besides the only living and true God of the Bible, suggesting the use of such sacrificed or "consecrated" things to be a non-issue.

Yet any and every such non-issue becomes an issue when others are hurt in the exercise of our freedom. Liberty, yet limited by love, limited by the conscience or opinions of others on such matters of moral indifference. And again, as with the marriage issue Paul declared himself given to the best choice, pointing to his own good example of what he taught. As he had chosen to refrain from marriage and all intimacy with the opposite sex, even so he declared his personal choice that *“if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth”* (8:13).

Paul now carries on along the same vein in chap. 9, again holding up his own good example. The essence of his point in this chapter before us is that though Paul had the right to expect financial support for his gospel labours he had never required this of the believers there, lest his motives for ministry should be misread. As he had been willing to forego marriage and meat for the sake of others, even so he was willing to go without ministry pay. All toward his one consuming purpose *“that I might gain the more”* (vs. 19). All toward the very greatest influence possible for good among others. All in fear that the gospel message he carried might in any way be hindered or diminished (vs. 12). It’s the principle the Lord

9:1 *Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen
Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the
Lord?*
9:2 *If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am
to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the
Lord.*
9:3 *Mine answer to them that do examine me is this,*

would press upon us. We are wise to restrict our liberties by love that we “*might by all means save some*” (vs. 22). We sigh and cry for things Paul simply dismissed for the greater good of eternal blessing!

9:1-18 – Paul’s Self-Denial

Vs. 1-3 – Paul’s apostleship.

Paul begins by certifying the fact that he was indeed an apostle. It seems one of the qualifying factors of an apostle was that he had “*seen Jesus Christ our Lord*”. Paul encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (15:8). But the more tangible evidence of his apostleship was the fruit of his labours in those believers there at Corinth. Though others might think they had cause to doubt Paul’s claim to be an apostle, yet the believers there had no such cause. For they had seen “*the signs of an*

9:4 *Have we not power to eat and to drink?*
9:5 *Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as
well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the
Lord, and Cephas?*
9:6 *Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to
forbear working?*

apostle” among them (II Cor. 12:12), and the result of Paul’s influence was their own eternal rescue. That fruit of Paul’s ministry was the seal of his apostleship and the answer he gave to all who would examine proofs of his claims.

Vs. 4-6 – Freedoms acknowledged.

“Have we not power to eat and to drink?” – Again it’s a return to questions, which all anticipate a “yes” answer. Didn’t Paul and his associates possess the Christian liberty to eat and drink as they pleased, as per his chapter 8 discussion? Didn’t Paul and his co-workers have the freedom to be married, according to his chapter 7 discussion, and as some of the other apostles had in fact done? This again affirms the completely allowable nature of marriage. And didn’t Paul and company actually have the right as the Lord’s missionaries to expect their ministry expenses to be covered? It was their freedom *“to forbear working”* for their income while

*9:7 Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?
who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit
thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the
milk of the flock?*

*9:8 Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the
same also?*

*9:9 For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not
muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the
corn. Doth God take care for oxen?*

conducting their ministry between their secular labours. Paul now uses several illustrations to demonstrate this last point.

Vs. 7-14 – Illustrations of Ministry Support;

- From the field of battle (vs. 7) – Who goes to war paying his own wages?
- From the farm (vs. 7) – Who plants a vineyard without expecting to eat of the fruits?
- From the flocks (vs. 7) – Who keeps the sheep without expecting to be fed from the proceeds?
- From the law (vs. 8-9) – Beyond only worldly parallels, doesn't the law of God affirm the same? Quoting from Deut. 25:4, Paul points to God's instruction against restraining an ox from eating of the grain while threshing. They

9:10 *Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.*
9:11 *If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?*

would commonly use oxen to pull a sled over the grain in separating the kernel from the chaff. Yet it's evident that this thoughtful instruction ranged beyond just the care of oxen, relating a principle "*for our sakes*" as well (vs. 10). If God sees to the needs of working oxen how much more His own servants should earn their daily bread from their works of service.

- Again from the farm (vs. 10) – Hope of a harvest is what motivates one in the hard slog of ploughing and threshing. A suggestion of capitalism perhaps? Paul clearly proclaims the right of one expending hopeful labour to "*be partaker of his hope*". The verb in the Greek is "ought" ("*should*"). It's right and proper that it be so.

Vs. 11 – Comparison is made between "*spiritual things*" and "*carnal things*". The question, "*is it a great thing?*", suggests the ready expectation that

9:12 If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.

temporary physical things should be given in exchange for eternal things, the lesser for the greater. It was more than fair that Paul and company should expect financial support for their good labours in “*spiritual things*”.

Vs. 12 – “*If others be partakers*” – It seems other teachers had in fact financially benefitted from the giving of the Corinthian believers. If appropriate for them, how much more fitting that their spiritual father be so benefitted (KJV “*rather*” in the sense of *more* here).

“*Nevertheless we have not used this power*” – Here is a key point toward which Paul is leading throughout this discussion. Though he was supremely qualified to receive their financial help, and though it was so utterly fitting that he and those serving with him should receive, this fact supported both from the simple equities of secular life and from biblical injunctions, yet Paul did not claim for himself this liberty available to him. Again

9:13 *Do ye not know that they which minister about
holy things live of the things of the temple? and they
which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?*
9:14 *Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which
preach the gospel should live of the gospel.*

it was a liberty he limited by love. It was a freedom unclaimed due to Paul's purpose to not "*hinder the gospel of Christ*". Instead Paul and company chose the way of greater hardship in labouring in the night that they might preach during the day, that none might be allowed any chance to criticize them from the angle of finance or to question their motives in ministry. They would have no shame or stain upon their name or work.

Vs. 13 – A further illustration from the temple. Isn't it true that the O.T. priests and levites were supported through the offerings of the people to whom they ministered, and that they were free to eat of some aspects of those sacrifices?

Vs. 14 – "*Even so*" the Lord Jesus Christ Himself affirmed the same point, that "*they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel*". Paul seems to refer here to Christ's words when sending His disciples to preach in Matt. 10, saying "*the workman is worthy of his meat*" (vs. 10). The Lord

9:15 But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.

has clearly ordained this principle so abundantly demonstrated here. Those who faithfully teach and preach God's eternal truths should be able to make a living in this work.

Vs. 15 – “*But I have used none of these things*” – Again, Paul had refused to benefit from the Corinthian believers according to this way the Lord has ordained. Nor was he so soundly proving his point in order that he might then begin to benefit in this way. His point here is that he again had denied himself a clear liberty, not only marriage and meats but money as well. And he had done so to cut off all occasion for some to suggest that he was “in it for the money”. Any such suggestion would seem to make his glorying vain and cheapen the ministry in which he gloried, and this he would not allow. It seems Paul would die of starvation or overwork before allowing for any loss of ministry effectiveness.

Do you see in the light of this principle how most of

9:16 *For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!*
9:17 *For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.*

the ugly salary disputes ministers get up to with their churches are so out of line? To really love others is to willingly sacrifice home and happiness and even life itself for their growth in the things of God.

Vs. 16 – “*Woe is me, if I preach not the gospel!*” – In view of Paul’s example in this regard, with clearest conscience he could affirm his only motivations for proclaiming the gospel. It was the constraint (“*necessity*”) of God’s call and sincere love for others that moved him. None could fairly suggest that he was gathering together a flock that he might enrich himself through them, as so many do today.

Vs. 17 – “*For if I do this thing willingly*” – Paul could expect his wages (“*reward*”) from the Lord if his labour was from a willing heart. He did not refer only to reward later in glory, but the present reward of a happy heart in serving others. If there should begin to arise in him a grudging spirit he need only

9:18 What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.

remind himself that he had been entrusted with the stewardship of the gospel ministry from the Lord. And it is required in stewards that they be faithful to their stewardship (4:2).

Vs. 18 – “*What is my reward then?*” – In his earthly work Paul found reward in the joy of knowing that he was making the gospel freely known without hindrance, and that he was free of all accusation of being an abuser in this great work.

Thus again Paul becomes a fine example of the vital principle he proclaims in this section. By insisting upon our right to our liberties we may in fact limit the spiritual successes we might have seen in life, because in so doing we can actually diminish the effectiveness of our impact upon others. Either we limit our liberties for greater success or we limit our success through the greater practice of our liberties. The Lord has left the choice to us. But He would have us to know up front what’s involved in such choices, both the losses and gains.

9:19 *For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.*
9:20 *And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;*

9:19-23 – Paul’s Service

Note the great focus in these next few verses on the word “*gain*”, occurring 5 times in the next 5 verses and revealing the main purpose driving Paul. He was all out for the gaining of souls for Christ’s kingdom and willing for any personal loss of liberties that might contribute to that gain.

Vs. 19 – “*I made myself servant unto all*” – Again, though aware of his many liberties in Christ, how willingly Paul in essence put himself into bondage to all men toward the great purpose of winning souls. As Christ’s steward he was free to serve.

“*For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another*” (Gal. 5:13).

Vs. 20 – “*Unto the Jews I became as a Jew*” – Paul was willing to keep his Jewishness in the practice of

9:21 *To them that are without law, as without law,
(being not without law to God, but under the law to
Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.*
9:22 *To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain
the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I
might by all means save some.*

various rites and ceremonies, feasts and fasts. And he was willing to refrain from practices that might be offensive to the Jews in order to win them. Compare Acts 15. Paul does not speak here of sacrificing principles, but only of forfeiting freedoms in matters of moral indifference.

Vs. 21 – *“To them that are without law, as without law”* – In dealing with Gentiles he did not force the practice of the O.T. law or Jewish customs upon them. And even in preaching to them he used a different approach than in preaching to the Jews (less O.T. oriented). Remember how with the Greeks at Athens Paul quoted from the writings of one of their own poets and from the inscription on one of their many altars (Acts 17:23, 28). It’s not that Paul was lawless, nor did he teach a kind of lawlessness. The new covenant law of love is the law Paul proclaimed.

Vs. 22 – *“To the weak”* – In dealing with those overly

9:23 *And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.*

burdened by things they consider forbidden or mandatory Paul was willing to make concessions for the sake of their conscience that he might have opportunity to lead them to the light of God's truth. In some churches or areas women in pants would be an offence. So be sure the women and girls of your family wear dresses and none will be offended in that setting. In some areas and churches of the States they might be offended if a man wears a short sleeve shirt or shorts. So in ministering among such folks one would be wise to wear what offends none. Don't selfishly cling to your freedoms to dress as you please and in so doing cut yourself off from opportunity with some. Paul's motto; *"I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."*

Vs. 23 – *"That I might be partaker thereof with you"* – Paul would be a sharer with them in the fullness of God's blessing. Even his quest for eternal reward was not a selfish thing. He would have as many of his brothers as possible join him in his quest. *"Warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in*

9:24 *Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*

9:25 *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:28). Paul’s purpose was the perfection of “every man”.

9:24-27 – “*So run, that ye may obtain*”

Vs. 24 – The comparison of the Christian life to athletic competition is a common illustration with Paul (Phil. 3:13-14; I Tim. 2:5). And it was one so fitting for these people to whom he wrote, for the Greeks were fond of their athletics. Every second year the Isthmian games were held in the area of Corinth, involving a rigorous programme of training and discipline for a contestant to qualify. In all such competitions it takes the most supreme effort to come away with the prize. So be one who strives for the prize! This is Paul’s point.

Vs. 25 – “*Temperate in all things*” – Anyone who is serious about striving to be a winner must exercise the most rigid self-denial and control “*in all things*”. He must be disciplined in his eating and exercise.

He must push his body far into the realms of discomfort. He must be willing to lay aside for a time the normal, day-to-day ease and pleasures and comforts people enjoy in life. Even so it is for the believer. We must not think the Christian life is a matter of free and easy living. If we would please our Master and find reward in His presence then we must be willing to get the mastery of ourselves. We must be willing to forego the eating and drinking of some things we enjoy in order to avoid the detrimental effects these might have on our prospects for ministry to others. If others are hurt by what we freely allow for ourselves then we're going to suffer loss before the Lord. We must be willing to deny ourselves some of the pleasures life offers if we would be winners for God. And those able to more greatly deny themselves will find even greater possibility for reward. The enjoyment of fine foods and the pleasures of physical intimacy in marriage and the ease of much sleep are not things we must have. There is nothing morally wrong with such things to be sure, yet these are the kinds of things some choose to deny themselves in this life for the greater opportunity to win reward in the next.

“But we an incorruptible” – Those who train for the games strive for a perishable, earthly crown. I have

9:26 *I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I,
not as one that beateth the air:*

an old tarnished trophy with my name engraved on it that my wife currently uses as a stand for her pot plant. It meant something a few years back but it means nothing anymore, only that its height is right for flowing fern branches. How many thousands of Olympic medals and Comrades medallions and 1st Place trophies and other such tokens of earthly excellence, so very precious in their day, with time end up in the Hospice shop or the dust bin. But to strive “*for masteries*” in the better race is to strive for a prize of truly lasting, heavenly worth. Again, how very often the Lord speaks of rewards for our service in the Christian life (James 1:12; I Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10; 22:12).

Vs. 26 – “*I therefore so run, not as uncertainly*” – Anybody who runs in a tentative manner is not running to win. Running to win must be all out, holding nothing back, with unwavering purpose. Paul had settled the matter in his own heart and knew what he was about. He was committed to the race, to “*the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*”. He was given to all that would best build up others and glorify God, regardless of the costs

9:27 *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*

that meant for himself and his own luxury and leisure.

“So fight I, not as one that beateth the air” – Shifting the figure to boxing now, in contending for the prize of God’s pleasure Paul would not swing aimlessly. He would strike out at Satan’s domain with a purpose to make contact. He would move according to God’s direction. Not working his own purposes, but working *“the works of Him who sent Me”*. Not spending himself on that which *he* thought would make an impact for God, but only in those ways in which God had directed his movements. Many people are busy with works and ways they think make God happy, yet they’ve never checked the book to find His instructions on things pleasing to Him.

Vs. 27 – *“But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection”* – Again, there is a need of discipline if we would win in the Christian life. We cannot win without control, borne out of a desire to please our Master. Trace the theme of control in the book of Proverbs;

- 12:16 – “*A fool’s wrath is presently known*”, because he has no ability to hold it back.
- 14:29 – The one with self-control over his own anger “*is of great understanding*”.
- 16:32 – Those slow to anger are the true heroes of life.
- 25:28 – “*He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls*”. It’s the image of one who is defenceless against his own impulsive desires.

“*I myself should be a castaway*” – It was to eternal reward and the eternal reward of others that Paul’s eyes were set. He would in no way allow himself to be disqualified to receive.

Ponder Points

Consider other matters of moral indifference we might be wise to deny ourselves lest some be offended,

- If a minister of the gospel should use alcoholic beverage or tobacco some may be offended.
- If a pastor should choose to drive a Mercedes,

or some comparable vehicle, some might be put off.

- If we produce sloppy literature with little commitment to excellence some may be put off.

Class 12 – I Corinthians 10

10:1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

It's the question of questionable things that Paul has been dealing with since chapter 8. A question of the wisdom of using things that might in any way bring others to harm or hinder the Lord's work among men. A question of prudence in the practice of our liberties in Christ. It's a subject Paul continues here in chapter 10, now bringing the theme to conclusion. For there are other aspects of this important question of Christian liberties that must be considered. Even the wisest among men, King Solomon, was deceived through his involvement in questionable things. Solomon gradually moved from playing with the edges of the Lord's permissive will to complete ruin and rebellion. So there are dangers even for the strong, for those who think they stand. These too must take careful heed in the practice of their freedoms in Christ lest they fall. Paul now takes us to O.T. examples to highlight this warning.

10:2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

10:1-13 – Wilderness Warnings

Vs. 1 – “*All our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea*” – The word “*all*” appears 5 times in these first 4 verses. The point is that all the children of Israel had access to the same divine privileges in their Exodus and wilderness trek.

Vs. 2 – “*And were all baptized unto Moses*” – It seems their passage through the sea “*under the cloud*” is used to depict a kind of baptism. Israel had at last recognized Moses as their deliverer from the bondage of Egypt, and so by following him in the Exodus they were in essence baptized “*unto Moses*”, that visible representative of the Lord. In a similar way we show by our baptism that we freely acknowledge Jesus Christ as God’s great representative whom He has sent (Jn. 17:3), and as our Deliverer from sin’s bondage. And we publicly demonstrate in our baptism our willingness to follow Him through the wilderness of life to our Promised Land of rest.

Vs. 3-4 – They all ate and drank the same food and

10:3 *And did all eat the same spiritual meat;*
10:4 *And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they*
drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and
that Rock was Christ.

drink. The manna was “*spiritual*” food in that it was supplied directly from the hand of God. The water from the rock was “*spiritual*” drink because again it was God’s miraculous provision. Twice we read of the Israelites drinking of water from the rock. The first was in Ex. 17 soon after the manna began to appear. Both the manna and water came through Israel’s murmuring complaints. There the Lord supplied water when Moses with his rod struck “*the rock in Horeb*” (vs. 6). The place was named Massah (“temptation”) and Meribah (“chiding”), because there the people scolded Moses and “*tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?*” (vs. 7) Their unreasonable doubts there were enough to begin to stir the Lord’s anger.

That rock pouring forth a satisfying stream in the barren wilderness Paul associates directly with Jesus Christ. He was the One going with them throughout their wilderness trek, in the same way that He is with us “*always, even unto the end of the world*” (Matt. 28:20). Jesus was the One quenching

*10:5 But with many of them God was not well pleased:
for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*

their thirst, yet only when the rock was struck. It's an obvious picture of Christ becoming the answer for our need, yet only when struck or wounded in our place at Calvary.

Notice how the N.T. ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper are pictured in these O.T. events. We, as they, have publicly declared ourselves followers of our great Deliverer, as pictured in our baptism. And we too have come to partake of all that Christ supplies, as we openly declare in our joining in the Lord's Table.

Vs. 5 – *“But with many of them God was not well pleased”* – It's a strong turning point in Paul's argument here. In spite of all that was available to all of His people, *“many of them”* were left strewn about the wilderness. The phrase behind *“many”* in the Greek here is literally “the more”. The vast majority in fact of those who began under Moses never actually entered into their promised rest. Only Joshua and Caleb from that first generation crossed the Jordan. There is warning here for us. Merely dwelling in the midst of spiritual privileges

10:6 Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

does not ensure eternal life. They “*all*” enjoyed God’s many privileges and miraculous evidences, yet most of them never made it to His place of rest. We must individually, personally receive God’s gift of life through faith in Jesus Christ. No one of us will enter heaven through our parent’s faith or our spouse’s faith or through enjoying what seem to be spiritual privileges such as visions, divine manifestations, or answered prayers. And just because we’ve believed in Jesus does not mean that our personal watchfulness for our souls is no longer necessary. Oh we cannot lose our salvation once received from God’s hand, but we can surely lose much in the way of reward and blessing and influence upon others through negligence. In Christ we must remain sober and vigilant because our “*adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*” (I Pet. 5:8). The evil one is quite able and willing to “*devour*” Christians. Thus there are indeed personal dangers to be considered in freely involving ourselves in things that may seem to be innocent in themselves.

Vs. 6 – “*Now these things were our examples*” – The

10:7 Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

word in the Greek here is “types”. These ancient events occurred and were recorded for our benefit, that we might learn to avoid the dangers to which many others have fallen. Innocent practices may lead us to *“lust after evil things, as they also lusted”*. Such “innocent” things are no longer innocent for the one led to lust. As Charles Erdman put it, “Indulgence in some forms of amusement, not in themselves sinful, and in practices which other persons regard as harmless, may make us discontented with our lives of more rigid morality, until continued dissatisfaction deepens into disloyalty and

Vs. 7 – *“Neither be ye idolaters”* – The incident referred to here was when the people made a golden calf after the long absence of Moses up on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 32). As Paul’s quote of Ex. 32:6 indicates, both feasting and carnal practices were involved in their idolatry. The practice of idolatry is more subtle than it may at first seem or there would not be so many N.T. warnings away from it. Even the Apostle John closed his 1st epistle with the command, *“Little*

10:8 Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.

children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen” (I Jn. 5:21).

