



“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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A Survey of the New Testament”

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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 giving to us 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 problems and 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*" (Gen. 50:20). 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 is 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 Corinthians 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, calling 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. This 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 message, 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 as

well, 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 fully 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 are more tolerant of evil than God is. Compare the church at Ephesus in Revelation 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;
 - o Applies to our relation to all others.
 - o 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 are 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 Proverbs 6:32.
- Because the Holy Spirit dwells within you (vs. 19).
- Because you are 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 are 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, and thus first choice (note vs. 1). Therefore 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 boyfriend/girlfriend up somewhere close to our need for air. The reality is that most folks are not gifted to be single, and there is 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 Proverbs 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;

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

Chapter 8-10 – Thoughts on Christian Liberty

Concerning foods (chapter 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). The answer is yes. Yet 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 Romans 12:17; II Corinthians 8:21.

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

Paul’s explanation (chapter 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” (1 Cor. 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 (chapter 3).
- Showmanship (sects, gifts), lawsuits, and inconsiderateness are answered by love.
- Living for selfish, sensual pleasure is answered by the intimacy and companionship of 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 are able to discern hints as to what is on his heart as he writes.

1:1-9 – Introduction

Vs. 1-3 – Greeting.

Vs. 1 – *“Paul, called to be an apostle”* – As we have discussed in our consideration of other N.T. epistles of Paul, it seems that when he was writing to deal with problems he would begin 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 step in and deal with the concerns these people were facing. The book of Proverbs (26:17) warns us away from

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.*

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. 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* do not 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*” – Do not 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 his 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 all who are sanctified and “*in Christ Jesus*”. Many are those inside the church but outside of Christ; inside the walls, even on the members 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 in the original language translated “church” expresses a similar idea, 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).

Note the great prominence of focus on the *lordship*

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;*

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, and one of his very profitable ways becomes evident here. Paul looked for *good* in others, even when it could have been so easy to allow the bad of 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 this known to them. Though he might have thought it enough that he was in fact loving them by correcting them, yet still he would *tell* them of his tender care for them. We usually overlook that part

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.*

I'm afraid. Paul was this way toward all. Only in his letter to the Galatian believers was this less visible, 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 tend to 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 the same in a Christian brother, can we not?

“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 will hear more on these gifts in chapters 12-14.

Vs. 8 – *“Who will also confirm you unto the end”* – To *“confirm”* is to ground or fix or establish. Those

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

who are truly in Christ are rooted in Him to the end. Again, it is about what *He* does, not what *we* do to the end. It is 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, one who is 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 this 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 the word schism, expressing the idea of something

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.

torn in two. Though it seems they were not split into separate churches as yet, they were certainly a church divided internally.

“That ye be perfectly joined together” – That being torn apart their schisms might be repaired. The word in the original Greek used here is the same used elsewhere of mending broken 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 and minds might be aligned with each other.

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 do not know from elsewhere in the N.T., 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 with them. He was making known the name of those who spoke to him, which could

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.*

only be by their permission. And these folks took their concern to someone responsible, one 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 began to turn up the heat in confronting their wrong he did not fail to call them *“my brethren”*. He was never aloof. He did not speak down to them, but as one among them. Again, it is 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 Kings 12). Confrontation is often necessary and sometimes appreciated, but never when coming from a high-and-mighty attitude.

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

Vs. 12 – *“Every one of you saith”* – This divisive, party spirit had spread through the whole church, affecting *“every one”* of them. There seems to be 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, a man particularly noted for his eloquence (Acts 18:24-19:1). Cephas or Peter may have appealed more to the Jewish Christians among them, he being the apostle to the circumcision (Galatians 2:7), though there is no record of Peter ever visiting Corinth. Those claiming Christ for their head perhaps wished 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 Jesus not one, and all who are His one in Him?

“Was Paul crucified for you?” – Could any mortal man do for you what Jesus has done in His sacrificial death on the cross?

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.*
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.*

“Were you baptized in the name of Paul?” – In whose name were you baptised? These are questions meant to turn the focus of these believers to where it should be. Jesus Christ is the great Champion, the only gathering point of every saved soul.

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 refused to have anything to do with helping to form any particular group or sect among them.

Vs. 17 – *“For Christ sent me not to baptize”* – It is not that Paul denied the importance of baptism here. His point was 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 (John 4:2). Even so it seems Paul left the

baptizing to his assistants. Then once the work had gotten going in a city the work of baptizing new believers would be 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, when it was really a nothing at all! We are saved by faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

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 Matthew 28 as well. Yet as we discover here Paul did not as a rule trouble himself with baptizing those who were

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.