Vs. 8 – “*Neither let us commit fornication*” – The record of the incident referred to here is in Num. 25, when many of the men of Israel “*began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab*” in the sensual way of their religion. This apparently was according to Balaam’s counsel (Rev. 2:14). When he could not directly curse Israel as he was bidden to do, he advised Moab’s king to attempt to make Israel a cursed people before their God, by wooing them to the fleshly practices of their own false religion. God’s answer there was to raise up bold and godly men like Phinehas (Num. 25:6-8), who executed God’s judgment upon all who fell to this evil. It was a valuable illustration for those of Corinth to keep in mind, for gross sensuality was the way of the local religion of Aphrodite there as well.

On the Side

10:9 *Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also
tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.*
10:10 *Neither murmur ye, as some of them also
murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.*

What do we do with the number discrepancy here? Paul says that 23,000 died in that incident, while Moses reported 24,000 in Num. 25:9. The answer seems to be found in the fact that Paul was highlighting the suddenness of the judgment, that “*in one day*” 23,000 fell. When all was completed over the days involved the full tally of the slain was 24,000.

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Vs. 9 – “*Neither tempt Christ, as some of them*” – This now refers to the event recorded in Num. 21. Again the people were trying the Lord’s patience with their murmuring complaints about the difficulty of the way and the lack of decent food and water. In response the Lord sent poisonous snakes into the camp, “*and much people of Israel died*” as a result (Num. 21:6).

Vs. 10 – “*Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured*” – This likely refers to their “no” vote at Kadesh Barnea in Num. 14, when “*all the children*

*10:11 Now all these things happened unto them for
ensamples: and they are written for our admonition,
upon whom the ends of the world are come.
10:12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take
heed lest he fall.*

of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron” due to the faithless “*evil report*” of the 10 spies (vs. 2). The result of their decision there of course was that almost the entire generation involved in that vote were buried in the wilderness without entering Canaan.

Vs. 11 – “*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples*” – Again the word is “types” in the Greek. All such incidents, and the nature of God’s response, combine for the instruction of we who live in this final age before the Lord’s return.

Vs. 12 – “*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*” – Let none think that they are in some way exempt or beyond a similar sort of fall. God’s record of trouble upon troublers is a wealth of warning concerning our own frailty and need of continual dependence upon Him. As Paul warned in Rom. 11:20, “*Be not highminded, but fear*”. Not craven fear of falling, but “*the fear of the Lord*” that keeps us from every fear and fall.

10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

Vs. 13 – “*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man*” – Here now is a ray of hope through the dark clouds of threat. There are many helpful, practical things taught in this verse concerning the way we handle temptation;

- No temptation we face is out of the ordinary but common among men. We’re not alone.
- God is aware and allows the trying of our faith to prove the reality of it.
- Our God is faithful to never allow any temptation to exceed our ability to endure. In Christ we don’t *have* to sin.
- The one truly wanting to avoid evil is always left with an escape route, even if only the simplicity of desperate flight.

So understand that we are compassed about with real threat to our spiritual well-being, as Israel of old, yet recognize that our God is ever aware and there for us with practical help in coping with all

10:14 *Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.*
10:15 *I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.*

that we face in life.

10:14-22 – Beware Idolatry

Paul now turns to the particular concern of idolatry. Again, there was and remains the danger of our practice of our freedoms subtly leading us away from our cling to the true God, to adhere to some other god. *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols”*.

Vs. 14-15 – *“Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry”* – Paul’s concern for these brothers so dear to him was that they avoid entanglements with idolatry at all cost. As his advise with immorality (II Tim. 2:22), so with idolatry, the best rule is not to stand and endure but to just get completely away from it. Look again to the dangerous history such practices have brought to God’s people throughout the ages. The ways of the world can be very attractive and extremely subtle in turning our hearts from the way of truth. Be *“wise men”*. Be aware. Be discerning. And as to wise men Paul would challenge his readers to understand what he

10:16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

10:17 For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

says in this regard. It was one thing, a matter of freedom perhaps, to eat food having been offered in sacrifice to an idol. It would be quite another thing, a step closer to danger, to actually eat in the context of idol worship and worshippers. We mustn't play too close to the fire if we would be pleasing to our Father.

Vs. 16 – *“Is it not the communion”* – Is it not true that in partaking of the elements of the Lord's Table we show that we share or participate in Christ's death and shed blood? Not that we eat and drink of His literal body and blood, but that we display our union with Him when we eat. We show ourselves sharers with Him in His sacrifice for us. It's why the unsaved should not partake of the Lord's Table. Because in so doing they display a lie.

Vs. 17 – *“For we being many are one bread”* – Even the fact that in the ordinance of Communion all who are present share from one loaf of bread

*10:18 Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which
eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?
10:19 What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that
which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing?*

expresses the idea of our oneness together and our oneness with Christ. Together we are one in Him and He in us, as represented by the bread in us.

Vs. 18 – “*Behold Israel after the flesh*” – Consider now the similar illustration with national Israel. When bringing their sacrifices to the altar in the O.T. system and then eating together of those sacrifices, isn’t it true that they in so eating were associating themselves with the God of the altar of which they ate?

Vs. 19 – “*What say I then?*” – Am I suggesting to you that I’m now reversing what I before said when affirming that “*an idol is nothing in the world*”? (8:4) Am I now saying that an idol is in fact something? The obvious answer to Paul’s question is “no”. He was not changing his tune.

Vs. 20 – But we must understand the reality of the matter, “*That the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils [demons]*”. Thus to allow ourselves to be involved with such services and

*10:20 But I say, that the things which the Gentiles
sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and
I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.
10:21 Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of
devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table,
and of the table of devils.*

sacrifices is to actually be sharing with or having “*fellowship with devils*”, and “*I would not that ye should*” be doing that! Though idols and things offered to them are in fact nothing of any real import before God, yet to get close to such worship is in fact to put ourselves close to demon activity. And in the subtlety of such involvements there are inherent dangers and temptations.

Vs. 21 – We cannot seem to go in two directions, sharing with the Lord at His table and at the same time sharing with demons at their sponsored feasts.

Are you collecting on Paul’s point here? In the same way that partaking of the ordinance of the Lord’s Table is a kind of joining of believers with Christ (vs. 16-17), and in the same way that Israel’s eating of the sacrifices of the altar was a uniting with the Lord God of that sacred altar, even so to eat of the sacrifices among pagan worshippers at their temple feast would imply a kind of participation in their worship of their gods (demons).

10:22 Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?

And this we would not be wise to imply.

Vs. 22 – “*Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?*” – Would we risk returning to that wilderness image of a people tempting the Lord and stirring Him to anger? Do we somehow think that we are stronger than He, to do as we please? Or would we think ourselves stronger than all those “*many*” who displeased the Lord and “*were overthrown in the wilderness*”? (vs. 5)

So though there was little concern with the use of things offered to idols, there is warning here against getting too close to idol worship. There would be dangers in actually feasting in the idol temples, as some believers might feel bold and free to do, saying “*all things are lawful for me*”! We must remember the temptations involved, and we must remember the great host of those who have fallen to those temptations, Solomon included. And we must remember that none of us are as independently strong as we may think we are. Thus not only are there dangers with regard to those who might see and be offended (chap. 8), there are dangers to

10:23 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

those so involved as well, that they might be led to appreciate things they should rather despise and reprove.

10:23-33 – Conclusions

Paul now brings his discussion to summary and conclusion, offering some practical application as well.

Vs. 23 – “*All things are lawful for me*” – Again Paul probably echoes here what some were saying who were committed to their Christian freedoms yet without the due considerations Paul has been presenting (6:12). But though “*all things are lawful*” yet “*all things are not expedient*”. Not only are some things not the best choice because *others* might be caused to stumble, but some things are not best because *I* might be caused to stumble.

“*But all things edify not*” – Ever make it your choice to prefer those things that contribute to the building up of our own faith and that of others.

10:24 Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.

10:25 Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake:

10:26 For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.

Vs. 24 – “*Let no man seek his own*” – It’s a similar statement here to Phil. 2:4. Our call is to actively “*seek*” the well-being of others over our own preferred freedoms. This is the law of love.

Vs. 25-30 – Paul now concludes with some practical comments as to proper procedures in the application of the things discussed. “*The shambles*” (KJV) was a market place where groceries could be purchased in their day (vs. 25). It’s implied that foods used in idol worship might very well be sold at such a place. Yet all such things found in the market believers were free to purchase and use or eat. There was no need to ask any questions concerning the spiritual background of any foods or goods found there. With our eyes opened in Christ we have come to fully understand that everything under the sun belongs to our heavenly Father, the only true and living God (vs. 26). So feel free to shop for the best price and products without any concerns for spiritually tainted goods or some sort of nasty powers residing upon anything.

10:27 *If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake.*

10:28 *But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof:*

10:29 *Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?*

Further, if an unsaved friend (a Muslim or Hindu for example) should invite you over for a meal, feel free to eat whatever is served (vs. 27). There's no need to enquire or raise any issues over the spiritual history of anything on their table. Eat with a clear conscience, without fear of being seized by some power or presence or curse, or defiled by things spiritually impure. But on the other hand if your host or anybody else at the table should make the point that the food has been "*offered in sacrifice unto idols*" then wisdom would advise you to put your fork down and leave the table (vs. 28). Not because of your offence but for fear of theirs. Lest by partaking under such a circumstance you should imply approval and perhaps help to confirm others in their idolatry.

Vs. 29-30 – Paul seems to put voice to the questions

10:30 *For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil
spoken of for that for which I give thanks?*
10:31 *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever
ye do, do all to the glory of God.*
10:32 *Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the
Gentiles, nor to the church of God:*
10:33 *Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking
mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they
may be saved.*

one might ask in complaint over his freedoms so restricted. The answer follows in the next verses.

Vs. 31-32 – “*Do all to the glory of God*” – Here is a guiding principle or question we might ask ourselves in assessing the worth of any endeavour. Can I do this or that to the glory of God? And in this particular context to do something to God’s glory is to do only what gives “*none offence*” to any individual or group. We must limit our freedoms if we would give “*none offence*”, and we must give “*none offence*” if we would live to “*the glory of God*”.

Vs. 33 – “*Even as I please all men in all things*” – Again Paul holds up his own example as he has throughout this section. And it’s not that Paul in pleasing “*all men in all things*” would refrain from saying the hard, potentially offensive things people need to hear in leading them to the truth. Compare

Paul's fiery words;

- To Elymas the sorcerer on Cyprus (Acts 13:9-11), proclaiming him *“full of all subtilty and all mischief”*, a *“child of the devil”* and an *“enemy of all righteousness”*. From the point of this faithful confrontation Paul stepped into leadership. No longer was it *“Barnabus and Saul”* (vs. 7), but *“Paul and his company”* (vs. 13).
- To the false worshippers at Lydia (Acts 14:15), calling them to turn from the *“vanities”* of their pagan religion.
- To the false worship of Diana of the Ephesians (Acts 19:24-26). Paul bluntly insisted that *“they be no gods, which are made with hands”*, dismissing their ancient god and worship as without substance or reality.

“That they may be saved” – It was this man's one consuming passion. He was quite willing to be *“made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some”* (9:22). Even as he concluded a similar argument in Rom. 15:1, *“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves”*.

Ponder Points

What about the possession of occult paraphernalia? Are such things in our house really a concern? How do these principles relate to the purchase and display of pretty dangling crystals or unicorns or the like?

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Consider all of the scents, lotions, and potions being marketed today, advertising powers to win love, turn hate, or otherwise mystically move the will of people. Do these really have some power over us?

“Be ye followers of me,
even as I also am of Christ”

(1 Cor. 11:1)

Class 13 – I Corinthians 11

11:1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

11:1 – Call to Follow

The point is commonly made that perhaps this first verse of chapter 11 might better fit with the argument of the previous chapters. In the chapter divisions, which are not a part of the inspired original text, perhaps it would have been the better choice to make this the last verse of chapter 10. It is true that within the past few chapters Paul has repeatedly held up his own choices and actions as an example to follow;

- Chap. 7 – Consider avoiding marriage, as Paul had, for the fuller opportunities singleness offers in living for God and others. It's a “good” option and not to be lightly discounted.
- Chap. 8 – Consider foregoing freedoms that might offend others, hindering their spiritual growth. This after Paul's resolve that *“if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh*

11:2 *Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.*

while the world standeth" (vs. 13).

- Chap. 9 – Consider Paul's example of even refusing due financial support, lest some think he served out of selfish motives. "*I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some*" (vs. 22).
- Chap. 10 – "*Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved*" (vs. 33).

Thus Paul beckons all to follow the good example of his sacrificial quest for the souls of others. Yet on the other hand the example of Jesus Christ, of whom Paul was such an avid follower, will now be underscored in chapter 11 (vs. 23-26). Thus perhaps we cannot make too much of an issue as to which side of the chapter break this verse should fall.

11:2-16 – Heads and Coverings

11:3 But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.

Vs. 2 – “*Now I praise you brethren*” – Paul was careful to commend what he could in this troubled congregation. That they looked to him as one able to help them with their questions he was thankful. And Paul rejoiced in their carefulness to keep the things he had before taught them, thus anticipating and expecting their thoughtful consideration of the things he was now writing to them.

Vs. 3 – Paul now turns to pursue the matter of headship and its outward tokens, particularly in church gatherings. From this point it is more questions of conduct in the public assemblies that are addressed. This is one of those portions with which this apostle has made many enemies over the years. Together with some of his thoughts in chap. 7, some see Paul as again describing here a rather low view of women. Yet Paul has been well established as God’s apostle and his writings as God’s inspired word. We are wise to hear God speaking to us here in this portion, though it be difficult.

11:4 *Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.*

The order of authority presented is this;

1. God the Father.
2. Jesus Christ.
3. The man.
4. The woman.

Within human society God has given leadership to the man, certainly in the home and in the church (Gen. 3:16). There is no discussion here of *qualitative* differences between the sexes, only of differing roles. In Christ men and women stand on level ground (Gal. 3:28). Compare the differing roles of God the Father and God the Son, yet none could say that one is in any way *better* than the other. Even so none could imply that the man is in any way better than the woman. Only that God has established an authority structure among mankind, even as we see the same within the Trinity, with reasons to follow.

Vs. 4-5 – *“Every man praying or prophesying, having*

11:5 *But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.*

his head covered” – This head covering has traditionally been interpreted as referring to a hat or veil. Thus it has commonly been understood that men out of respect should remove their hats upon entering church and women should wear hats in church. The “*praying or prophesying*” does suggest a context of church gatherings in some form. The main question here concerns the phrase “*having his head covered*”. The literal phrase in the Greek is “having down the head”. The core concern is whether this refers to having something down *upon* the head or hanging down *from* the head, forbidden on men but required on women, and particularly in a worship setting. The NASB reads this way, “*Every man who has (something) on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head*”. “On” in the sense of “upon” is an interpretive addition, for the Greek has a preposition to express the idea of “upon”, which is not used here. Though this has commonly been read as referring to an artificial head covering of some type, in vs. 13-14 it comes clear that the head-covering or veil of our *hair* is what Paul refers

11:6 *For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.*

to. A man “*dishonoureth his head*”, both himself and his heavenly Master, when involved in spiritual things while wearing “*the hair of women*” (Rev. 9:8).

One point that’s unclear here is how the particular sign of a covered head, whether by hat or hair, expresses the idea of subjection or submission, and therefore dishonour in the case of the man and honour in the case of the woman. It seems to be presumed that a covering of long hair is feminine and therefore inappropriately effeminate for a man, as if in so wearing a man would throw off his God given leadership role. It seems to be presumed or understood that cropped hair, not hanging down the head, is masculine and therefore inappropriate for a woman, as if in so wearing she would adopt the leadership role God has given to the man.

“*For that is even all one as if she were shaven*” – This phrase, with vs. 6, helps to affirm the fact that it’s hair and not hats under discussion here. For a woman to cut her hair short like a man’s, such that her head is not properly covered, is to bring upon

*11:7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head,
forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but
the woman is the glory of the man.*

her the same shame as if her head were shaved.

Vs. 6 – “*Let her also be shorn*” – Paul obviously takes the idea of cutting and carries it to the extreme here. If a woman would so dishonour her head, either her father or husband, in presenting herself with the short-cropped look of a man then let her suffer the shame of a proper shave. But if it would be a shame for her to have her head shaved then let her hair be long enough that it be hanging down to cover her head. These are hard words. But it seems Paul was dealing with a brazen lean in the women of Corinth toward taking the matter of freedom too far. It is true that there are great liberties in Christ for women as compared with most false religions of earth. But again, consistent with Paul’s earlier discussions, such liberties must not be taken too far. And so with stern words he would lead them (us) back to wisdom.

Vs. 7 – “*For a man indeed ought not to cover his head*” – For a man it’s quite the opposite. His head ought not to be hidden by long hair, not if he would

11:8 *For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man.*

be pleasing to his God.

“He is the image and glory of God” – What Paul means by this statement is another uncertainty in this context. We do know that it was Adam who was first created *“in the image of God”*, and Eve was later made from Adam. We do know that God is masculine and not feminine. Perhaps the thought here carries the idea as well that the particular focus of man’s pleasing is toward God, whereas the special focus of the woman’s pleasing and submission is to be toward her man.

We can well understand how such teaching fails to fit within modern women’s liberation thinking. But it is not man (or woman) that we seek to please, but God. And we make no apologies for God or His words, though we may not have a firm hold on the handle of His precise meaning at all times.

Vs. 8-9 – Reasons from creation are now given for the man’s dominance over the woman;

11:9 Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.

11:10 For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.

- Vs. 8 – Source – Woman was created out of man’s body rather than he of hers (Gen. 2:21-23). Woman is from man.
- Vs. 9 – Purpose – Woman was created by God as a fit helper for the man, not he as her helper (Gen. 2:18). Woman is for man.

Compare in I Tim. 2 a couple more arguments for the same God-appointed roles;

- I Tim. 2:13 – Order – Adam was first formed and later Eve was created. Woman is after man.
- I Tim. 2:14 – Nature – Though Eve was actually deceived by Satan, Adam was not, suggesting perhaps a generally greater susceptibility to deception in women. This too serves to disqualify them from leadership.

Vs. 10 – A further cause is now supplied as to why a godly woman should “*have power on her head*”, referring to authority over her, and particularly to

*11:11 Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.
11:12 For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.*

the proper token of this authority in the covering of her hair.

“Because of the angels” – Again it’s unclear what Paul meant by this, whether actual angels or messengers (as the word “angel” means), and whether good angels or fallen. Unfortunately there are no clues in the context to help us. We just don’t have much to go on, so don’t let anybody get weird with the use of a portion like this as some do. Any unclear portion of the Bible tends to be a kook magnet. There is no discussion here of any special messengers, thus it seems we must assume the reference is to actual angels. If the reference was to fallen angels they would likely be called “demons” rather than “angels”. Thus there must be some lessons on submission for God’s angels looking on within a church congregation where submission is properly lived out. Compare Heb. 1:14 & 13:2. The idea of angels observing and learning from our example adds a bit of weight to what we do. They’re part of that great *“cloud of witnesses”* with which

*11:13 Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman
pray unto God uncovered?
11:14 Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a
man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?*

we're "*compassed about*" (Heb. 12:1).

Vs. 11-12 – "*Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman*" – Now Paul offers a measure of balance, expressing the mutual dependence between the sexes. Not only is "*the woman of [out of] the man*", but as well the man is "*by [through] the woman*". Though the first woman was created from the man, every man since was born of a woman.

Vs. 13 – "*Judge in yourselves*" – Think about it. Isn't it your own gut feeling that for a woman to approach God with boyishly short hair is inappropriate? Of course it is. As if she would go to God for His help while at the same time expressing her independence from His order and way.

Vs. 14-15 – "*If a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him*" – Paul uses a verb here which clearly means to "let your hair grow long". And don't miss the fact that he just continues on in these verses in

*11:15 But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her:
for her hair is given her for a covering.*

the same discussion from the previous. There's no indication that Paul is now changing gears in any way. It's clearly the "*covering*" of hair that is under discussion in this first half of chap. 11, not hats or veils.

Thus for a man to have long hair, "*the hair of women*", "*is a shame unto him*". Shame on him, saith the Lord! And for parents to allow their boy to grow his hair long like a girl's while still under their care is a shame to them. It's a shame for a girl or woman to have short, boy-like hair as well, regardless of the current fashion, and a shame for her parents to allow her glory to be bobbed like a boy. Why do folks struggle with such things when they know in themselves the rights and wrongs of it? Because they want to be free to do their own thing (in their bondage to crowd opinion that is). Free from God to follow the world. It's an authority statement, a declaration of independence, rather than a fashion statement.

Short hair on men offends nobody. Therefore any man genuinely interested in ministry in the lives of

11:16 But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.
11:17 Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse.

others will see that his hair is trimmed, clean, reasonably neat, and an offence to none.

Vs. 16 – Paul seems to place his conclusions on this matter into the realms of a principle for all the churches. He has indeed based his reasoning on creation rather than any temporary notion of local customs.

11:17-34 – Cautions and Conduct at the Lord's Supper

As we've seen, divisions characterized this Corinthian congregation. But a greater problem arose when they carried their divisions to the Communion table. For as we saw in 10:16-17, this was an event meant to highlight their unity in Christ.

Vs. 17-18 – “*Now in this . . . I praise you not*” – In contrast to the praise for them with which he began this chapter (vs. 2), Paul now turns to things for

11:18 *For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.*

11:19 *For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.*

which he could only speak further rebuke. One result of the divisions among them with which Paul dealt so strongly in the early chapters was that their public gatherings were actually more harmful than helpful to their Christian growth.

Vs. 19 – “*For there must be also heresies among you*” – The word translated “*heresies*” here is stronger than the “*divisions*” mentioned in vs. 18, speaking of things of a more serious nature. It’s one thing to have a bit of divisiveness or difference of opinion within the church. It’s another thing for these lines of division to become more formalized into actual fixed factions or fractions or sects. This more settled and permanent sense is what Paul refers to here by this term “*heresies*”. Paul knew that such factions “*must be also among you*” because of man’s sin nature and pride, and because of the fact that there will always tend to be the “*tares*” of unsaved souls among the wheat of God’s true children, those who are merely professors of

*11:20 When ye come together therefore into one place,
this is not to eat the Lord's supper.*

*11:21 For in eating every one taketh before other his own
supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.*

the religion of Christ rather than true possessors of relation to Christ. And note as well how Paul implies here that such factions are in a sense a work of God's providence. They're a means by which God purifies His church, splitting off and away those who do not really belong to Him, and leaving behind a hurting but healthier body for their departure. Believers work through their differences and stick. The "*mixed multitude*" among them can't do this, eventually finding cause to leave. The Apostle John adds that "*they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us*" (I Jn. 2:19).

"That they which are approved may be made manifest" – That those who do indeed belong to Christ may become evident. God overrules the divisive issues to the proving of character, both of the saved and of the lost. These can be very ugly situations, but turned by God to a good end.

Vs. 20-21 – *"This is not to eat the Lord's Supper"* –

*11:22 What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?
or despise ye the church of God, and shame them
that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise
you in this? I praise you not.*

“When you come together for your church assemblies and the taking of Communion it’s not actually for the *Lord’s* Supper that you gather. Instead you people are gathering to do your *own* thing! In eating you see to yourselves and are overboard in your excesses, you who have something to eat. And those with little are left to go hungry!” There was little practice of oneness or fellowship or sharing among them. What Paul describes seems to have been a type of group meal common to their church meetings. Yet they were not conducting it like a bring-and-share meal as we would. They would bring and eat what they brought and think nothing of sharing together. Or they would share only with those in their close clique of friends, excluding others. How crude and thoughtless they were! How shockingly rude! Paul (God) frowns on all exclusiveness in the church.

Vs. 22 – “If you cannot share together what you’ve brought then eat your meal in your own houses. Don’t come together in this ill-mannered way and so

11:23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:

demonstrate how really small you view God's church. Don't come with your selfish abundance and embarrass those who are poorer among you." Paul's words are stern, but there was need to firmly counter such truly tasteless behaviour.

So again, Christians can be jolly vulgar people and still be Christians. It's not a sweetened lifestyle that makes one a Christian or gets one to heaven. Eternal life must be received from the hand of God. And how graciously He gives to all who sincerely come to Him. How graciously He receives even the vulgar. And only then does He begin to bring appropriate change to their character.

Vs. 23-26 – Apparently the group meal or “love feast” just discussed either preceded or followed their practice of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper (Lord's Table or Communion). Having dealt with the unhappy and unnecessary larger meal, Paul now turns to give instruction on the necessary ordinance Jesus instituted at the Last Supper with His disciples. The description here is consistent with

11:24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

the gospel rendering of the same, yet with added details and warnings from the Lord.

Vs. 23 – Paul presented to them the account of it as the Lord had given to Him.

“The same night in which He was betrayed” – Though greatest loss for Christ loomed over that Last Supper and He knew it, yet His thoughts were all of what His followers would gain through His loss. Though man would betray Him, even that very same night, yet mankind He would faithfully love and serve in His death. Our Saviour was betrayed;

- When His own nation and leaders would put Him out of their misery.
- When Judas sold Him for material advantage.
- When His disciples would not stand by Him, but left Him to suffer alone.
- When nobody would own Him, but only denied Him.

11:25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

- When all surface devotion dried up in the heat of persecution.
- When folks won't have Him because He denies them their will or way of doing things.

Vs. 24 – *“This is My body”* – The broken bread was a symbol or representation of His body to be broken for us.

“This do in remembrance of Me” – The indication is obvious that it was to become a church ordinance or a practice to be continually observed. And the observance of it was to be a time of solemn remembrance of what our Lord suffered for us.

Vs. 25 – *“This cup is the new testament in My blood”* – *“Testament”* means covenant. The new covenant was ratified with Christ's own precious blood while the old was ratified with the blood of bulls and goats. The new covenant offers eternal life by faith in the promise of God. The old offers only blessing or cursing for obedience or not. The provisions of

11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

Christ's new covenant are given in Hebrews 8:10-12;

- God's own righteousness (law) engraved on the heart through the indwelling Spirit.
- Intimate relation to God.
- Universal, supernatural knowledge of God.
- Forgiveness of sins.

"As oft as ye drink it" – There is no set frequency stated. This is left to the discretion of individuals and churches. But again, the ongoing practice of this ordinance is clearly indicated. It is not something a truly godly believer would neglect or from which he would long be absent.

Vs. 26 – *"Ye do show the Lord's death till He come"* – This regular time of remembrance prescribed by the Lord looks down both ends of the timeline. We look back to the great horror of what our Saviour endured for us and the great honour that He did it for us. And we look ahead to the greatest happiness of our Lord's return and kingdom.

*11:27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and
drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty
of the body and blood of the Lord.
11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat
of that bread, and drink of that cup.*

Vs. 27-32 – Don't Partake Unworthily.

Paul now issues warning of the danger of partaking of the Lord's Supper in the wrong way. Believers must not despise "*the church of God*" (vs. 22), and they certainly must not despise the Lord's Table.

Vs. 27 – Eating and drinking "*unworthily*" in this context must mainly refer to the selfish, divisive manner of the Corinthian believers with each other (vs. 20-21), for they were indeed suffering God's judgment already for their careless and disrespectful attitude as vs. 30 indicates. Again, in conducting themselves in this way they displayed their low regard for God's institution and ordinances (vs. 22).

Vs. 28-30 – "*But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat*" – Let a man carefully examine his own spiritual condition before easily partaking of the Lord's Supper. It's not that we are to avoid God's ordinance for fear of being hit with sickness and

11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

11:30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

death (vs. 30). The Lord bids us to join and partake, but to come with a proper fear of Him that would bring us to His table with;

- Christ within as our own Saviour by faith (II Cor. 13:5).
- An appropriately humble attitude of respect for Him and His institutions and people.
- A hatred of our sin and pride that brought our Saviour to such pain and shame.
- Confession on our lips and a will to forsake all known sin in our hearts.
- A genuine desire for God's perfection though knowing that we all fall short of it.

"Eateth and drinketh damnation to himself" – *"Damnation"* is perhaps a bit strong, as *"condemnation"* in vs. 34 as well. Behind both is the Greek word for "judgment". It's not that a child of God might lose his salvation through his abuse of

11:31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.
11:32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

this sacred ordinance, but he can leave himself open to some rough handling through his careless disregard of things important to God. For our loving heavenly Father is quite willing to take His wayward child in hand and give a good hiding as vs. 30 explains. Paul was actually aware of “*many*” saints who were sick or dead (“*sleep*”) there in Corinth, apparently for their abuse or neglect of the Lord’s Table.

Vs. 31-32 – “*For if we would judge ourselves*” – God’s promise is still in the Book, that “*if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (I Jn. 1:9). If we’re willing to be open and honest with God, if we’re willing to acknowledge and agree with Him concerning the reality and depravity of our own evil ways then there is cleansing and forgiveness with Him. But when we refuse to own up to our sin before Him and determine to hold it close and keep it hidden from the eyes of men and even carry it with us to the Lord’s Table then it’s the

11:33 Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.

11:34 And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

Lord's rod of discipline we're calling for, and with time He will bring it. He does not condemn us with the unsaved world. He chastens us as a child. And if He does not chasten us for our wrong then we must be asking the question whether we really belong to Him or to the world, "*for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?*" (Heb. 12:5ff).

Vs. 33-34 – Paul now brings his point to conclusion.

"Tarry one for another" – "Rather make the ordinance of the Lord's Supper a time of courtesy and caring for each other," Paul says. "And as for the custom of eating a proper meal together, it would be better to leave off this aspect for now since it's such a point of contention and abuse among you, bringing God's punishments upon you. We'll sort things out further when I come in person." See how Paul treats them like small children in need of his parental supervision in order to get along with each other, for it was like children they were acting.

“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe” (Heb. 5:12-13).

May our gracious God lead us to wisdom and spiritual maturity.

“Now concerning
spiritual gifts, brethren,
I would not
have you ignorant”

(1 Cor. 12:1)

Class 14 – I Corinthians 12

12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.

12:2 Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.

In chapter 11 Paul began to deal with matters of conduct in public worship. He now continues in this track with the question of things of the Spirit. This important theme he will chase to the end of chap. 14. It seems questions had been raised on this subject as well, either by the Corinthian believers themselves or perhaps by others over the way those at Corinth were conducting themselves in worship.

12:1-3 – God’s Spirit Exalts Christ

Vs. 1 – “*Now concerning spiritual gifts*” – The opening phrase is similar in the Greek to that opening chapter 8. There it was the question of things offered to idols, here the matter of things of the Spirit.

Vs. 2 – Paul began by reminding them of the way of

their religion before they found Christ. In their idolatrous beliefs it was thought that those “*carried away*” in wild flights of madness in worship and prophesying were the most spiritual among them. History records the way of the pagan religions of that time and place. Traces of this old view had been imported into their newfound Christian worship it seems, resulting in a notion that reason departed with conscious control as one came more fully under the power of the Holy Spirit, that spirituality is expressed in a kind of frenzied Christian comatose state. We can well imagine what such a view would look and sound like when practiced collectively. It was an obvious effort of the evil one to corrupt the pure worship of God by mingling in a touch of the pagan. Paul will seek to set them straight on this score in the course of these next three chapters. He will demand an orderly, thoughtful way in their services (14:27-30). He will insist that “*the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets*” (14:32), not carried away. He will point to peace and not confusion as God’s way (14:33), and “*decently and in order*” as His command in the conduct of His church rather than pandemonium (14:40).

Vs. 3 – Paul then gave a test for discerning the spirits. Never will those led by God’s Spirit speak

12:3 Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

against Jesus Christ. Indeed all who are filled with God's true Spirit will be brimming only with clearest recognition of Christ's lordship and glory. It becomes a guiding principle in the discerning of spirits within the churches. Every utterance prompted by God's Spirit will be true to Christ. Obviously we can conclude that there is need of such a guiding principle entered here at the head of the apostle's discussion of things of the Spirit, with the obvious implication that there are other spirits active in the churches besides God's.

Notice something else that begins to become evident here concerning we who know Jesus Christ. Is it not obvious that every true child of God has the indwelling presence of the Spirit, enabling him to confess Jesus as Saviour and Lord? No sincere believer in Christ is without the Spirit of God.

12:4-11 – One Giver, Many Gifts

The focus of the next few verses is upon the great

12:4 *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

variety of God's spiritual gifts, yet all sourced in the same God. Within vs. 4-11 the phrase "*the same*" comes up 7 times. God is the One superintending the placement of His gifts, "*dividing to every man severally as He wills*" (vs. 11). It was to misunderstandings and abuses among these believers that Paul was responding, and the nature of his response indicates the nature of their abuses. The pride and selfishness of their way there at Corinth led naturally to dissatisfaction in some saints with less prominent gifts, and to pride in others with gifts deemed more important. Their jealousies and unhappiness with their lot only contributed to their disunity, rather than the use of their gifts fostering their mutual growth together as God meant it to be. Perhaps their longing for certain gifts could lead to a tendency to fake such. It becomes evident as well through Paul's teaching here that the gift of tongues was of particular interest there in that troubled church, perhaps because this gift fit well with their more paganised form of worship expression. The phenomenon of ecstatic speech was a part of pagan religion long before the gift of tongues was a part of Christianity

12:5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

(is biblical tongues ecstatic speech at all?). It seems they were keen on gifts that suggested they flew closer to the spiritual flame over those gifts more useful in benefitting others. This Paul will seek more earnestly to correct in chap. 14. Thus Paul begins with the solid insistence that the placing of all the gifts within the body is at God's discretion and not open to our demanding or fabricating. He will follow in chapter 13 with the finest discourse on the principle of love with which all is to be done in the church.

Vs. 4 – *“There are diversities of gifts”* – The word translated *“gifts”* here refers to special Spirit-given abilities making believers useful in the Lord's work. Though there are many gifts, it's *“the same Spirit”* who gives them all.

Vs. 5 – *“There are differences of administrations”* – There are many different kinds of ministries in which folks may use their gifts, yet it's *“the same Lord”* or Master who calls His saints to His various works.

12:6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

Vs. 6 – *“There are diversities of operations”* – There are many different but equally effective outworkings, yet the same God superintends the whole, in every age, in every area, in every aspect of God’s work.

We seem to see all three Persons of the Trinity here striving together in God’s great work on earth;

- God the Spirit gifts or equips the saints.
- God the Son calls and sends the saints into His service. Even as we see Christ doing in the gospel accounts.
- God the Father oversees the whole of it, ensuring that His Word does not return void, but that it accomplishes exactly what He has purposed.

Because that ship sank, that Nigerian man lost his wife, which produced in him a receptive heart, which opened his eyes and ears to that gospel tract he happened to pick up off the pavement, which actually was printed across the sea and shipped

12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

over, and that only made possible because one man over there decided to honour God with His tithe, and he only made that sound decision because . . . etc. etc. So God weaves together His intricate work among men.

Vs. 7 – *“Given to every man to profit withal”* – Some *“manifestation of the Spirit”* or special ability from the Spirit has been given to each and every believer. And there is one reason or purpose given consistently throughout these chapters as to why these spiritual gifts are made available to us. They’re all given *“to profit withal”* or for the benefit of others, that we might more effectively *“look . . . every man also on the things of others”* (Phil. 2:4). Thus the gifts are given both as evidence or *“manifestation”* of the Spirit’s working in us and as a means of more effectively serving others. *“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”* (I Pet. 4:10). Never do we find the true gifts of the Spirit used for the service or benefit of self. Paul’s words here would have most certainly raised some eye-brows at Corinth,

12:8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom;
to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;
12:9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the
gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

pointing them in such an opposite direction from their selfish lean.

Vs. 8-11 – Now we have a listing of some of the gifts to which Paul has been referring. But again, repeatedly we’re reminded of “*the same Spirit*” as the Giver of all;

- “*Word of wisdom . . . knowledge*” – A heightened ability to know and understand and apply the word of God is the obvious essence of these two gifts, though tracing the particular difference between them would be a bit of a challenge. Compare 13:2. Both of these gifts involve words and thus are communication gifts, perhaps involving special revelation. See how Paul puts at the top of the list those gifts with the greatest ability to benefit others. Compare the gifts of “*teaching*” and “*exhortation*” in Rom. 12:7-8.
- “*Faith*” – This cannot refer to saving faith for such is required of all that we might find life in Jesus. This gift of faith is likely a

12:10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

particular confidence in God to trust Him for great things, special tasks, or miraculous provisions.

- *“Gifts of healing(s)”* – *“Healing”* is plural in the Greek (vs. 28) suggesting the divinely given ability to heal various forms of physical disease or disorder. This was a gift commonly mentioned and seen in action in the early church.
- *“Working of miracles”* – The power to perform supernatural deeds such as seen in Elijah, Elisha, Jesus, or the Apostles.
- *“Prophecy”* – That gift by which God’s words were put in a man’s mouth, speaking all that God commanded him to speak (Deut. 18:18).
 - Predominantly forth-telling but with a measure of fore-telling as well.
 - This was a vital gift for that era when the Bible was being completed.
- *“Discerning of spirits”* – Divine discernment to

perceive and handle correctly men with spirits other than Gods. Compare Peter's handling of Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8), and Paul's of Elymas (Acts 13) and the demon possessed girl (Acts 16). Again the suggestion is of other spirits active in the church, needing to be exposed.

- "*Tongues*" – The God-given ability to speak languages not learned. This was never employed as a tool to speed missionary outreach, but only as a means to display the Lord's working and purpose, as at Pentecost.
- "*Interpretation of tongues*" – The ability to give the meaning of what has been spoken in an unknown tongue.

Don't fail to notice what Paul put at the very bottom of the list here, listing last what it seems the believers there were clamouring after the most. Though these gifts seemed more dynamic and attractive and similar to the pagan way of religion from which they had come, yet from the beginning they were gifts less oriented toward ministry to others, more given to selfish abuse. Paul would lead these people up and out of themselves to find and run with gifts that are all for the help of others.

12:11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

Again it's the Spirit that "*worketh all these*", who divides His gifts "*to every man severally* [individually] *as He will*". Do we ever see folks in the N.T. crying after spiritual gifts or learning how to perform them? As if the Spirit's giving must be combined with coaching from the Pastor's wife. It's the Spirit who gives these gifts, seemingly fully operative. They no more come through church leaders than does the gift of salvation.

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On the Side

Did you notice how Paul speaks of the Spirit in this context? The Spirit is the One working and dividing according to His will. He's the One doing and deciding on the matter of gifts. That the Spirit is a Person or has Personhood is the obvious indication here. And that it's God working "*all in all*" in vs. 6 and yet the Spirit doing the work "*as He will*" in vs. 11 displays the Holy Spirit as God. The Spirit of God is not an impersonal force but an individual Person. And yet He is God Himself, co-equal with the God the Father and God the Son.

*12:12 For as the body is one, and hath many members,
and all the members of that one body, being many,
are one body: so also is Christ.*

12:12-31 – One Body, Many Members

Paul now pushes further the concept of diversity within our unity in Christ. In so doing he used the illustration of the human body, for our body is a *unit* or singular item and yet it's made up of multiple parts or members, all wonderfully working together as a united whole. The church is as a body, the body of Christ. Compare also Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 4:16; 5:30; Col. 2:19.

Vs. 12 – “*For as the body is one, and hath many members*” – Paul’s focus, and that which was so important for these believers to understand, was the matter of unity. Though a body has many members, each with very different functions from other members, yet the combination of the whole is a unit.

“*So is Christ*” – Even so it is meant to be in Christ. Though we are all different and gifted differently there must be a basic union in Christ or His body cannot properly function.

12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

12:14 For the body is not one member, but many.

Vs. 13 – “*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body*” – Paul speaks here of the church as a whole and not to a small elite portion of it. Again it comes clear that all believers are baptized with the Spirit into Christ’s body, regardless of their nationality, gender, or status. Though these Corinthian believers were carnal babes in Christ Paul did not in any way exclude them from this “*we all*”.

Some would teach that there is a second divine work of Spirit baptism which we must seek after we’re saved. But portions such as this expose the error of such teaching. All saved individuals from the moment of their salvation share the same spiritual baptism with the same Spirit into the same spiritual body of Christ. And in Christ we are now commanded to “*be filled with the Spirit*” (Eph. 5:18). We may be filled with the Spirit often, but baptized or indwelt only once, and that forever (Jn. 14:16).

Vs. 14-24 – All body members are needed. With vs.