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 Jesus Christ crucified, Paul would seek to turn no focus to himself but only to that great object of his preaching. He would have no part in the popularity contest happening there at Corinth.

1:18-31 – Right Focus – Jesus 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.

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 our English word “moron”. To those who are 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 often considered the work of morons, the preoccupation of those too dull or stupid to understand the sophistications of culture, that might deliver them from the folly of such superstitious beliefs. It is the stuff of fairy-tales, the interest of children, not of thinking people you might hear them say. It is not that the gospel is too high or too difficult for them to understand. It is too low for *“them that perish”* to consider worthy of their attention. It is too vulgar, too messy, too insulting of their self-opinion, too shackling and limiting of their freedom to enjoy sin.

“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 is the wonder-working *“power of God”!* Compare in Romans 1:16 the gospel as the *“power of God unto salvation”*, not

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

to all, but *“to every one that believes”*.

Vs. 19 – *“For it is written...”* – Paul introduces support for his point with a quote from Isaiah 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 quick to follow 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 the Almighty God for her defence. Compare Asa in II Chronicles 14 with Asa in II Chronicles 16, and the corresponding results. How often what is according to faith does not make good sense. It did not make sense for a man to leave his ground unplanted every 7th year if he expected to survive (Lev. 25). It does not 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 we can

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.

believe God for 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). Compare Psalm 37:1-2, 10, 35-36.

Vs. 21 – “*The world by wisdom knew not God*” – Consider further how very weak the wisdom of man. For in every age such “wisdom” 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 dependence upon the only true and living God. Compare the downward spiral with human wisdom in the lead in Romans 1.

“*The foolishness of preaching*” – This refers not so

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;*

much to the method of preaching, but to the message or content of what is proclaimed. 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, the message of the crucified and risen Saviour, the very heart of the gospel. We are called to preach Him in spite of rejection, for out of the mass of mockers some will be found honest and ready to humbly believe. It is a test of honesty and humility for the unsaved soul, whether he will accept the truth of his own sinful condition before God, and of the sacrifice of Jesus in his place. Jesus said, “*Every one that is of the truth hears My voice*” (John 18:37).

Vs. 22-23 – “*For the Jews require a sign*” – These reject the gospel because they are 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 “*the Jews*” would not/could not see it, for a crucified Christ indicates

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

weakness and seems a failure, this becoming for them a point of stumbling.

“The Greeks seek after wisdom” – The Greeks, representing all Gentiles, reject the gospel message because they are 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, requiring no intellect, learning, or unusual abilities. How very humbling to human pride! How could faith in a 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 in presuming to know the best way.

Vs. 24 – *“But unto them which are called...”* – To those who hear God’s call through His words and Spirit, and believe, all fits and falls into place. 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 freely justify

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:*

sinful man without compromising His standard of justice. 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. Such “wisdom”, together with human pride, 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.

Vs. 26 – *“Not many wise men...not many mighty”* – Not many from among those considered (or considering themselves) wise by the people of earth will find the answer in Jesus Christ; the great thinkers, clever comedians, noble rulers, critics,

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:

1:29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

etc. Not many from among those considered strong will ever see their need to 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 proud 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 of low degree*” (Luke 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

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.*

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.
- 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*”.
- Sanctification, as we grow in holiness through the power of the indwelling Spirit.

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!

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, would we not perhaps tend to question whether these were people who really know Jesus 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 have 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 may have resulted in an ugly atmosphere there, with verbal arguments, boisterous business meetings, written statements of position and rebuttals and such, seeking to prove the merits of one position or personality over

another. To this matter the apostle turned immediately following his opening greetings and thanks, speaking of the urgency of his concern. 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, less impressive 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 is a sifter, designed to weed out

those who come in pride, demanding that God fit His approach into their expectation of 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. He chose rather 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), but *God's* wisdom and *God's* working. 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 Jews 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 is it not 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. 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 man, 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

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.

human character, human abilities, human wisdom. But when our union in Christ is underscored, how much more easily we can get along with those on the other side of 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 the Lord.