*12:15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I
am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?
12:16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I
am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?
12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the
hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the
smelling?*

14 Paul now begins to demonstrate how every member in the body is a necessary part of the functioning of the whole. In vs. 15-17 his point is that none can rightly think *less* of their gifting and purpose in the church than that of others. In vs. 21-24 he affirms that none can rightly think *more* of their gift than that of others. It becomes apparent that these believers were elevating the value of certain spiritual gifts or church functions and despising others. Again, from chap. 14 it seems tongues-speaking was especially high on their wish-list of gifts to have and display. To not be so endowed with the spirituality such a gift seemed to radiate was to tend toward envy of those who had, and to be dissatisfied with anything else. Such an approach could only lead to loss in the church of the benefits of other less sought-after divinely given abilities. Paul's point throughout this portion is how useless and grotesque the body would be if all were the same member. A diversity of members is

12:18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

12:19 And if they were all one member, where were the body?

12:20 But now are they many members, yet but one body.

12:21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

vital for the body to function as a body at all. Feet cannot grasp and hands cannot walk. Ears cannot see and eyes cannot hear. And without the feet and mouth how can the body walk and talk? No member can deny the vital importance either of itself or of another, for each has a particular ability the other cannot perform and each is mutually dependent upon the others. And again, it's God Himself who has "*set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him*" (vs. 18). The vital question is always what pleases our God, not what pleases us. Again, gift placement is God's business (vs. 6, 11). Don't wish for another gift or somebody else's special ability. Rather take what God has given to you and run with it to the ends of the earth for the glory of God and the good of His people.

Vs. 22-24 – Least attractive, greatest value. Even parts of the body considered much less useful or

*12:22 Nay, much more those members of the body,
which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:*

*12:23 And those members of the body, which we think to
be less honourable, upon these we bestow more
abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have
more abundant comeliness.*

*12:24 For our comely parts have no need: but God hath
tempered the body together, having given more
abundant honour to that part which lacked:*

attractive we may discover to be of much greater importance than we at first realized, even having a certain beauty of their own. People write poetry about the beauty of eyes, and they are a powerful aspect of the attractiveness of the temptress (Prov. 6:25). But though we can live without our eyes we won't get far without our bowels, which nobody eulogizes. The glory of a woman is her hair. It's something Solomon mentioned in his song in describing the splendour of his bride. Lose it and you live on. But try living without your bladder, not mentioned in Solomon's list. "*God hath tempered*" or mingled or interwoven and weighted the usefulness of the various parts to distribute a certain equality of importance to all. Even so within Christ's body.

Vs. 25-26 – "*That there should be no schism in the body*" – Here is the great purpose of Paul's discourse. As any physical body divided or even

12:25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

12:26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

12:27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

fighting against itself is an unhealthy body, even so when there is animosity within Christ's body it is an unhealthy organism and unable to function as it was designed. In a healthy body all of its members are happy to be a part of the whole and happy to be working together with all others and mindful of the well-being of all. Each part is concerned about preserving every other member, because any injury to any part of the body hurts the entire unit and affects the functioning of the whole. There is no place for pride among believers, or divisions, or elite groups, or class distinctions, or outcasts, or partiality, or thoughtlessness. All must rather show *"the same care one for another"* in an even-handed way, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep (Rom. 12:15).

Vs. 27-28 – *"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular"* – Paul now returns to a listing of individual gifts of the Spirit or gifted

12:28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

people, this time listing them in order of importance in an even more marked way, beginning with “*first . . . secondarily . . . thirdly*”;

- “*First apostles*” – Those so prominently gifted with supernatural abilities, bearing that divine stamp as the vehicle by which God would complete the Bible and by whom He would lay the foundation of His church (Eph. 2:20).
- “*Secondarily prophets*” – Those proclaiming God’s message, either in preaching or prophesying.
- “*Thirdly teachers*” – Those gifted to understand, explain, and apply the Word of God given to the church.
- “*After that miracles*” – See on vs. 10. A gift coming “*after*” or secondary, thus one less useful in bringing real benefit to others than those listed first.
- “*Gifts of healings*” – See on vs. 9.

12:29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?
12:30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

- “*Helps*” – Those with a particular will and ability to help folks in need. Compare in Rom. 12:8 “*he that sheweth mercy*”, of those especially stirred to sympathy with the misery of others in their hardships.
- “*Governments*” – The effective ability to govern or give direction in leading the work of God’s church or ministries. Compare in Rom. 12:8 “*he that ruleth*”.
- “*Diversities of tongues*” – Again this gift sits at the bottom of the list, displaying Paul’s determination to overturn their view of this gift among the chiefest. It was a gift with a particular purpose, as Paul will reveal in chap. 14, and one offering the least value to others.

Vs. 29-30 – “*Are all apostles?*” – In hammering home his point Paul now fires questions at his readers, all obviously demanding a “no” answer. One undeniable fact in the matter of spiritual things

*12:31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I
unto you a more excellent way.*

is that there must be “*diversities of gifts*” if there is to be a proper body, with mutual dependence of all upon all others in the body, and with the need for all to exercise what has been given to them toward the efficient functioning of the whole. Non-charismatics need to get a grasp on this too. And it’s God who administers this, working “*all in all*” (vs. 6) “*as He will*” (vs. 11). It’s He who “*hath set some in the church*” (vs. 28) “*as it hath pleased Him*” (vs. 18).

Vs. 31 – “*But covet earnestly the best gifts*” – There’s an interesting difficulty in the verb translated “*covet*” (KJV) here. In the Greek it could grammatically be read either as a simple statement or as a command. Is Paul stating, perhaps with an accusatory note, “But you are zealous for the best gifts, and yet I am showing you a more excellent way”? This rendering would certainly find support in the context, for Paul was seeking to lead these people away from their selfish pursuit of showier gifts considered better than others. Or is Paul encouraging them to zealous pursuit of the best gifts, with their sights now perhaps somewhat

adjusted as to which gifts were indeed best for them to pursue? The former seems to fit better with Paul's continual insistence in this chapter that decisions on the giving of the gifts are God's business. The latter fits with 14:1 & 39 where the coveting of gifts is encouraged. Not in the sense of individuals wishing to trade theirs in for something "better", but in the corporate sense of encouraging among them those gifts most useful for the benefit of all.

"Yet show I unto you a more excellent way" – This *"more excellent way"* is the way of love, coming right up in full measure in the next chapter.

“And now abideth
faith, hope, charity,
these three;
but the greatest of these
is charity”

(1 Cor. 13:13)

Class 15 – I Corinthians 13

There is a word at the core of those two great commands upon which hang all of God's law and prophets, to love God with everything and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-40). It is the same word that features so prominently now in chapter 13, found 9 times within these few verses. The word in the Greek is *agape* (αγαπη), translated "*charity*" in the KJV. Some consider this an unfortunate translation since in the evolution of language "*charity*" has come to take on a particular meaning in deeds of kindness for the needy. But then the word "*love*" has come to express more the notion of emotion, a meaning several sizes too small for *agape*. We tend to think of love as a feeling we fall into and out of, something that happens or not, grows or dies, waxes or wanes, while we remain quite passive. But such a view of love is not *agape*. Perhaps it's better that a handle other than "*love*" be used in describing such a core concept in the nature of God and our relation to Him and others. A key aspect of *agape* love is action. It involves decisive resolve for the good of another leading to acts of good will. It is the active decision to do what is best for the other regardless of returns. Perhaps "*charity*" was not such a bad choice.

13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

13:1-3 – Love is Essential

Paul begins with clearest instruction that this love to which God calls us is the chief ingredient in every religious endeavour. No matter how marvellously impressive or seemingly sacrificial any spiritual activity might be, the absence of this kind of love reduces it to an empty zero.

Vs. 1 – “*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels*” – Though the exercise of the gift of tongues be real enough, yet it would be only meaningless clatter without the proper motivation of love driving it. Again, it’s implied that even the gift of tongues was given for some corporate benefit rather than for private use. And that Paul begins with tongues here again suggests the inappropriate prominence this church was placing on this particular gift.

Paul’s reference to “*tongues . . . of angels*” is likely a touch of hyperbole, an exaggeration used for effect, for never in the Bible do we hear angels speaking in

13:2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.
13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

any form of speech other than that easily understandable to man. Yet it's also likely that Paul was speaking tongue-in-cheek here, knowing what some were perhaps saying there at Corinth in justifying their babbling "in the Spirit".

Vs. 2 – Three times in this verse the word "*all*" is found, again suggesting a note of exaggeration. Though a man should have it all, with the most complete powers of discernment and greatest faith for the miraculous, yet if he's missing the key ingredient he is "*nothing*".

Understanding and knowledge here would relate to "*word of wisdom*" and "*word of knowledge*" in 12:8. Paul speaks of divinely given knowledge beyond the natural.

Vs. 3 – Now Paul turns to acts of great kindness or charity, deeds that outwardly seem to display love.

13:4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

Though one's self-sacrifice be total, yet if not moved by agape love it could only be a case of vain glory. And the eternal profit for deeds so motivated is nil. *"Verily I say unto you, They have their reward"* (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16).

13:4-7 – Love is Explained

Now Paul begins to define agape love using 15 statements involving a mix of both negatives and positives.

Charity;

- *"Suffereth long"* (vs. 4) – This kind of love is long-fused. It remains committed to the best for the other regardless of returns. It is therefore able to endure a great deal of disappointment. Often when folks don't get what they want from their marriage partner or from a friendship they'll find somebody else to satisfy their desire. This is no true agape love. Job's love was a long-suffering kind, for he remained true to his God *"though He slay*

me". How uncommon is this kind of resilient, pursuing, thick-skinned love even among Christians.

Yet consider that though love is long-suffering it doesn't suffer *everything*. It cares enough for the sheep to despise the wolves (Matt. 23; Gal. 5:12). God cares enough for the saved to ultimately condemn the lost.

- "*Is kind*" (vs. 4) – Love is generally gentle or mild in it's way with others, with seldom the bitter lash of the tongue. Love is ever concerned with how its actions or words will affect others. It tends to leave others refreshed and lifted rather than thrashed and flattened. Yet such a way of kindness does not mean weak and squishy with no firm principles or the will to uphold them. Love will do what is best in speaking the truth though it hurt both speaker and hearer. Though anxious to avoid unneeded harshness, yet it is willing to say the hard thing.

Now a string of 8 negatives suggesting where love does not go.

- "*Envieth not*" (vs. 4) – Love does not seethe in anger when a "competitor" becomes higher,

13:5 *Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;*

grander, more popular, better figured, fitted, or kitted out. It does not look upon others in any comparative way, seeking to excel above any other. Such comparative thinking is only the glaring evidence of pride. Love is quite happy with servanthood. It is not aspiring to masterhood, for it “*seeketh not its own*”. There is nothing like pride-generated envy to stir hatred and contention (Gal. 5:26). Compare Rachel with Leah and Hannah with Peninah. Love wishes only to build up and encourage the other, not beat him down. Envy wishes only to step on the other in lifting itself. “*For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Mk. 10:45).

- “*Vaunteth not itself*” (vs. 4) – Love is not given to boasting or displaying itself. It neither sees itself as great nor cares for any such things, for its focus is not upon self but upon the concerns of others.
- “*Is not puffed up*” (vs. 4) – This relates to the

previous. Love is not bloated with pride. There is no self-focus.

- *“Doth not behave itself unseemly”* (vs. 5) – *“Unseemly”* speaks of things indecent or shameful. Love doesn’t do things inappropriate or rude. It’s not excessive or extreme or weird in any way, whether in speech, dress, or behaviour, because it’s not trying to impress others or attract attention to itself. Instead love always demonstrates respect for others out of genuine concern for them. *“Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt”* (Col. 4:6).
- *“Seeketh not her own”* (vs. 5) – Here is a statement so simple and profound, and yet so unhuman! There is no selfish seeking after one’s own advantage in love, no demanding of personal rights (in contrast to the way of the believers at Corinth with each other). Self-seekers invariably take liberties at the expense of others, while love always puts the welfare of others before its own. Love is quite happy and fulfilled with the advancement of the other. If any one of these statements would best sum up the whole, this one would be a good possibility.
- *“Is not easily provoked”* (vs. 5) – Love is not

tending to be irritated or stirred to anger. A provoked person is one pushed beyond his level of tolerance. But love has a very high tolerance threshold. It's like drenched firewood that just cannot be set alight. It's like a candle in the wind. Any match is blown out by the wind (Spirit) before it can even be touched to the candle to get it burning. We're all still candles very much capable of being lit, yet it's the influence of God's Spirit within that keeps us from being easily enflamed. Thus love refuses to participate in conflicts. It's no fun in a good fight. It just won't keep its side going. Compare the same in the way of humble wisdom in the book of Proverbs.

Yet the Bible says "slow to wrath", not *no* to wrath (James 1:19). There are times when anger is a right and appropriate response. Jesus was not whistling a happy tune when clearing the temple of buyers, sellers, and money-changers (Jn. 2:13-17). Compare Acts 15:39 & Eccl. 3:8.

- "*Thinketh no evil*" (vs. 5) – Love keeps no count or score of evils or offences done against it. It has a much quicker tendency toward forgiveness than fault-finding.

- “*Rejoiceth not in iniquity*” (vs. 6) – It is wrong to practice evil things, and it is just as wrong to be impressed with the evil practices of others or to thrill over those who practice them. Compare Rom. 1:32, where “*have pleasure*” speaks of approving together with others in their practice of things “*worthy of death*”. Where would most television programming be if folks took this one seriously? How often such “entertainments” lead us to thrill over the unrighteous actions of an actor or actress. We laugh when we ought to cry and we delight when we ought to detest. “Lord, teach us to love what You love and hate what You hate”. God honoured Job because he “*feared God, and eschewed evil*”. These come together as two sides of the same coin. “*The fear of the Lord is to hate evil*” (Prov. 8:13). To truly love Him is to hate what He hates.

Now back to a few positives.

- “*Rejoiceth in the truth*” (vs. 6) – It was the Apostle John, that “Son of thunder” turned by

the Lord to “the Apostle of Love”, who said, “*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth*” (III Jn. 4). Because John loved with God’s kind of love, joy filled him when truth was found in others. Love hates untruth and must deal firmly with lies in the one it loves. Love is most sincere and rejoices in sincerity. Therefore it hides nothing and welcomes scrutiny. There’s no wedge of gold buried under its tent or stolen idol hidden under its saddle. Love is a wide-open, genuine, look-you-in-the-eye sort of virtue.

- “*Beareth all things*” (vs. 7) – Love endures the faults and frustrations others bring into our lives. It tends more to look for reasons why they do the annoying things they do, reasons that often may be traced back to our own failures if we’re willing to see it. Compare the example of Jesus in Mk. 6 for One bearing the frustrations of people. When He heard that John the Baptist was killed He wished to get away for a while from the pressing crowds. And so He sailed with His disciples across the Sea of Galilee. But when they landed they found the crowd had run around to meet them there. Yet instead of responding with irritation Jesus “*was moved with compassion*

13:7 *Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

toward them”, for He saw them “*as sheep not having a shepherd*”. That was the enduring love of God in action! When the Father sends the rain and sunshine upon those who hate Him still, that’s enduring love in action. When Christ carried the stain of our sin upon Himself and was forsaken by His Father for a time because of it, knowing it was the only way to our blessing, that was enduring love in action. Love bears up against everything, for it is essentially hate-proof. The short fuse of a quick temper has nothing to do with this kind of love.

- “*Believeth all things*” (vs. 7) – This is not to say that one who loves is easily deceived. Yet on the other hand love is not given to easy suspicion. Love leans toward trust, quick to give the benefit of the doubt. It doesn’t blindly believe what it knows is not true, yet it does not live in fear of being taken. For it knows the great Leveller and lives under His eye and protecting care.
- “*Hopeth all things*” (vs. 7) – Love has a

fundamentally optimistic outlook. Circumstances do not tend to move it to despairing thoughts. It tends always, instinctively to look to the bright side and hope for the best in others. Love's hope is pegged to the sure promises of God, His unshakeable love, and the surpassing power of that One who is "*for us*". Love understands that all the glory is before us and therefore there is nothing really lost in seeming losses or sacrifices here.

- "*Endureth all things*" (vs. 7) – Love perseveres in the face of every adverse circumstance. Compare the undaunted servant of Isa. 50, who set his "*face like a flint*" against the most bitter human hatred and rejection. Love stands when others crumble and lose hope. It remains steadfast in its devotion in the most trying situations and over a lifetime of years. It refuses to let irresponsible behaviour influence its attitude against the object of its love. Endurance is the sacrifice love makes that it might be there to benefit the other, though the other should respond with evil. It's how our God loved us when we were yet sinners and hated Him.

13:8-13 – Love is Eternal

13:8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

In vs. 1-3 Paul describes love as the vital aspect, for without it all spiritual gifts are useless. In vs. 4-7 Paul describes love in its various aspects, in all of its multi-faceted beauty. Now in these remaining verses Paul describes both the permanence and pre-eminence of love.

Vs. 8 – “*Charity never faileth*” – Agape love never comes down in the least little bit from its place of highest prominence and importance. It is that virtue eternally highest and greatest of all of God’s gifts. The Corinthian believers over-emphasized the importance of certain spiritual gifts, of which Paul gives a representative sampling here in “*prophecies*”, “*tongues*”, and supernatural “*knowledge*”. Yet when such gifts came to the end of their tenure or usefulness they would “*cease*” and “*vanish away*”.

The pride of these believers took even God’s good gifts and made them an instrument of division, because love was the missing element in their

pursuit of personal prominence. Now Paul is re-stacking the blocks, pulling love out from the bottom of the stack of the Corinthian estimation and putting it in its rightful place on the very top of the pile. The gifts of the Spirit only provide opportunity for the expression of love, as the computer hardware provides a facility to run the software. To elevate spiritual gifts without love would be like keeping the hardware and losing the software. What good is it really? Like having a hosepipe without water. Like having a house all wired up but with no electricity. The channel is all there, but with no proper substance to run through it, and therefore essentially worthless. Love is the vital substance flowing through the veins of the Spirit's network of gifts. And love's tenure is eternal, continuing into the ages long after the perishable gifts upon which the Corinthians so prided themselves had passed away. These temporary gifts, so emphasized by some to their own personal pre-eminence, have their place and purpose in time alone. But love is the gift of grace that continues through all eternity. Throughout this chapter Paul underscores the same theme in

13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

love's pre-eminence and endurance above all. If there is anything we have from God that is worthy of our most diligent cultivation it is this!

Vs. 9 – *“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part”* – Our current view of God and His things is only partial at best. The finest gifts offer only a partial view, only limited answers to our questions of God and His glories. The fullest revelation is yet to come and will be distributed to all then, divine disclosures which will cause the greatest insights now to pale into seeming ignorance in that day of Christ's revelation. We are not wise to make so much of that which will seem so small in comparison to the overwhelming insights of that coming day.

Vs. 10 – *“But when that which is perfect is come”* – The Greek word translated *“perfect”* could as easily be translated *“complete”* or *“fully accomplished”*. It's a question whether Paul is referring to the perfect One coming in the day of Christ's return or the perfection of prophecy with the completion of the canon of Scripture, yet future as Paul wrote. It

*13:11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I
understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when
I became a man, I put away childish things.*

seems likely that Paul was not referring to specifics here, but spoke generally of the folly of elevating the vehicle of the gifts, set to be done away once they had carried to completion what they were given to convey. It would be like glorying in the pretty package, to be discarded upon delivery, while disregarding the important contents within.

There is indeed the significant question of why the need of revelation gifts such as supernatural knowledge and prophecy once the perfection of revelation had been given in our completed Bible. And there is the weighty question of why the need of tongues once the essential purpose for the gift had been fulfilled, as Paul will suggest further in the next chapter.

Vs. 11 – “*When I was a child*” – Paul now uses a couple illustrations to help demonstrate his point. At the beginning stages of life, as in the early days of the church, there was a way in which we spoke and thought and did things consistent with our age and abilities; a way that changed as we grew to

13:12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13:13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

maturity. Thus the suggestion of change in the way of things is clearly introduced. Compare 14:20. As well there is perhaps a touch of subtle rebuke in Paul's words here, indicating that it was time for these believers to grow up and move on from their more childish ways.

Vs. 12 – *“But then face to face”* – Further on the idea of our *“in part”* awareness, Paul compares it to the difference between looking at the somewhat obscured reflection of things in a mirror and looking upon things directly. Now he speaks more directly of the glory of Christ's return, when we will see and understand even as the Lord sees and understands us now. Far less the need then to interpret the subtleties and symbolisms of the written Word of God when we shall behold directly and personally the living Word of God.

Vs. 13 – *“But the greatest of these is charity”* – Paul has pointed out how love *outlasts* the gifts of time. Now he declares that love *outshines* the very

greatest of graces or virtues. Not only is love superior to things that pass away but it's also greatest among things that abide. Faith is essential in putting one into right relation to God. Hope is the result of faith, filling us with solid expectations concerning the future. But love is key in keeping us in right relation to both God and man. Faith and hope help me, but love helps you through me. Faith and hope are more characteristic of men than of God. But love is a characteristic from God, for "*love is of God*", and love characterizes God, for "*God is love*" (I Jn. 4:7-8, 16). Love is of the very nature of God, and for this cause it is *supreme!* Love will be that premier virtue pervading heaven and extending throughout eternity. It is that grace that will make heaven heaven! Therefore the command of 14:1 to "*Follow after charity*". In all of your pursuing of gifts make this gift your chief pursuit!

Class 16 – I Corinthians 14:1-22

I'm impressed with Paul's gracious but firm handling of the troubled saints at Corinth in his discussion of spiritual gifts. He was obviously dealing with some fairly significant abuses among them, especially of the gift of tongues. And yet he doesn't come with whip or rod to quickly set them straight, but with kid gloves. He comes with patience in the winning way of a gentle shepherd. He reasons with them, seeking to lead them from where they were to where they should be in their thinking and practice. He comes in fact as a living example of what he has just described in chap. 13, in the gentle, patient, hopeful way of agape love.

In this 14th chapter Paul first seeks to demonstrate how largely unprofitable is the practice of tongues in comparison to other gifts when not interpreted. He then explains what the gift of tongues is all about. Again, the overriding assumption throughout this portion is that the usefulness of a gift is a matter of its value to the whole assembly. The gifts of the Spirit are given "*to profit withal*". They're not personal play things for believers to enjoy for themselves either privately or while in church assemblies.

14:1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.

14:1-5 – Tongues vs. Prophecy

Vs. 1 – “*Follow after charity*” – Coming off the presentation of chap. 13 the call is to pursue agape love above all things pursued. Let love of others be the guiding principle in all of our seeking of gifts.

“*But rather that ye may prophesy*” – “*Rather*” here is in the sense of “more”. Paul would rather that they seek the gift of prophesying more than tongues-speaking purely because of its greater usefulness to others. Again, the focus of the gift of prophesying has always been more the proclamation of God’s words for here and now than the predicting of things future. It is that ability to reveal the words of God where they have not yet been revealed and to make effective application of what God has already said and done. This latter sense is the essence of preaching, the proclamation of God’s revealed Word. With the completion of the Old and New Testaments it is this latter sense that is to be the focus of the modern church. Compare 13:8 & Rev. 22:18. God’s eternal words applied to our individual needs and situations are of greatest worth in fostering

*14:2 For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.
14:3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.*

faith and stirring courage and feeding souls (Rom. 10:17). Whether revealing a new message from God or explaining what has already been revealed the Spirit's gifting is involved.

Vs. 2-5 – Paul now gives reasons why the gift of prophesying or proclamation is to be preferred over tongues.

Vs. 2 – Tongues does not speak to men at all but only to God. God understands the inward expressions of praise and thanks regardless of the sounds coming from the mouth, but to others listening it's a mystery. Such worship may very well be sincere toward God, but what good is it to others? Understand the way Paul states this here. His obvious point is that it is a significant mark *against* tongues that only God can understand what is communicated.

Vs. 3 – In contrast, the better way is prophesying. For through the exercise of this gift all are able to

*14:4 He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.
14:5 I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.*

fully understand what is spoken. And through the use of this gift there are great possibilities for others, in building them up in their faith and encouraging them to more zealous activity for the Lord and in bringing God's peace and comfort to their souls. God's effective method for outreach and the uplifting of His church has always been the preaching of His words (II Tim. 4:2).

Vs. 4 – The practice of tongues within the public gatherings offers positive benefit only to the speaker, with his heart alone rising to the Lord in praise. On the other hand prophesying benefits *all* within hearing, with the potential of moving all to faith and praise and thanks to God for His goodness and truth and glorious promises.

Vs. 5 – Though Paul was willing for their practice of tongues, he was *more* willing for them to practice what would feed the flock of God.

14:6 Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?

“Except he interpret” – Only when tongues were interpreted did they have the ability to bring a useful message to others.

14:6-19 – Tongues Must Be Interpreted

Having mentioned in vs. 5 the need for the gift of interpretation when tongues are practiced, Paul now chases this theme with illustrations.

Vs. 6 – *“What shall it profit you”* – Again Paul makes reference to the primary concern in the exercise of the Spirit’s gifts. They are given for the profit of others. And what is the use of a gift if it does not accomplish this central purpose? Do you sense this vital thrust throughout? “If I come to you speaking revelations or teachings from God bringing awareness and understanding to your soul, then I will be able to *‘profit you’*. But if I come muttering mysteries, in what way will you be advanced in your Christian life? Why come at all on that basis?”

14:7 *And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?*

14:8 *For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?*

Vs. 7 – *“Except they give a distinction of sounds”* – Paul now gives an illustration from music. If someone should go to the piano and plunk out a random series of notes we’d all wonder what that was about. There would be *no recognition*. But if through the appropriate use of notes, timing, and rhythm one should play an easily recognizable tune, in unison we’d all say, “I know what that is!”

Vs. 8 – *“For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound”* – Now an illustration from the field of battle. In ancient battles, before the day of radios and satellites, the trumpet was used to signal the movement of troops on the field. Various trumpeted sounds indicated varying responses. There was a sounding of the trumpet that called all to gather in the morning. There were sounds that signalled attack or retreat. But if on the battlefield the soldiers should suddenly hear some ragtime tune trumpeted through the trees, or again some random series of blaring sounds, they’d look at each other

14:9 So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

and say, “What on earth is that supposed to mean?” There would be *no communication*. Some might read it to mean attack and others that they should dig trenches and others to retreat and still others that they were to climb trees or rally at some central point. All could be thrown into confusion and disarray. The sounding of the voice must be clearly discernible if people are to find good help and guidance, which is the whole point and purpose of the Spirit’s gifts.

Vs. 9 – “*So likewise ye*” – Now the application is made. Unless you speak with intelligible speech who’s going to know what you’re saying? Don’t miss the incredible emphasis with which Paul hammers the point in this portion. How kindly yet resolutely he seeks to lead these baby Christians away from the “toy” of tongues they had been playing with in the public assemblies. Paul was like a man gently attempting to take something abused from the clutching hold of his friend, offering to swap with something better in its place. Don’t miss the very negative feature in Paul’s (God’s) mind of a

14:10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.

gift that from the angle of others is little more than sounds sent into the air. This was not a gift to be so put on a pedestal as these people were doing and as many of God's children do today. How much more inferior this gift to one like the proclamation of God's words in the hearing and understanding of all!

Vs. 10-11 – In these verses Paul seems to suggest attitude difficulties or dissensions introduced through tongues-speaking conducted in the selfish way they were practicing it at Corinth.

Vs. 10 – Though there are many different languages spoken around the globe not one of them is meaningless to those who speak it. The reference here to the many languages of earth seems to affirm that the tongues of which Paul speaks in this context were the same as that spoken at Pentecost. It was the divinely given ability to speak actual languages of men, not gibberish.

Vs. 11 – *“I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian”* – The term *“barbarian”* was used by the

14:11 Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.
14:12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

Greeks to refer to anyone not speaking their language, thus a foreigner. When one speaks in a language different from what I understand he becomes a foreigner to me and I to him. We do not share a oneness of mutual understanding. Paul seems to imply that they were in a sense introducing an alienating element into their fellowship, making themselves essentially as foreigners to each other by their public practice of tongues without interpretation, rather than being fully united as co-sharers in a common heavenly citizenship.

Vs. 12 – “*Even so ye*” – Again Paul turns the application to his readers. “*Forasmuch*” as they were keen in the matter of spiritual things, which is a good thing, Paul would have them to be just as keen to use spiritual things in the way they were meant to be used. Suppose one was an avid gun enthusiast. He could not be so inclined without keen awareness that there is a proper way to handle

14:13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.

guns. Without this understanding one would be a tragedy looking for a happening. I might be crazy about driving, and especially about the great gift of a car I've received. But I cannot just go out and use my ability to drive that gift without clearest awareness of the rules of the road and proper driving etiquette or I will surely be more problem than profit to my society. These believers, with all believers, must understand that what they have from the Spirit has been given to build up the body rather than to tear it down through the introduction of subtle rifts. There are indeed rules of the road for the use of spiritual gifts. Oh how needed is this message for the church of our own day!

Vs. 13 – *“Pray that he may interpret”* – Some interesting things are suggested here. Even one using the gift of tongues did not know in himself what was being spoken, but had need of the gift of interpretation. So tongues and interpretation don't necessarily come together, but are two separate gifts. As well, one with a proper desire to benefit the body might ask for and receive the gift of interpretation. The degree to which the same

14:14 For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

14:15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

possibility could be extended to all the available gifts is an interesting ponder. Chapter 12 seems to indicate otherwise (vs. 11), that the issuing of the gifts is the Spirit's concern.

Vs. 14 – “*For if I pray in an unknown tongue*” – Still affirming the need for tongues to be interpreted, Paul indicates that the one speaking to God in tongues could not fully benefit *himself* either. Though he would perceive that he was speaking to God, and even generally that it was praise or thanks or some request, yet without interpretation he could not know the details of his own words. The intellectual part of him “*is unfruitful*”, receiving little more benefit than if a foreigner were speaking to him. So with the practice of tongues not only is there loss to the hearers but to the speaker as well.

Vs. 15-19 – Paul resolved for himself that when praying or singing or speaking he would do so in a way that would benefit his own understanding as well as the understanding of all who were listening.

14:16 *Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how
shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say
Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he
understandeth not what thou sayest?*
14:17 *For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is
not edified.*
14:18 *I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than
ye all:*

He would not “minister” in a way that exalted himself as some great spiritual one. He would hold as his firm resolve the determination to lift and help others in all that he did. This is *true* ministry. He would pray, sing, and speak either in a language known by those present or with interpretation in the case of tongues.

Vs. 18 – It’s evident that Paul possessed and exercised the gifts of tongues and interpretation and so greatly appreciated what he had from the Lord. Thus Paul could not fairly be accused of preferring proclamation gifts over tongues-speaking only because he had never experienced tongues.

The measure of greatest emphasis on this theme here is remarkable! It fairly *demand*s that the church sit up and take notice, absorbing with greatest care what Paul is saying here in the

14:19 Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.

14:20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

exercise of God's gifts. In God's cherished institution of the church *nothing* is to be done unto ourselves. *All* is to be done toward the growth and benefit of the body. The selfish delight with which the Corinthian believers toyed with tongues, bringing Paul's earnest guidance, is a vital lesson on others-centred living.

14:20-22 – *“Tongues are for a Sign”*

Paul now so carefully draws back the curtain to reveal the essential idea or reason behind tongues-speaking, displaying to us what this gift has always been about. It was and is vital that they (we) understand the purpose for this gift.

Vs. 20 – *“Brethren, be not children in understanding”* – Paul was quite happy for them to be as inexperienced as small children when it came to matters of meanness. But when it came to

*14:21 In the law it is written, With men of other tongues
and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet
for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.*

understanding the things of the Spirit it was time for them to grow up. That Paul must speak to them in this way reveals the fact of their immaturity in these matters. Compare 13:11, where Paul may have been hinting at the same need for this church to rise to maturity. Their use of the gift of tongues was a bit like some boys removing a stop sign from its roadside post at a park and using it as a Frisbee. Somebody was sure to get hurt before long. Even so the Corinthian believers were taking something that was meant to be a sign or signal and were using it as a play thing. They took something with a serious purpose, a purpose designed to come shortly to an end in fact (13:8), and they were making a toy out of it. And Paul now came as the thoughtful caretaker, seeking to explain the dangers and violation involved, seeking to remove that gift from a play-thing status and to reinstate it as the sign it was meant to be.

Vs. 21 – “*In the law it is written*” – Paul quotes now from Isa. 28:11-12. Isaiah’s words there refer to a time in Israel’s history when God through His

prophet was attempting to speak to His wayward people but they were not listening. In fact in the context there in Isaiah 28 the proud Jewish leaders were complaining about the way God came to them through His words *“precept upon precept, line upon line”*, treating them as if they were babies, as *“them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts”* (Isa. 28:9-10). But *“yet for all that will they not hear Me, saith the Lord”*. Though He spoke to them in their own language through their own prophets in such a simple and repetitive manner, to the point where they had heard quite enough and were sick and tired of it, yet still they refused to hear or heed the Lord’s words of warning to them. Therefore the Lord was left with no alternative but to follow through with what He had long before told them He would do. Back in the list of cursings of Deut. 28 the Lord had warned His people that He would *“bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand”* (vs. 49ff). When it came to the point where God’s people simply would not hear His voice, His words in their own tongue through their own people or prophets spoken and refused repeatedly, then the Lord would at last bring down foreigners (barbarians) upon them. And though these would come speaking in tongues other than their own, yet God’s people

would at last hear and understand His message of judgment with greatest possible clarity. The message through such *“stammering lips and another tongue”* of their foreign captors would be rather self-evident. And did God do as He had warned? Of course He did! He always does as He promises, whether in cursing or blessing. When the Lord through His prophet Isaiah later warned His people of Assyria’s coming and capture of the 10 northern tribes of Israel He gave His assurance to the godly among them that, *“Thou shalt not see a fierce people, a people of a deeper speech than thou canst perceive; of a stammering tongue, that thou canst not understand”* (Isa. 33:19). Yet all the rest suffered for their rebellion under Assyria just as God had warned. They were brutally taken into captivity by a people *“of a stammering tongue”*. Then when the two southern tribes of Judah later followed the same downward slant to stubborn denial, in the context of strongest words of condemnation and woe God affirmed a similar word to them through His prophet Jeremiah, saying, *“Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say”* (Jer. 5:15). Always it was the same in God’s dealings with His people. When they were

14:22 Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

confronted with the signal He had long before given to them of *“stammering lips and another tongue”* they would know it for a sign of His judgment. It seems the judgment upon ancient Babel was a foreshadow of this same approach repeatedly used by the Lord throughout Israel’s troubled history (Gen. 11).

Now go back to I Cor. 14 and understand what Paul was so carefully implying to those Corinthian Christians.

Vs. 22 – *“Wherefore tongues are for a sign”* – Tongues were never some private Christian play thing. In fact they were never actually meant to be for the benefit of believers at all. They were given as a sign, *“not to them that believe, but to them that believe not”*. In this context *“them that believe not”* refers particularly to the unbelieving, rebellious house of Israel. The gift of tongues was a sign operative in that early church era as an indicator especially to the Jewish race that they as a people had been weighed in the balance and found

wanting, for they were again drawing the stroke of God upon themselves. This time through their rejection and murder of their promised Messiah. Therefore, as Jesus had proclaimed to the Jewish leaders in Matt. 22, the kingdom of God would be taken from Israel (for a time) and “*given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*” (Matt. 22:43). The church is that fruitful nation! And so it was this “*nation*” of the church bringing the sign of “*stammering lips and another tongue*”, assuring unbelieving Israel that again their doom was on the way. It’s the *why* of tongues folks. It’s why that particular, rather odd gift was given at Pentecost and throughout the early church era. And then came 70 A.D. when God again crushed and scattered His people to the four winds, as He had been warning through the gift. And then, just as Paul had indicated in chapter 13, the Spirit gift of tongues ceased. Because the purpose of the gift was no more with God’s judgment having fully fallen upon the Jewish nation. And of course history records how that sign gift did indeed cease from the early church. Only among the odd radical religious group throughout history can the continued practice of tongues be traced, groups such as the Montanists and Irvingites, Mormons, Catholics, and cultists. Are you listening? The “practice” of tongues continued, not the *gift* of

tongues. For the gift of tongues ceased with its purpose. When we understand the *why* of the gift, the *what* and *when* of it fall into place.

I fear that when Satan sets God's church to babbling and gibberish it's really a kind of subtle mockery of God for His hard dealing against the corrupting efforts of the evil one at the beginning, at Babel. It's Satan sending confusion and division into the ranks of God's people, even as God confused and scattered Satan's people and purpose there.

Thoughts on Prophets and Prophecy

The gift of prophecy is the God-given ability to relate God's revelation to man, whether in presenting what is newly revealed or in explaining and applying what has already been revealed. It was an important spiritual gift in the days of the early church, that gift through which the Lord conveyed His Bible to His people. But once the New Testament (and therefore the entire Book of God's revelation to man) was completed and the last of the Apostles died, what is the further need for prophets and prophecy bringing new revelation to man? Once "*the foundation of the apostles and prophets*" (Eph. 2:20) had been laid, why would the Lord re-

lay the foundation? Ours is the age of the completed canon of Scripture. Therefore the Lord's focus has shifted from the gift of prophecy to the gifts of preaching and teaching (note in II Peter 2:1, *prophets* in their day but *teachers* in our own day). Through gifted pastors and teachers the Lord now feeds and leads His flock into an understanding and life application of His completed revelation already given. This shift from prophets laying the foundation to teachers building on that foundation is partly what the Lord meant when He prophesied in I Cor. 13:8-10 that the gift of prophecy, with supernatural knowledge, would pass away when the "*perfect*" or completed had come. And then God sealed the completed Book with a grave warning to any who would presume to add to His revelation with any further bogus "prophecies" (Rev. 22:18). No more is there need for a prophet of God in our present day, and therefore there are no true prophets of the true God today. I'm afraid all who claim to be such are deceived and deceivers. May all who are the Lord's and eager to please Him earnestly seek to understand and apply all that has already been revealed to us by the Lord through His true prophets of old, and leave off their intrigue with all else.

Class 17 – I Corinthians 14:23-40

In review of our last class;

14:1-5 – Tongues vs. Prophecy – A gift like prophesying is more to be sought than the gift of tongues, because speaking in a tongue doesn't speak to men at all whereas prophesying speaks to the understanding and benefit of all.

14:6-19 – Tongues Must Be Interpreted – What could be the value of sounds offering neither recognition nor communication? Simple logic insists that for a message to benefit others it must be delivered through intelligible speech.

14:20-22 – “*Tongues are for a Sign*” – The reason for this gift of such questionable value is its *sign* value. It was given as that token or herald of God's judgment, particularly upon the rejecting Jewish nation after they murdered their Messiah. This must surely be part of the reason why the preaching at Pentecost resulted in such widespread repentance among the devout Jews gathered there for the feast.

14:23-25 – Effects in the Church

14:23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?

Paul now relates the potential effects upon the unsaved visiting their church services.

Vs. 23 – “*And all speak with tongues*” – If the initial church experience of one who is unaware of the issues should be to walk in on the confusion of all babbling away together in tongues they might easily take the church for a collection of assorted *nuts!* Not only could they find no benefit there, but they might in fact conclude that the church was no place where sane people could find any kind of help.

The implication is that this was the nature of their services there at Corinth, with the unrestrained clamour of all speaking in tongues at the same time, all trying to be heard, both men and women together, like the honking hubbub of a flock of geese. And if you listen carefully you might hear Satan having a good belly laugh in the wings. It’s Paul the apostle of God who states it clearly here, that this *would not be a good thing!* This is not the way God meant for His church. And yet this is the

14:24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:

14:25 And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

very sort of thing happening out there within too many Christian circles today. It's Paul who said it first in seeking to lead God's church away from such crude abuse of God's things.

Vs. 24-25 – *“But if all prophesy”* – By the context we understand that Paul does not mean all speaking a message at the same time here, but *“one by one”* (vs. 31) those gathered given opportunity to express what they've found from God through their own searching and study.