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 is just that simple. And of course out of these basic truths comes a world of opportunity in a life transformed through faith in Jesus, leading on to godly 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, who is 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 the Old Testament (O.T.) 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. Again, 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 is why more compromising ministers and ministries often leave this aspect out of their preaching, or play 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. 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 apostle. No puppets, pageants, 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*" – 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 is portions like this that set us straight and offer proper adjustment to our focus. It certainly attracts greater interest from listeners if we are 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 or teaching or 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 hear and 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 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? Hear Paul as he makes clear to us that 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 stands 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. It just depends on who you are 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 attempts at 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 is not consistent with the wisdom of the world, Paul assures us that it does represent a form of wisdom,

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:

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 through His Word, the more His teaching and 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*”, and with all who love it (I John 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.

Vs. 7-8 – “*We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery*”

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.*

– 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 we see in Ephesians 3, “*mystery*” here refers to truths previously unrevealed or only dimly revealed, but now are 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).
- Gentiles included as “*fellowheirs, and of the same body*” (Eph. 3:6), enjoying all benefits in Jesus on an equal standing with Jewish

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.*

believers.

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 Isaiah 64:4. Before this gospel era man could not have even imagined what the God of grace had planned for mankind in Jesus Christ. Not only does Jesus bring to us things unseen and unheard of, but things utterly unthinkable in the splendour of God's abounding goodness.

Vs. 10-12 – *"But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit"* – Now with our great advantages of a

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.*

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 to us the ability to understand God's fullest revelation. 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 can we make sense of the things of God and wisdom of God and all that God has given us in Jesus Christ.

"That we might know" – Oh listen to this purpose statement folks! Why was the Spirit given in the very special way in which believers have now received Him? That we might know God! That we might comprehend more fully all of the wealth of

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.*

what has been “*freely given to us of God*”. God gives, and gives, and gives again, and He wants us to *fully know* of all of it! God reconciles unholy sinners to Himself in Jesus 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 of understanding He gives to all who seek and find Him. *Oh the wonder of His grace!*

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On the Side

Do not miss the obvious indications here concerning the nature of 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.
 - He is God.
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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.

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 transforming 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 is 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. The ears and eyes of the unsaved soul are not enough. He needs the “software” of the Spirit to be able to read the “file” of 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 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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2:15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.

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. 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 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 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...*

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

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 Isaiah 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 Jesus we are as much a mystery to the people of earth as is Jesus 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 did not 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.
- Involving truths still largely indiscernible by the unsaved world without the work of the Spirit.

In Jesus 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

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

present spiritual things with human wisdom can never work.

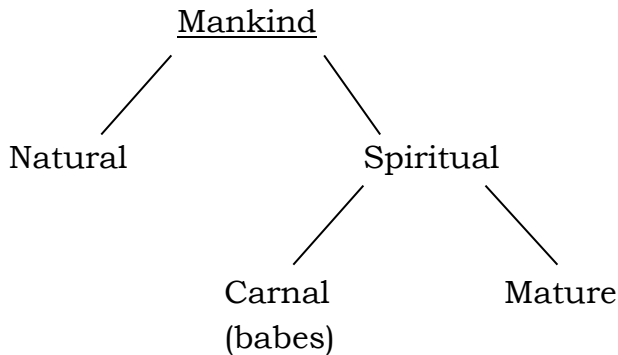
3:1-4 – Division is Carnal

At the end of chapter 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*” (John 3). The “*natural*” man cannot see God’s kingdom in the sense of ever entering into it, 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 many among 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 further

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.*

the meaning of his term “*as unto babes in Christ*”. While acknowledging that they were indeed “*in Christ*” Paul puts their spiritual maturity on the level of babies. These were not happy words! Though born into spiritual life, they were living for themselves after their own carnal interests rather than after the Lord’s interests, as babies do. Therefore the divisions among them. It is selfishness that causes divisions. It is baby Christians who cannot 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 Hebrews 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 is found, tending to form and further “*envying*,

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?*

and strife, and divisions” rather than resisting such 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. But only *baby* Christians can do this, those who are living for themselves rather than for their

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?*

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

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

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

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. The book of 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 many of these believers through to spiritual maturity, because maturity depends on 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. Ultimately God is the One who sends His various servants to a work according to His will.

“Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth” – The men on the ground are of small consequence. They are not the Master Farmer in any field of the Lord’s service. They are all merely the lowly field workers handling hoe and hosepipe,

*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.*

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 Lord's 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 was it so among their followers there at Corinth? 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” – Everyone who labours in the Lord's 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.