“He is convinced of all, he is judged of all” – The result of that approach, the exercise of that better gift, is not only that the saved are edified and exhorted and comforted, but the Spirit is able to take the words spoken and through them examine and expose and convict the heart of the unsaved hearer as well. How many thousands of thousands have benefitted over the centuries through the preaching of gifted saints. Through the exercise of

14:26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

this supremely useful gift the sin of the hearer is discovered and exposed to himself. The Spirit of God joins as well to press the sinner's soul with strong conviction, with a keen sense of his condemnation before God (Jn. 16:8; Acts 24:25). The hearer is then moved to earnestly ask "*What shall we do*" and is led to cry to God for mercy (Acts 2:37ff; 16:30). And so cleansing and forgiveness and life eternal are found in Jesus Christ! Praise God for the surpassing usefulness of His gifts exercised among men!

"He will worship God" – Though that unsaved one entered the assembly as an unbeliever, unaware of his condemnation before God, yet he becomes a true believer and worshipper through the proper use of the Spirit's gifts within the church assembly.

14:26-35 – Proper Church Order

Paul now begins to more pointedly direct in leading this congregation away from any tendency to

confusion in their assemblies. All that is done must be done “*unto edifying*” (vs. 26) and “*decently and in order*” (vs. 40).

Vs. 26 – “*How is it then, brethren?*” – Some take this verse to be a description of the confused way of the Corinthian services, which Paul was seeking to correct. But Paul began with a similar statement in vs. 15 and then laid out the correct way in which he would proceed. More likely we have here a summary of the orderly way in which their church services were to be conducted. In turn, participants were to suggest maybe a psalm or hymn of praise to sing together, and then perhaps some word of teaching would be given by another, and then maybe a message in a tongue spoken with the interpretation following, and then perhaps the expression of something revealed to another. However we read this verse, the primary principle, stated so many times and ways throughout this portion, is made plain; that all should be “*done unto edifying*”. Compare vs. 3, 4, 5, 6, 17.

Vs. 27-28 – “*If any man speak in an unknown tongue . . .*” – Now practical guidance is given toward the correction of abuses in the exercise of tongues-speaking, a main thrust of this entire chapter. If some wished to speak in a tongue in any

14:27 If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.

14:28 But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

given church service it must only be two or three at the most. And these were not to speak all at once but only in an orderly fashion, each taking their turn. The demand for such an orderly handling of the services implies an appointed leader of the assembly, who was granted the authority to ensure that Paul's instructions were not sidestepped or forgotten. If a 4th or 5th individual wished to speak in a tongue or if several wished to speak at the same time they were to be deemed out of line and duly stopped by those responsible. There were to be no impulsive seizures by "the Spirit", sending folks into uncontrolled, frenzied speech, losing all contact with reality and trampling the orderly progression of the service. Proper control was to be maintained at all times.

Many years ago I visited a Nazarene church for a while in southern Missouri. There was a certain fellow who would sit in the front row. And now and again during the service he would slowly stand with hand outstretched, head back, far-away gaze in his

eyes, as if gripped and borne along by the Spirit. And he would begin his brief interruption of whatever was happening in the service at the time, whether announcements or preaching or testimony or whatever. All must come to a stop until he finished his little monologue. Such a lordly feeling of control I suspect.

“And let one interpret” – “Interpret”, not interrupt! There must be one to interpret or *there was to be no tongues-speaking!* Again, all taking place and being said must contribute toward the benefit of all. And by the command to *“keep silence”* in the absence of an interpreter Paul does not allow even for muttering in subdued tones. They were to keep their mystery message to themselves. Paul said *“silence”*. Neither were they to be evidently floating about in their own private mesmerism while the service carried on. All are to be a part of what is taking place, *“that all may learn, and all may be comforted”*. They may speak briefly to God, but not with a prolonged, glazed-over absence. None are to be there with a subtle purpose to put their spiritual prowess on display.

So understand it clearly. No audible speaking in tongues was to take place in public assemblies without the meaning made available to all. Apply

14:29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

14:30 If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.

Paul's instructions here and the sham of most of what is called tongues today becomes immediately apparent.

Vs. 29-30 – *“Let the prophets speak two or three”* – The same rule of limitation applied to the preaching as well, lest the service find no end and become tiresome. Rather than a single sermon, two or three brief messages from the Word would be given.

“And let the other judge” – The word of no preacher or teacher is to be blindly received but every word is to be carefully examined to ascertain whether it is true to the Word of God. All those listening must listen with the ear of the Berean Christian, who *“received the word with all readiness of mind”*, and yet *“searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so”* (Acts 17:11).

Vs. 30 – There was to be a common courtesy among them. There must be a readiness to give the floor to another who had something further to say or to add

14:31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.
14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

to what was being taught.

Vs. 31 – *“For ye may all prophesy one by one”* – Paul is not talking about all speaking in the same service, for he has already made the point that only two or three at each service were to speak. But all who were gifted and qualified to speak must have the chance to relate what they had learned from the Spirit toward the growth and comfort of all. It must be recognized that not all are so gifted to effectively relate the meaning of God’s words. And others may be unqualified as teachers in the public setting for other reasons. The necessity of such limitations is assumed.

Vs. 32 – *“And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets”* – This was likely spoken in response to what was happening there. Remember their religious environment of Gentiles *“carried away”* in worship (12:2). Yet at no point in the exercise of any gift of God’s Spirit is one at a loss of personal control. To be filled with the Spirit is to

14:33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

14:34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

know greatest self-control. Therefore the real possibility of the orderly way of conduct Paul here describes. And therefore the ready ability for one to wait his turn or be silent while another speaks, or even to wait to speak at the next meeting. If it is a people truly moved by God's Spirit and exercising the Spirit's gifts according to the Spirit's way then there will be no impulsive, anxious treading over each other in the conduct of public meetings. And the degree to which there is pulsating pandemonium in the services, to the same degree it is *not* the Spirit of God moving the happenings there. Speaking of this control Clark said, "This distinguishes God's prophets from the uncontrolled impulses of the heathen prophets and sibyls".

Vs. 33 – *"For God is not the author of confusion"* – God's true work in a soul, as in a church, will lead to stability and restfulness rather than to the tumult of restless disorder. This is to be the way for all churches and for all time. Peace is a work of the

14:35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

Spirit (Gal. 5:22; James 3:17), while confusion is the result of self-service.

Vs. 34-35 – “*Let your women keep silence in the churches*” – It’s an interesting couple of verses we come to now, stirring much debate over the particular meaning and way they are to be applied. Some simply dismiss Paul’s words here as applicable to the situation in Corinth but having little to do with our modern church scene. But such a response comes only of the desire to accommodate the Bible to our own wishes or current religious fashion. Some points to consider;

- The command for the silence of women within church services is an expression of their submission. In I Tim. 2:11 Paul also ties the subjection of women with their silence.
- Paul speaks here of church in the sense of the public services, not as in the church building. Women may have ministry speaking roles within the church, for we’re told in 11:5 that with the proper head

covering they may be involved in praying and prophesying. But any teaching or leadership role of women over men in the church is disallowed (II Tim. 2:12). Consider the cults begun by misguided women teaching doctrine (Christian Science, 7th Day Adventism, etc.).

- The larger context in these chapters is the matter of spiritual gifts (12-14). Here in chap. 14 comparison is particularly made between the speaking gifts of tongues and prophesying. This point is prominent both before and after these verses. More particularly the silence required in certain situations in vs. 28 & 30 refers to refraining from the exercise of spiritual gifts involving speech. Though such men might still give a testimony or lead in prayer their silence related to the exercise of their speaking gift.

Thus the main point here seems to be against woman exercising their spiritual gifts within the context of public church services, for this would constitute teaching. Even questions (and testimonies) can be used as a subtle pretence for teaching and so these too are disallowed. This is purely a question of involvement in the public services. This does not exclude women from all forms of gifting and ministry. Compare how

effective an evangelist the woman of Sychar in Jn. 4, even among the men of her city. Compare how useful the instruction of both Aquila and Priscilla in setting Apollos straight in his beliefs (Acts 18:26). The work of women in the Lord's ministry is no less important than that of men, but it tends to take place more behind the scenes in helping and support type roles. Godly women were active in the days of Christ's ministry, but more behind the scenes, while the disciples were the more visible followers and then leaders. It is never a question of lesser abilities in women, but only of calling, of God-appointed headship. "*Adam was first formed, and then Eve*" as that helper perfectly fitted to him (I Tim. 2:13).

"*As also saith the law*" – This probably refers to the concept of submission first spoken in God's curse upon the woman in Gen. 3:16.

However far we apply this prohibition, there can be no doubt that the exercise of verbal gifts such as tongues and prophesying *are not for the use of women in the public services!* Yet it's interesting to trace the very prominent role women have played in the development of the modern tongues movement over the past century, from the time it began with Agnes Ozman, at Parham's Bethel Bible School in

*14:36 What? came the word of God out from you? or
came it unto you only?*

Topeka, Kansas.

14:36-40 – Confirmatory Comments

It's clear that Paul was expecting resistance in the things he had written, especially in this 14th chapter. And so he ended his discussion of the gifts with stout words of challenge to any who might balk, affirming the authority and therefore the binding nature of his words upon the church.

Vs. 36 – “*Came the word of God out from you?*” – Anticipating among them some refusal to follow, Paul asks if they could make any claim to be the source of God’s Book of instruction for Christian life and service. Could they therefore proclaim themselves free to use it or define it or interpret it as they pleased?

“*Came it unto you only?*” – Was Paul especially picking on these believers? Or was it not true that every other child of God was called upon to live according to the same?

*14:37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or
spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I
write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.
14:38 But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.*

Vs. 37 – Paul was confident that all who were truly spiritual or with a genuine gifting to prophesy would recognize his words as from God. Now this is a very interesting statement indeed. Don't miss the obvious assumption here. The Apostle Paul knew, not only that his writing was inspired of God, but that there would be some within the churches of that day gifted of the Spirit to recognize the same. God affirms here that there would be men spiritually equipped to sift among the writings of men and to discern those words or writings truly of God. This vital work was accomplished through the Spirit's gifting, leaving God's church with His true Book, encompassing the correct writings and discarding the rest.

Vs. 38 – *“Let him be ignorant”* – Paul's words are rather severe in these concluding comments (11:16). All who in their wilful ignorance refuse to acknowledge his words as from God are consigned to the ignorance they have chosen for themselves. Paul would waste no more words on stubborn

14:39 *Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and
forbid not to speak with tongues.*
14:40 *Let all things be done decently and in order.*

rejecters, but handed them over to God for His just dealing. Compare 5:5. It's not that Paul no longer cared or prayed for them, but there was no more he could do for such folks.

Vs. 39 – “*Covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak in tongues*” – In summary of one of Paul's main thrusts throughout this chapter, he spoke both positively of that which they should pursue and negatively of that which they should not hinder others to pursue. In that day the gift of tongues was viable though less valuable. And then a few decades later came the end to which tongues pointed, bringing to an end the need of the pointer or sign.

Vs. 40 – “*Let all things be done decently and in order*” – Now in summary of another of his main points of this portion, Paul left them with a closing command in this matter of the way of their conduct in public services. Behind “*decently*” is a word suggesting good form or that which is becoming or proper, that which would not provide unbelievers with cause to

find fault. In the word “*order*” we find the contrast of the “*confusion*” of vs. 33.

Summary Thoughts on Tongues

Tongues-speaking as a supernatural gift is mentioned in the Bible only in Acts 2, 10, 19, and here in I Cor. 12-14. We may find it elsewhere in the Bible only through devious methods of desperation. Though a rather showy gift, it was never one of the highest value from the beginning. The prominence of tongues in this problem church of Corinth speaks nothing to the credit of the gift. It was never meant to be received by all as a sign of Spirit baptism, as some believe. It was given as a sign of God’s judgment upon the Jewish nation. The gift ceased as predicted when its purpose was fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem and scattering of the Jews, beginning in 70 A.D.

“But now is Christ
risen from the dead,
and become the firstfruits
of them that slept”

(1 Cor. 15:20)

Class 18 – I Corinthians 15:1-28

15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

Paul turns now to a new thought in chapter 15, his final main theme in this epistle. It seems he reserved his most important concern for last in dealing with the troubled church at Corinth. For some among the believers there held the view that “*there is no resurrection from the dead*” (vs. 12). Praise God for those who had fallen into such error there! For their doubts drew from God’s apostle this most wonderful discourse on the resurrection in all the Word of God.

Paul begins by displaying the true and essential nature of Christ’s resurrection. This he then holds up as the assurance that all who are His shall be raised to life as well.

15:1-4 – Paul’s Gospel

Vs. 1 – “*I declare unto you the gospel*” – Paul holds

*15:2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory
what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in
vain.*

up before them the gospel message he had brought to them at the first, the very same message they had believed and received to the salvation of their souls and in which they still stood firm in their faith. As we've often seen and considered, when it's genuine faith in Christ it stands firm against the most bewildering assaults life might throw at us. What Job faced was extreme to the max! And the worst of it was that he just didn't understand why. Yet his resolve concerning his God never wavered. Though the Lord should even take his life yet still his faithful trust would remain, still he would worship his God. Because his was a genuine faith and a soul truly redeemed.

Vs. 2 – *“If ye keep in memory what I preached unto you”* – Behind the phrase *“keep in memory”* here (KJV) is the Greek verb meaning to hold fast or keep firm possession. They were indeed saved if they were holding firmly to the gospel message Paul preached. For again, the endurance of faith proves the reality of faith. Compare Col. 1:23. Remember those crucial verb tenses in Heb. 3:6 & 14.

15:3 *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;*
15:4 *And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:*

“Unless ye have believed in vain” – This suggestion is perhaps a bit tongue-in-cheek as Paul hints at the direction in which he was headed. For he will just now challenge the views of those doubting the resurrection, suggesting that if Jesus is not risen from the dead then *“your faith is also vain”*, and all who have believed on Him are yet in their sins (vs. 14, 17). *“Unless of course it’s all for nothing anyway”*, is what Paul seems to imply here.

Vs. 3-4 – *“That which I also received”* – Remember Paul’s point so strongly made in Galatians 1 & 2, that his gospel was not received *“of men, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ”* (1:11-12). He speaks here of what he received from God (11:23).

The basic elements of the gospel message Paul now summarizes;

- Jesus died for our sins – Remember *“Christ crucified”* as the essential element in Paul’s

15:5 *And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:*

preaching (chap. 1-2).

- Jesus was buried – Displaying His condition of actual death. His soul actually joined the dead (Ps. 16:10).
- Jesus rose again the third day – The Greek verb here is in the perfect tense, suggesting effects continuing to the present. He is in a state of having been raised.

“According to the Scriptures” – By *“the Scriptures”* Paul would likely have been referring only to the O.T. at that point. Both Christ’s death and resurrection can be traced there; His death in portions such as Ps. 22 & Isa. 53:1-9 and His resurrection in Ps. 16:10 & Isa. 53:10. Even Christ’s resurrection on the third day is alluded to in Jonah’s experience in the fish.

15:5-8 – Resurrection Witnesses

In these next few verses Paul lays out an array of credible witnesses to the risen Christ.

15:6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

Vs. 5 – *“He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve”* – Again, Cephas is the Aramaic form of Peter’s name. On the day of His resurrection Jesus appeared to Peter at some point before revealing Himself to the two on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:34). He then appeared later that evening to all gathered in the upper room (Lk. 24:36ff). *“The twelve”* is a term referring to Christ’s disciples, even though both Judas and Thomas were absent in that first appearance of the risen Christ to all.

Vs. 6 – *“Above five hundred brethren at once”* – The circumstances of this event are uncertain. Perhaps it took place on that mountain in Galilee where Jesus met with his disciples and gave them the great commission (Matt. 28:7, 10, 16). Paul was aware of the fact that most of those who had seen Jesus in that appearance were still alive as he wrote. Thus the truth of it could still be amply affirmed with many then living.

Vs. 7 – *“He was seen of James”* – This apparently was James the half-brother of Jesus and the writer

15:7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

15:8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

of the N.T. book of James. Though Christ's siblings did not believe on Him during His life (Jn. 7:5) this apparently changed after His death and resurrection (Acts 1:14).

Vs. 8 – “*Last of all He was seen of me*” – We have the repeated record in Acts (chap. 9, 22, 26) of Paul's meeting with the risen and ascended Lord on the Damascus road. Paul was saved and transformed there and sent into the service of his Saviour and never looked back.

“*As one born out of due time*” – Paul seems to make the point here that his new birth was not as timely or as early as it might better have been. Had he been saved much sooner he would never have so humiliated himself in the intensity of his earnest persecution of believers. How many of us in Christ wish the same, that we might have found Him or chose to live for Him much sooner in life. It's never too late to turn to Jesus or to present our life to

15:9 *For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

Him for service as “*a living sacrifice*”. Yet as well, the time is never more right than *right now!* The sooner we put ourselves right with Him the more sorrow we spare ourselves on the other side of commitment.

15:9-11 – God’s Appointed Servant

This thought now turns this servant of the Lord to God’s great grace in appointing such an unworthy one to His service.

Vs. 9 – “*For I am the least of the apostles*” – Paul saw himself as inferior to all other servants, considering himself unworthy even of the title “apostle”. He never got over what a shameful fool he had been in the days of his unbelief. Notice that this man of God did not feel compelled to hide his shame or put it behind him. Having settled it with God, Paul speaks openly about his past disgrace. He never forgot what God had saved him from, allowing this always to send his heart to praise. He was not a man with high *self*-esteem, but with the

15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

very highest possible God-esteem. He was not a man with *self*-confidence, but only with abounding God-confidence.

Vs. 10 – “*By the grace of God I am what I am*” – Three times God’s grace features in this verse. Paul lived in the lap of God’s exceeding grace. He earned nothing, he received all. He claimed nothing as from himself, but all from his Saviour. He was not down and negative due to his own past failings, though so intensely aware of them. He was up and positive because his eyes were ever fixed on God. It’s the answer to the heartaches of selfishness in which the world lives and moves. “*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee*” (Isa. 26:3).

“*And His grace . . . was not in vain*” – It was not for nothing that the Lord saved Paul. That act of God’s grace did not result in a fruitless life, for Paul had poured himself into the Lord’s work like few others in history. He was both fully equipped by the Lord

*15:11 Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach,
and so ye believed.*

and fully motivated for the Lord. Yet even in his intense labours Paul attributed no glory to himself. It was God working in and through him, *“both to will and to do of His good pleasure”* as Paul walked in the light. He knew it was a matter of his own decisions and doing, yet he could not rightly say that it was really his doing but the Lord living out His grace through the man. Compare Eph. 3:7, where Paul speaks of being *“made a minister”* not only through *“the gift of the grace of God”* but *“by the effectual working of His power”* as well. The appointing, gifting, and empowering were all from God.

Vs. 11 – *“So we preach, and so ye believed”* – Returning to his theme of Christ’s resurrection and all those able to bear witness to it, all witnesses agreed with the truth of the risen Christ they were proclaiming. Even so the believers there at Corinth had believed the truth of the Saviour’s death, burial, and resurrection.

15:12-19 – If No Resurrection

15:12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?

Vs. 12 – *“How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?”* – If the risen Christ is affirmed and believed everywhere by all the saints then how could some there dare to doubt? There can be no question on this score. Such doubts were likely a mingling of pagan views into Christian beliefs as well. Perhaps it stemmed from the teachings of the Sadducees who *“say there is no resurrection”* (Mk. 12:18; Acts 4:1-2), this arising through the Jewish element among the believers there at Corinth. Perhaps it arose from the views of the Epicureans who didn’t believe in life after death, arising from the Gentile side. The source is not given for it little mattered where the error came from, only that it was a view festering among them, needing to be lanced. For it was a rot developing at the very heart of Christian belief.

Vs. 13 – *“Then is Christ not risen”* – The obvious conclusion would be that even Jesus Christ cannot be risen if there is no such thing as resurrection from the dead. We must apply the principle evenly. Either the possibility of resurrection exists or it

15:13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:
15:14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

does not. And if not, then Christ's resurrection is excluded by the same ban. Compare the same in vs. 16.

Vs. 14 – “*And if Christ be not risen . . .*” – If there is no risen Christ then there are further obvious conclusions;

- He must still be dead.
- All preaching therefore that affirms a living Christ could only be an empty, useless endeavour. A lot of good men were wasting their lives.
- All faith placed in a dead man is just as empty and useless. If death was Christ's end then so it must be ours as well. If He had no strength to overcome death then how could *we* ever hope to do so? If that One who claimed to be “*the resurrection and the life*” is dead and gone then what could He really be but a fraud?

*15:15 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God;
because we have testified of God that he raised up
Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead
rise not.
15:16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:*

The very core of Christianity is Christ. And if Christ be rotten then the Christian religion is rotten from the core.

Vs. 15 – “*Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God*” – In proclaiming that God had raised Christ, Paul and his associates would be found to be nothing but peddlers of lies, making outlandish claims which simply are not true. It would show them up as cheap and silly fools, Christian charlatans, and all of those many hundreds of witnesses of which Paul spoke must also be part of the same scam. And to what purpose?

Vs. 17 – “*Ye are yet in your sins*” – As the statement of vs. 16 is essentially a repeat of vs. 13, so the first part of vs. 17 can be found in vs. 14 as well. In the Greek differing words are translated “*vain*” in vs. 14 & 17. In vs. 14 it’s vain in the sense of empty, pointing out the hollowness of such faith. In vs. 17 it’s vain in the sense of aimless, pointing to an utter hopelessness of such faith coming to any results.

*15:17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.
15:18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.*

As one writer suggested, it would be like chasing the wind or shooting at stars or pursuing your shadow. Such a faith, devoid of any worth, could not justify or cleanse anyone! Such a purposeless faith could only leave one still stained and condemned, still fully responsible before God for sin.

Vs. 18 – *“They also which are fallen asleep in Jesus”* – This is a way Paul commonly referred to those dead in Christ, implying of course that there is still more living in store for them. Now chasing things through to their ultimate, unthinkable conclusions, it must be admitted then that beyond only impact upon the living, such a useless faith would leave the believing dead without hope for eternal life as well! *How could the news possibly be worse?!*

Note the implication here. Either to have eternal life or to perish are the only existing options after this life. It becomes evident that no probation-like purgatory exists, does it not? If faith in a risen

15:19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

15:20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

Saviour cannot take us to glory then it can only leave us to perish.

Vs. 19 – “*We are of all men most miserable*” – If our faith in Christ were actually quite useless, only to leave us confounded upon leaving this life, then all of what we’ve endured and denied ourselves for Christ here would be for nothing as well. We of all men would be the most pitiable specimens, for we would have lived and died in delusion, only to face eternal destruction!

15:20-28 – Christ’s Resurrection and Reign

Vs. 20 – “*But now is Christ risen from the dead*” – Paul’s “*But now*” here is a key turning point in his argument. From the lowest pit of hopeless despair he now leads out and up to the heights of the triumph that is ours in Christ. The truth of it and proof of it is that Jesus Christ *is indeed risen* from the dead! And with His resurrection He has become “*the firstfruits*” of all those who sleep in Jesus, His

15:21 *For since by man came death, by man came also
the resurrection of the dead.*
15:22 *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all
be made alive.*

own resurrection the guarantee of theirs and ours. In the O.T. era the firstfruits involved an initial sheaf or handful taken from the harvest and brought to the priest to be offered up to the Lord (Lev. 23:9-14). Even the day on which it was to be offered was specified by Moses. It was to be brought *“on the morrow after the Sabbath”*, i.e. on the first day of the week or Sunday. It was a token of thanksgiving for the harvest to come. It was an act of recognition that *all* of the blessing of the coming harvest was from the Lord. Indeed the miracle of seed buried in the soil sending up the sheaf of grain in the priest’s hand was a picture of resurrection, of those buried in death and yet at length springing forth to new life. Even so in Christ’s resurrection *“on the morrow after the Sabbath”* we see the token of the coming harvest of resurrected souls yet to rise through Him.

Vs. 21-22 – In Adam the entire race of man fell to sin, resulting in death (Rom. 5:12). Since it was through a man, through Adam, our representative

head, that our greatest enemy in death originated, therefore it was through a man, through Jesus Christ, that the undoing of that greatest enemy must come. The Son of God must become the Son of Man in order to accomplish the rescue of man from the clutches of death, making him a son of God.

“In Christ shall all be made alive” – Adam gave life to the race of man, yet with inherent death onboard, for everyone born in Adam as a man is dying. Yet everyone born *again* in Christ is living, having received newness of spiritual life, and will be raised at the last in physical life and immortality as well.

“If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness.

But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:10-11).

The *“all made alive”* here cannot refer to the entire race of man as some take it, but to all who are *“in Christ”*. The Bible does not teach universal salvation, for only those who choose to believe on Christ will not perish but have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16).

15:23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

Vs. 23-28 – Paul now gives a general order of resurrection and end time events, the results then ranging off into eternity;

- *“Christ the firstfruits”* of resurrection.
- Then *“they that are Christ’s at His coming”* – Again, notice that only those *“that are Christ’s”*, who belong to Him, will be resurrected to life. All the saved will be resurrected, their bodies raised immortal to join with their souls in order to enter Christ’s earthly kingdom *“at His coming”* or return (Rev. 19). This resurrection of the saved will be in two phases;
 - The church saints resurrected and removed from earth in the Rapture before the final 7-year Tribulation period.
 - All the rest of the redeemed of all time, from before the church age and from the Tribulation period will then be raised at the time of Christ’s return to

15:24 *Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered
up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall
have put down all rule and all authority and power.*
15:25 *For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies
under his feet.*
15:26 *The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.*

earth.

- “*Then cometh the end*” – This “*end*” is at the close of Christ’s earthly 1000-year kingdom anticipated and presented to Christ by the Father in Ps. 2 and described in Rev. 20. After Satan’s final efforts, and after the rest of the unsaved of earth (“lastfruits”) have revealed themselves (Rev. 20:7-10), and after the “*great white throne*” judgment and final condemnation of all the lost of all time to “*the lake of fire*” (Rev. 20:11-15), then at last Jesus will have finally and forever fully subdued every enemy of righteousness, with all of the six great purposes of Dan. 9:24 fully realized. Even death itself will then be cast at last to the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). And that will be the point when Jesus joyfully presents to the Father the finished job of man’s redemption, accomplished within the earthly kingdom promised from of old to and through the nation of Israel. And though Jesus will

15:27 For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.

15:28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

then gladly subject Himself to the Father at that time (vs. 28), yet the days of Christ's rule will not be finished at that "end". For prophecy affirms that He will reign forever (Isa. 9:7; Dan. 7:14; Rev. 11:15). From that point onward it shall be a co-reign of Father and Son.

Vs. 28 – "*That God may be all in all*" – The true and living God will at last be without rival in the hearts of every living soul then. Happy day! All of man's love and devotion will be His, and into eternity. There will not be the least vestige of sin or doubt in the way in that day to in any way hinder our direct relation with our God of grace. We in living union and communion with Him and He with us. Living in the glory of His light, never to be tempted away again. Happy prospect!

“O death,
where is thy sting?
O grave,
where is thy victory”

(1 Cor. 15:55)

Class 19 – I Corinthians 15:29-58

15:29 Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?

Some among the believers there at Corinth had come to doubt the reality of the resurrection and this likely due to the evil suggestion of false views around them. We've already seen evidence in this church of the same foul influences from the outside in their lean toward fornication (chap. 5-6) and their abuse of the Spirit's gifts (chap. 12). It is a danger ever with us as we live among the noxious notions of this sin-sick world. How continually we must be checking our views with all open-minded sincerity against the standard of God's Book.

15:29-34 – Dip Into Deviations

Paul now returns to the angle he left off in vs. 19, considering the results if there should be no resurrection.

Vs. 29 – *“Else what shall they do which are baptized*

for the dead” – All Bible commentators agree that this is a difficult verse to understand. The preposition behind “*for*” here generally means “on behalf of”. So this would seem to refer to the baptism of the living on behalf of or for the benefit of those who are dead. Differing interpretations are legion here, but some things are evident;

- The clear message throughout the Bible is that justification is what fits us for heaven, and this is by grace alone through faith alone.
- There is no saving effect in baptism, for baptism is merely the outward demonstration of our soul’s salvation. What advantage then in some sort of proxy baptism for those who are dead and no longer able to make a decision for Christ?
- There is no support for such a view or practice elsewhere in the Bible.
- There is no historical indication of such views or practices in the early church.

Don’t miss the pronoun flags. Paul speaks here of “*they . . . they*”, and then with a touch of emphasis in the Greek he returns to “*we*” in vs. 30. Thus he seems perhaps to refer to the beliefs of others outside the church. There is certainly a strong

tradition of baptismal regeneration filtering through the societies of men, even from ancient Babylon. According to Hislop in his “Two Babylons” this view arose out of the pagan exaltation of Noah as the father of the whole human race after the Flood. In the mystery religion of Babylon Noah was seen as having passed through the water from the old world or life into the new. He was thus referred to as the “twice-born” one. And so there arose the pagan notion of assuring an entrance into the next life through the waters of baptism, which view of course has found its way into the Christianized paganism of much of modern church belief. And if water baptism could assure entrance into the next world then this would naturally lead to the necessity of infant baptism, and might lead as well to the thought of the living being baptized for those who had never been baptized and now were dead and unable to do for themselves. Paul’s point here is perhaps that even those involved in such practices would be robbed of purpose and meaning if death was the end of it all anyway. And then perhaps continuing in this trend of deviant views, Paul now seems to simulate the despair of the “*men most miserable*” mentioned in vs. 19 who discover there is no resurrection after all.

Vs. 30-32 – “*Why stand we in jeopardy every hour?*”

*15:30 And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?
15:31 I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ
Jesus our Lord, I die daily.*

– Why are we then foolishly hazarding our lives? Why are we living in peril for your sakes such that it's like we die every day of our lives? Why do we face the venom of wicked men as if meeting wild beasts in the stadium? Surely it's all a waste then, to no real advantage! Hey, if we were smart we would rather recognize the brief window of this life as all we will ever have and we would wholly resolve to live it up, with the motto of the sensual man on our lips, *"Eat and drink; for tomorrow we die"* (Isa. 22:13). We would live for ourselves and our own pleasures just as far as we possibly can run with it in the hopeless acceptance of the ultimate end of our existence. It's where the notion of no resurrection leads.

Vs. 33 – *"Be not deceived"* – After the example of the father with his son in Proverbs, who led his boy close to the fire that he might look upon the alluring way of the crafty harlot, and then sharply pulled him back to reality with the clear vision of the devastating results of involvement with such (Prov. 7), even so Paul now yanks his listeners back from

*15:32 If after the manner of men I have fought with
beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead
rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.
15:33 Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt
good manners.*

such foolish tendencies suggested and fostered by the world's thinking through too close an association with their corrupt philosophies and fantasies. Paul even quotes here from the Greek author, Menander, a man of the world, in displaying the danger of allowing the world's follies to influence our thinking.

“Evil communications corrupt good manners” – *“Communication”* here (KJV) is in the sense of communion. “Evil companionships are corrupting things now virtuous”. Even a man of the world recognizes the danger of surrounding influences leading the virtuous away from their virtues. How much more should we. The truth of it is the dead in Christ will indeed be raised. And to spend and be spent for the cause of Christ is the most worthwhile cause in all of human experience. And to live for ourselves to the neglect of those still blind to the gospel is the very height of a wasted life, even though some may see it exactly the opposite, that to live for God and others in self-denial is to waste all

15:34 Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.

that we will ever have in our earthly existence.

Vs. 34 – *“Awake to righteousness, and sin not”* – “Snap out of your stupor! Leave off your subtle delusions brought on by your drinking of the world’s poison, as if stumbling about in a kind of drunkenness! Stop allowing the world to seduce you into their way, for it is the way of sin!”

“For some have not the knowledge of God” – Paul speaks here of the entire purpose for our remaining days on this earth; not to live for ourselves but to live for others ; not to lift up myself but to lift up a message, the gospel message (vs. 1-4), that avenue by which men might come to know God.

“I speak this to your shame” – How very strong Paul’s words, for they were holding far too loosely to a crucial aspect of *“the faith once delivered unto the saints”*. Compare 6:5. Sometimes it’s necessary to shame others in love if they would see the folly of their way. Paul was free to do so and undoubtedly was most effective in his approach because his love for these people was ever an evident thing (vs. 58; 1:4).

15:35 But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?

15:35-48 – The Resurrection Body

Now Paul turns his thoughts to the nature of the resurrection and of the resurrection body.

Vs. 35 – *“How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?”* – Judging by Paul’s response in the next verse, rather than sincerity in such questions he heard an attitude of disbelief. It’s never wrong to ask questions of the Lord. But it’s always wrong to cast faithless words of challenge at Him like Pilate’s *“What is truth?!”* expressing a heart of denial as in some there at Corinth. It seems some were forgetting the question put to Jeremiah by *“the God of all flesh”*, asking *“is there anything too hard for Me?”* (Jer. 32:27). Could it possibly be that the actual mechanics of the resurrection might be too hard for the God who made *“all flesh”* and all things? Paul dismisses all such doubts with *“Thou fool”*. What thoughtless questions!

Vs. 36-38 – *“That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die”* – God’s apostle illustrates

15:36 *Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die:*

15:37 *And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain:*

now with the plantings of the farmer in his fields, making the following points;

- There can be no life in the living plant *unless* and *until* the seed is planted in “death” (vs. 36). The seed must come to an end of itself in its original form before the resulting plant can live. Compare Jn. 12:24.
- The new plant is the quickened seed or the seed come alive (vs. 36). Though the plant is not *as* the seed, it *is* the seed. The plant arising from the seed is not some entirely new life form completely distinct from the seed but is the same life now appearing in a different form.
- Though the new plant *is* the quickened seed, the plant is not as the seed (vs. 37-38). Though it’s not actually a different life form, it does come in a different form of life. The seed has been radically changed in the plant. Even as the butterfly coming out of the

15:38 *But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him,
and to every seed his own body.*
15:39 *All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind
of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of
fishes, and another of birds.*

cocoon is the same being though very different from the caterpillar going into it.

So the seed must *die* before it can come forth as a plant, is the *same* in essence as the resulting plant, and yet is *very different* from the resulting plant. Continuity and yet distinction. Same entity, different quality. Even so it is with us in the resurrection. It will indeed be you and me who rise from the dead, though we will be changed, for “*this mortal must put on immortality*”. Even as it was still entirely Jesus who rose from the grave in a physical body that can eat and drink and bear scars, yet it’s a body that can appear and disappear.

Vs. 39 – “*All flesh is not the same flesh*” – Now Paul moves to the example of animal life with the suggestion that there are various types of fleshly matter as well. The physical make-up of human flesh is not the same as that of beasts, bass, birds, or bugs. God is not in any way limited in what He can do in the construction of living bodies.

15:40 *There are also celestial bodies, and bodies
terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and
the glory of the terrestrial is another.*
15:41 *There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of
the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one
star differeth from another star in glory.*
15:42 *So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown
in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:*

Vs. 40-41 – “*There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial*” – Shifting his focus higher, Paul suggests the same is true of heavenly bodies as opposed to earthly, for God is the Creator of all things material and immaterial. And each kind of matter or body possesses its own particular qualities or glories.

Vs. 42-44 – “*So also the resurrection of the dead*” – Even so it will be with those raised from death. Our corruptible bodies destined to perish and to be buried in the ground as if seeds will at last be raised very different kinds of bodies, those that will never more be perishable. Our imperfect bodies destined to the ugly mess of physical decay will be raised in glory, never to be so shamed again. For “*we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body*” (Phil. 3:21). Our feeble bodies, diminishing in strength and health and

15:43 *It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:*

15:44 *It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.*

15:45 *And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.*

vitality from the time we reached the peak of our physical prime, will be raised with eternal vigour. Never is the frailty of man more evident than when succumbing at last to death's relentless approach. But we will be raised to die no more! Our natural or soulish bodies so connected and distracted and given to the things of earthly life will be raised with fullest ability for focus upon things spiritual. As we now have a body fitted for temporary life here on earth so we will then have a body perfectly fitted for eternal life in God's presence.

Vs. 45-46 – Now it's the question of order on Paul's mind with the word "*first*" appearing 3 times in the next 3 verses. As suggested in the principle of sowing in vs. 36, there first must be the seed before there can follow the plant. As "*it is written*" in Gen. 2:7, Adam was the first man created by God. He was made of the dust of earth and so his first existence here, his more soulish life, was oriented

15:46 *Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.*

toward the earth, and the same for all born of Adam.

“The last Adam was made a quickening spirit” – Adam came giving natural life to every soul born into the human family. Yet *“in Adam all die”* because of his fall into sin (vs. 22). But Jesus came giving spiritual or resurrection life to every soul born again into God’s family, for *“in Christ shall all be made alive”* (vs. 22). His *“quickenings”* or making alive with spiritual life comes later to believers from among those with natural life from Adam. Eternal, resurrection life cannot be found within the natural life of Adam’s race. This life can only be received from *“the last Adam”*.

Vs. 46 – Again, first must come the natural life and then the spiritual life in their proper order. Even as Jesus said to Nicodemus in Jn. 3, *“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”* (vs. 5). One first must be born physically and then he must be *“born again”* spiritually or he will have no entrance into heaven.

15:47 *The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.*

15:48 *As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.*

Vs. 47-48 – “*The first man is of the earth, earthy*” – The Greek word behind “*earthy*” at its root refers to a pile of dirt. As the first man, the earthy, the one from the earth, returned to the earth in death (Gen. 3:19), so the second man, the heavenly, the One “*which cometh down from heaven*” (Jn. 6:33), returned to heaven. As the first at his very best could only lead his race into the earth (“*terrestrial*”) from which he came, so the second, “*the Lord from heaven*”, is able to lead His own to heaven (“*celestial*”) from whence He came. It all depends on who we’re connected with upon death. If we are connected only to the first Adam in whom we were born we will follow him to the grave. If however we have made connection to Christ, the 2nd Adam, we will instead follow Him to heaven and eternal life. To whom are *you* connected my friend?

15:49-58 – Hope and Victory in Christ

Paul turns in these next few verses to deal particularly with our *condition* in our resurrection

15:49 *And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.*
15:50 *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.*

bodies.

Vs. 49 – “*We shall also bear the image of the heavenly*” – As we have carried in life the appearance and nature of our earthly father, we being earthy as he, even so in our resurrection life we will possess the appearance and nature of our risen Saviour with a body like Christ’s. “*When He shall appear, we shall be like Him*” (I Jn. 3:2).

Vs. 50 – “*Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*” – There is a bodily consistency appropriate for life here on earth in this present life. And there is then a type of body appropriate for God’s place and presence. That which is subject to “*corruption*” in the sense of decay cannot exist in that place where nothing perishes or decays in any way. Nobody will waste away and die of old age in God’s presence or even in Christ’s earthly kingdom.

Vs. 51 – “*Behold, I show you a mystery*” – By “*mystery*” Paul does not refer to something that

15:51 *Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,*
15:52 *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*
15:53 *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

cannot be known, but to something previously unknown yet now revealed and available to our understanding.

“We shall not all sleep” – Not all believers will pass through death before being resurrected to life. Paul doesn’t necessarily say *“we”* as if he himself expected the Lord to come before his death, but *“we”* in the sense of Christ’s body, we the church. Christ’s return for His church is indeed imminent, an any-moment possibility.

“But we shall all be changed” – Though some believers will be living at the time of Christ’s return for His own and some will be dead in Christ, yet both living and dead will undergo a very definite change to another form at that time.

Vs. 52-53 – *“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye”* – The Greek word behind *“moment”* is *atomos*, from

15:54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

which we get our English word atom. In the smallest particle of time, in fact as quick as the flickering movement of an eye, this change will take place in us.

“At the last trump” – The Jews often used the sound of a trumpet to gather folks to some important event. The Lord as well will use the same. We read of the same event in I Thess. 4:13-18 as well. *“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”* (I Thess. 4:16-17). At that moment of the Lord’s return for His church, and with the predicted sounds of the announcement of it, all believers both dead and living will be changed from corruptible to incorruptible, from mortal to immortality, and shall be caught away after the manner of Enoch and Elijah in the Rapture of the church. It’s not that we

15:55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?
15:56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

will become entirely new and different beings for our identity will remain intact. It's not that our bodies will be destroyed and replaced with entirely different physical entities. We will be the same and yet celestial.

Vs. 54 – *“Death is swallowed up in victory”* – It was the prophet Isaiah who said this first (25:8), whom Paul quotes as he now turns to celebrate the victory that will be ours in the resurrection. With that glorious change the entire concept of decay and death will be conquered and removed in victorious immortality.

Vs. 55 – *“O death, where is thy sting”* – Now Paul draws words loosely from the prophet Hosea (13:14), as he again celebrates in anticipation of the victory that is ours. His words here come across as something of a taunt. As if death is given personhood and Paul looks with delight upon its shrivelling form, withering in weakness. Compare the heavenly celebrations in Rev. 19 with the forever fall of Babylon.

15:57 *But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Vs. 56 – *“The sting of death is sin”* – Adam’s choice to sin brought death into the world (Rom. 5:12), resulting in the entire race of man stung with the perishable poison of decay and death.

“The strength of sin is the law” – To sin is to fall short of God’s law. And to know the standard of God’s law is to know our sin in the same moment of realization. Only by God’s perfect standard of righteousness *“is the knowledge of sin”* (Rom. 3:20). Thus sin comes to life and vitality through the entrance of the law (Rom. 7:9). Sin takes occasion by the commandment to deceive us and work in us *“all manner of concupiscence”* (Rom. 7:8, 11).

Vs. 57 – *“But thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory”* – Through Christ’s finished work of redemption we have been plunged into victory, with both the corruptions of sin and the condemnations of the law removed. For Jesus has taken these *“out of the way, nailing it to His cross”* (Col. 2:14). From terror to triumph we have come. For we now live in that One;

15:58 *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

- Who carried our sins away in death.
- Who fulfilled all that the law required in our behalf.
- Who has risen the Victor over death to lead us to the same victory.
- Who *“hath done all things well”* in conquering all in which we were held fast.

“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ” (II Cor. 2:14).

Vs. 58 – *“Therefore my beloved brethren . . .”* – Now at last Paul would make application of these vital truths to our practice. What do these things mean to me today? Apart from filling our hearts with greatest hope, confidence, and courage, they serve to fill our days with earnest labours as well. Based upon the assured truth of the resurrection, *“be ye”*;

- *“Stedfast”* – Resolute in purpose.
- *“Unmoveable”* – Firmly persistent. Unshaken

from our resolve by any impure influences from the world.

- *“Always abounding in the work of the Lord”*
 - Not only active in His work but *“abounding”* in it.
 - Not only sometimes but *“always”*.
 - Not doing my own thing but *“the work of the Lord”*, fulfilling His purposes.
 - It is that work that is the Lord’s work, His heart, what He is actively involved in right now and in which He bids us to join Him.

Compare the undaunted Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 50 who set his *“face like a flint”* against all that might lead to discouragement (vs. 7), calling others to *“trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God”* (vs. 10).

“Forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” – There will be a resurrection. There will be life after this life. And there will be reward for faithful labours. What we do and endure for the Lord here will not be for nothing. But only *“in the Lord”*, only for those who have come to Him by faith and have found in Him their only refuge

from God's judgment upon sin.

“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ.”

Are you in?

“Watch ye,
stand fast in the faith,
quit you like men,
be strong”

(1 Cor. 16:13)

Class 20 – I Corinthians 16

16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.

Having brought the grand finale of his major focus on the resurrection in chap. 15, Paul now turns to practical instructions concerning church offerings and his travel plans and then some closing words of challenge.

16:1-4 – Directions for Collections

Vs. 1 – *“Now concerning the collection for the saints”* – This was obviously a subject of which Paul’s readers had previous knowledge. This *“collection for the saints”*, i.e. the saints at Jerusalem, featured prominently in Paul’s 3rd missionary journey. The same subject is underscored in his 2nd epistle to this church as well (II Cor. 8-9). And when writing to the church at Rome Paul spoke of *“a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem”*, a concern the churches of Macedonia and Achaia had expressed eager willingness to be a

part of (Rom. 15:26). Paul considered it a fair debt that the Gentile believers should so care for the needs of the believing Jews in Judea, *“for if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things”* (Rom. 15:27). When Paul was later attacked and accused by the Jews in Jerusalem he was there partly for the purpose of delivering this collection of Gentile offerings (Acts 24:17).

It's not stated why the Jerusalem believers struggled so financially but it's not hard to figure it out. Knowing the intensity of hatred among the Jews for the cause of Christ and those who followed Him, it was likely very difficult for a believer in Christ to do business among them. Hebrews 10 gives some indication of the abuse and fraud believers faced among the hostile Jews (vs. 32-34). As well, remember that God had warned His people long before through Moses of what He would do if they should turn from Him. He had very clearly told how He would dry up all their livelihood and well-being and ultimately scatter them to captivity (Deut. 28). With their murder of that One who *is* truth, their own Messiah, their promise-keeping God surely must have been tightening the economic screws on His rejecting people in those days, and all would feel the effects. All leading up to their

destruction and dispersion by Rome in 70 A.D. It could not have been a very easy place to live in those days.

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On the Side

Now consider the response of those godly believers still living under such extremely difficult conditions there in Judea and Jerusalem, even perhaps facing the possibility of starvation. What they endured there was for reasons that were no fault of their own for they had received God's Messiah. Did they sell up and leave in search of greener pastures and easier living? No! They stayed for the opportunity to reach their own people there in love. And did the Lord let them starve under such conditions? No. Their God saw to their needs, raising up financial support from the most unexpected source, even from among the hated Gentiles!

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God moved Paul to take up the cause of his needy brothers in Judea and to carry this need to the churches with which he was involved in Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia. And now the same instructions he had given to the churches of Galatia in central Asia Minor (modern Turkey) he gave to

16:2 *Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.*

the believers there at Corinth as well.

Vs. 2 – “*Upon the first day of the week*” – The 1st day, or Sunday, was the day the early church had begun to meet for fellowship, worship, instruction in God’s Word, and breaking of bread (Acts 20:7). This of course because it was the day Christ rose from death, that event so greatly highlighted in the previous chapter. Now Paul would add a suggestion of how they might further abound “*in the work of the Lord*” in view of our sure hope of resurrection with Him. He adds a dimension to their Sunday worship in his instruction here that they honour the Lord with their substance then as well. In so doing Paul gives good advice on how God’s children are to be involved in giving;

- It is to take place “*on the first day*” as an aspect of our worship of the Lord.
- It was something “*every one of you*” is to take part in. Every child of God should think it his duty to honour the Lord in this way, whether people of means or people of poverty, whether

man or woman, young or old. It's God who prospered us regardless of the measure of that prosperity. Therefore it's God we should honour with *"the firstfruits of all thine increase"* (Prov. 3:9-10).

- It is to be done as a regular habit rather than impulsively or according to emotion. Yet in our method we must never lose sight of what we're doing, why we're doing it, and for whom we so sacrifice.
- It is to be done proportionally. There is no set figure applicable to all, but *"as God hath prospered"* us, suggesting some percentage perhaps.

"That there be no gathering when I come" – Paul wanted no money drives when he got there, for he must attend to other things while there with them. He wished that all might be accumulated and ready for his arrival. But as well, he perhaps wanted them (us) to get into the habit of regular giving to the Lord's work.

Vs. 3-4 – Their own trusted representatives were to carry their gift. And these were to carry an official letter of appointment from the church as well. When it came to finances, especially funds folks

16:3 And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem.

16:4 And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me.

16:5 Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia.

have given in worship of the Lord, due to the dangers of suspicion and false accusation Paul exercised extreme caution to ensure all was done with integrity, and evidently so.

16:5-12 – Travel Plans

Having mentioned his plans to visit them in vs. 3, Paul now gives greater details on travel and visiting plans.

Vs. 5 – “*When I shall pass through Macedonia*” – Paul’s purpose was to do a preaching tour through the province of Macedonia to the north of Corinth. He then hoped to follow through to the south to spend some time with them. He did not want it to be just a quick visit but he wished to “*abide*” or remain with them for a while. Perhaps he might even stay with them through the winter until sea travel resumed in the spring, giving them the opportunity to then see him on his way with

*16:6 And it may be that I will abide, yea, and winter
with you, that ye may bring me on my journey
whithersoever I go.*

*16:7 For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to
tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit.*

sufficient provisions for his further travels from there.

Vs. 7 – “*For I will not see you now by the way*” – The phrase “*by the way*” means along the way or in passing. Again, he wanted to spend some time with them rather than making only a quick whistle stop. As we’ve seen, there were important issues to sort out among them, which Paul presumed would require some time. And he didn’t wish to go to them “*now*”, perhaps partly because if he did he would be forced to deal strongly with them as he had warned. He was likely hoping as well that this letter would iron out some of the difficulties, thus taking the edge off his approach with them.

It seems this trip Paul planned is what we find recorded in Acts 20. Due to the uproar stirred by Demetrius and the other silversmiths over the diminishing trade in Diana idols through the preaching of Christ there (Acts 19), Paul departed from Asia and passed through Macedonia giving

16:8 *But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost.*
16:9 *For a great door and effectual is opened unto me,*
and there are many adversaries.

“them much exhortation”. He then arrived in Greece, spending 3 months there before accompanying those who carried the combined gift of the churches to Jerusalem.

Vs. 8-9 – *“I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost”* – More specifically as to his plans, Paul purposed to remain there in ministry in Ephesus until the feast of Pentecost, which would fall in the middle of May. He would then spend the summer months in ministry throughout the province of Macedonia, arriving then in Corinth to spend the winter months there.

Another reason Paul did not wish to set out immediately was the opportunity of an open door then beckoning there in Asia. He does not give the details of what this involved, only that it was *“great”* and *“effectual”* and that there were *“many adversaries”*. By God’s grace Paul was going to stay there a bit longer and do his best to walk through that door! It was some wonderfully effective opening for ministry and Paul was a man with eyes

16:10 Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do.

open and heart yearning for every such golden opportunity. Perhaps it was the chance to teach “*daily in the school of one Tyranius . . . so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus*” (Acts 19:9-10). Perhaps it was the wonderful work of faith and repentance there at Ephesus among those “*which used curious arts*” or occult practices (Acts 19:17-19), for the Word of God was so mightily growing and prevailing in Asia in those days (vs. 20). This then gave rise to Satan’s counter effort through the silversmith uprising. In facing so great and so “*many adversaries*” Paul knew he was getting close to the dark heart of the enemy. This awareness likely contributed toward keeping him there as well. We can know that we’re living godly in Christ Jesus when we suffer persecution (II Tim. 3:12). We can know that we’ve touched a nerve of the evil one when we face his wrath through his people, particularly his false religious people.

Vs. 10 – “*Now if Timothy come*” – Paul had apparently sent Timothy across the Aegean to minister in his absence in the churches of

16:11 Let no man therefore despise him: but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him with the brethren.

Macedonia and then onward to Greece, preparing the way for Paul's coming. It's interesting that Paul felt the need to speak so strongly concerning the way they might handle Timothy there at Corinth, as if he feared his faithful assistant might actually suffer abuse among them. Timothy was then still young and apparently of a less dynamic nature than Paul. Perhaps he was the type proud and troubled folks like those at Corinth might eat for breakfast. Yet still Timothy would be there as Paul's representative and as Christ's servant and thus he was to be considered worthy of their respect.

Vs. 11 – *“Let no man therefore despise him”* – None were to think any smaller of Timothy than of the man he represented. Compare I Tim. 4:12. Even so none are wise to think less of any servant of the Lord than of the Lord he represents. Paul insisted that they see to the young man's needs and help him along his way, both while there with them and onward.

16:12 As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time.

Vs. 12 – “As touching our brother Apollos” – Paul had spoken to Apollos about going to Corinth to help with the maturing of the saints there, perhaps travelling over with those carrying this epistle, for Apollos had been involved in the early days of the church development there (Acts 18:27-19:1). But it seems he was not “*at all*” interested, certainly at that point. Reasons are not given for his disinterest. Perhaps it related to what he was then busy with there in Asia. Or perhaps it had more to do with the sizeable mess among the believers at Corinth.

Note how Paul was in no position of authority, displaying no religious hierarchy. Paul could strongly urge Apollos to such a response, but Apollos was his own man under the Lord.

16:13-18 – Final Encouragements

Having laid out his tentative plans and how they related to the church there, Paul now fired a battery

16:13 *Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men,
be strong.*

of concise commands relating to Christian living.

Vs. 13 – “*Watch ye*” – Be watching or watchful. Be on guard and ever aware of the divisive, destructive efforts of the evil one, who “*as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*” (I Pet. 5:8). Learn to be that way and stay that way. It will be for your own protection and the good of others as well. The very command here implies great dangers! There are so many deceivers of so many types out there in the wicked world. Somewhere between paranoia and blonde is a sharp, inquisitive awareness of all things that is not sceptical of everything. It’s an alertness that is willing to trust the counsel of those who have proven themselves trustworthy but that is not too quick to trust the motives of any man!

“*Stand fast in faith*” – Or perhaps “in the faith”, for there is a definite article here in the Greek behind the English. “The faith” is a common N.T. term referring to that body of truth “*which was once delivered unto the saints*” (Jude 3). Be ever strong to cling with all tenacity to the truth we’ve believed

and received through Christ and His apostles. God forbid that His words to the Galatian believers should ever become applicable to us when He exclaimed; *“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you unto another gospel . . . O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth”* (1:6; 3:1). There is a world of bewitchers out there who must be seen for what they are and withstood to the face, “Grievous wolves entering in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). We are wise to ever make it our habit to know God’s words, to seek His answers on issues, and to stand by them come what may, wherever such a stand might threaten to lead or leave us. Somewhere between compromise and a closed-mind is strength of conviction, that ability to weigh everything on the scale of God’s truth and not be led away captive with the *“silly women”* of II Tim. 3. It is that balanced ability to run everything through the filter of God’s eternal truth, straining out every impurity that does not belong in the pure wine of His word and will. It is out of love for the Lord and for His people *“which He hath purchased with His own blood”* that we must so stand. The Lord’s people mean everything to Him, adding the most weighty significance to our stand upon the truth for their sakes, unbending, uncompromising.

“Quit you like men” – Be manly in the conduct of your life in Christ. Be brave! How the evil one seeks to play upon that natural tendency in us to fear. We’re not wrong or weak to experience such feelings. We’re wrong when we allow them to cave in our courage and drive us from that field of service where God would have us be. We may be afraid to do or say things that need doing or saying, but do and say we must!

“Be strong” – The sense of the word here is “resolute”, unswayed, unswerved from our fixed purpose. We must ever remember that our primary mission is the winning of the lost and the feeding of God’s sheep. Don’t ever allow yourself to be subtly moved to some other mission. Never forget the simple facts;

- *Proclaiming* results in *hearing*
- *Hearing* results in *believing*.
- *Believing* results in *receiving*.
- And for one to receive salvation from God’s hand is to have all and abound as His own eternal child.

Be alert, convinced of the truth, *brave*, and *resolute* in your mission.

16:14 *Let all your things be done with charity.*

16:15 *I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,)*

Vs. 14 – “*Let all your things be done with charity*” – Lest vs. 13 appear too much the steely discipline, here’s the other side of successful Christian living, the side these at Corinth especially needed to hear and heed. Give yourself wholly to the very best for others. Conviction and courage we must have, “*but the greatest of these is love*”. It was the difference with David Livingstone. There was a loving respect and care in him for the African people that moved them to love him in return and walk the continent with him in loyal devotion. Thus, be alert, convinced, brave, and resolute, but ever loving in your active devotion to the very best for the other regardless of returns.

Vs. 15 – “*They have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints*” – It’s a stunning statement here concerning this man Stephanas and his family. They were people who had set themselves or devoted themselves or “*addicted themselves to the ministry*”, and ministry especially to “*the saints*” or believers. Their choice was not something forced

16:16 That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth.

16:17 I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied.

upon them but something from within “*themselves*”, a voluntary decision. All who are servants such as they on earth will be esteemed great in heaven (Matt. 23:11).

Vs. 16 – “*That ye submit yourselves unto such*” – In response to such sold-out service Paul now calls for a humility in us that is given to submission, that naturally leans that way. Pride makes one ungovernable and therefore useless in ministry. Pride drives wedges and creates divisions such as were so prevalent there among the believers at Corinth, spoiling the testimony of a unified ministry.

Vs. 17-18 – These men having come from Corinth were able to supply help and refreshment to Paul on behalf of their distant church. Compare Phil. 2:29-30.

“*Therefore acknowledge ye them that are such*” – Paul was full of praise for that calibre of men, fully

*16:18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours:
therefore acknowledge ye them that are such.
16:19 The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and
Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the
church that is in their house.*

insisting that the believers there recognize their character and the supreme value of their presence among them.

16:19-24 – Greetings

Vs. 19 – “*The churches of Asia salute you*” – The province of Asia was where Paul was then working, in spite of the postscript which put him in Philippi. The city of Ephesus was the main city of that province.

“*Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord*” – This couple of course found the Lord through Paul’s initial church-planting work there in Corinth. It was with them that Paul stayed when in Corinth, working in their tent-making business (Acts 18). If you recall, we found them in Rome in Paul’s closing greetings of the book of Romans. There as well mention was made of a church in their house (Rom. 16:3-5). Aquila & Pricilla had been exiled from Rome with the rest of their Jewish race by the Edict

*16:20 All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another
with an holy kiss.*

of Claudius Caesar in 52 A.D., ending up in Corinth. They were saved and discipled by Paul when he began the church in that city. They then went with Paul to Ephesus, staying behind as he moved on (Acts 18:18ff). They were still at Ephesus when Paul returned to his extensive ministry there (Acts 19), seemingly playing an important part in establishing the church there. Paul purposed to go to Rome in those days (Acts 19:21) and so we later find this couple in Rome, again with a church meeting *“in their house”*. It seems they devoted themselves to the pioneering work of getting churches going in key centres through the use of their home, and perhaps in anticipation of Paul’s coming.

Vs. 20 – *“Greet one another with an holy kiss”* – As we would shake hands or embrace, this *“holy kiss”* was a common Christian expression of mutual affection, a needful expression among so divided a people as these. This kiss of greeting is usually described as *“holy”*, as between brother and sister without any impure motives. Compare also Rom. 16:16; II Cor. 13:12; I Thess. 5:26; I Pet. 5:14.

*16:21 The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand.
16:22 If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him
be Anathema Maranatha.*

Though we may not follow the same particular custom the principle is plain. We must show warm affection for each other. And if we are not able to do this then we may know that there is something wrong in our own hearts.

Vs. 21 – *“The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand”* – As we often see at the end of Paul’s letters, at this point he took the pen from his secretary to whom he had been dictating and scribbled a few lines with his own hand. It was a form of signature to authenticate the writing as actually from *“me Paul”*.

Vs. 22 – *“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ”* – The Greek verb translated *“love”* here is *phileo*, that one expressing the idea of affection. “Anyone who has no affection for the Lord Jesus Christ let him be anathema”. *“Anathema”* refers to something devoted to destruction, as the Canaanites in the days of the conquest. Every soul capable of knowing and loving God who refuses to hold Jesus in highest honour and affection is dedicated to

16:23 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*
16:24 *My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

destruction! We cannot talk about “God” with the Muslim and think they have the same salvation we have found. They must receive and love Jesus Christ as God’s only answer for sin if they would be saved. We cannot talk with the Catholic of a Jesus who’s enthroned on the lap of the “Queen of Heaven” and think they’ve found what we have found. They must love and honour Jesus Christ as supreme above all, the “*one Mediator between God and men*”. We cannot speak with the Hindu of all roads leading to the same Supreme Being. They must renounce their pagan views and love Jesus Christ alone as the only way to eternal life, to the exclusion of every other imagined, lying way. Jesus is either the stepping stone or the crushing stone. It is upon the person of Jesus that every soul is either helped to an eternal heaven or hurled to an everlasting hell.

“*Maranatha*” – This word is made up of two Aramaic words meaning “the Lord comes” or “Lord come”. Paul’s point is that the coming of the Lord whom we love is near at hand.

Vs. 23-24 – *“My love be with you all”* – Though Paul had spoken so sharply within these chapters to the troubled saints there at Corinth yet still he longed for God’s grace to be with them, still he would have them to know his love for them. In fact he was only willing to speak the sometimes painful truth to them because he loved them.

When Paul took up the pen here at the close of his letter it was all about Jesus Christ, His name featuring 3 times in these last 3 verses. Remember how Paul began this epistle with the name of Christ in almost every verse of the opening verses. He began and ended on the same theme, He who is the alpha and omega, the first and last, the beginning and the end of everything worthwhile on this globe.

Maranatha!