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”*, a field of His service. Do not miss the emphasis on the Owner here. Understand that it is no man's work

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.*

but “God’s”. 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 Corinthians 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 Timothy 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 did not hang around to continue the project, but others made themselves available to lay brick in building up the walls of that work. Paul does not 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 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.

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

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, for 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. 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 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. When that living message meets with faith in the heart of a hearer, together with the mighty working of Holy Spirit power within, the results are

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

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 those 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 squarely 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 Galatians 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, leading souls to the Saviour, and feeding God’s sheep with the truth of His words will count for eternity.

Such words as these send a shudder of warning through the ranks of all worthless religion as well, even those with a surface show of being based on the Bible, yet full of 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. 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”

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.

(I Kings 22). These types are still with us today. 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 such imposters build 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, where fire is used in separating out 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 wheat from the chaff, 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.

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

Compare 4:5 & Romans 2:16.

Vs. 14-15 – *“If any man’s work abide”* – Though a soul’s salvation is a free gift received from God by faith in Jesus Christ, yet rewards in Christ’s presence are a different story. These are available to God’s children through a *“man’s work”* performed out of a good and godly heart after coming to new life in Christ. Compare Ephesians 2:8-10 & Revelation 22:12. Compare Paul’s common reference to crowns of reward (9:25; II Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; I Peter 5:4; Revelation 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 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 in Revelation 18, not lost of salvation but of rewards. The warning is here, that we might be sure our lives and loves and labours are lined up where they should be, upon God’s way as given in His words.

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.*

“*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 perhaps be left completely razed, 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

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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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.*

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 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 that man handles His church. The idea is similar to that spoken over Israel in Genesis 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

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.

intensely important to the Lord! It is where Jesus is first seen in John's vision of Revelation 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 Numbers 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 suggests that we too are not immune to deception. Let the one who considers himself wise show himself to be 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

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

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 faced the Lord's stern rebuke in the end (Job 42:7-8), for they kindled His wrath against them by failing to speak "*of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job hath*". 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 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 the beginning 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

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;

own confusion.

Vs. 20 – Paul quotes now from Psalm 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 Ephesians 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 high-mindedness.

“For all things are yours” – Again, Paul rather turns our attention to the bigger picture, sending our thoughts above our petty squabbles 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.

*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.*

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

“But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psalm 37:11).

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

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

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 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 what the master has entrusted to him without abusing it. He simply proclaims the Master's message without changing it in any way.
- 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 committed to the best for his master.

There may be other qualities that would be useful in a faithful servant, such 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 is a guiding principle for all who are under the authority of another. It is the primary quality for a good employee or manager or student or citizen or church member or child with his parents. It is 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 have 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 that others might tend to judge or examine him and find him less than an ideal specimen in their eyes.

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.*

“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 have 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 Jesus Christ and what might be 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*

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

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 or how he responded to it. God is quite able to use even our failures and foolishness, the things we remember and should have forgotten, the things we forgot and should have remembered, the things we did and said and wished we had not. We of course must ever strive to be our best for the Lord, and then simply trust Him 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), truly leave it there and pressing on toward the mark in Christ’s service.

“*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 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.

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.

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 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 (ICor. 5; Rev. 2:2).
- The laziness of those given to ease (II Thess. 3).

“Then shall every man have praise of God” – N.B.

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.

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”* – Perhaps Paul is indicating here that rather than speaking directly of those involved in the trouble at Corinth and naming the names of the leaders folks were gathering around there, he 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 as to what and 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 in Galatians 2:6 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"*.

Vs. 7 – *"For who maketh thee to differ from 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 come of our own doing? Compare James 1:17. And beyond only the matter of gifts, is the Lord not the One who made us and made us 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?

others? Is He not the One responsible for our every feature, soul and body? Are we ever in a position to be fairly idolized 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 have received, and we have small cause to gripe over anything we have 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.

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

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.*

completely one is sold out to Jesus 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*” (Mark 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 “*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

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.

writer of Hebrews described the same impression in Hebrews 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 where it led to 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 “*in Christ*” yet considered “*wise*”, while Paul was quite happy to be considered a fool “*for Christ’s sake*”. These wanted 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*”.

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

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 Corinthians 6:4-10; 11:23ff. To be “*buffeted*” speaks of taking a 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 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

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.*

a good word in return, even as Paul commanded in Romans 12:14 to “*bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not*”, and after Christ’s encouragements toward the same in Matthew 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 are 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

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.*

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 is an image of the humility of a true servant of Jesus, 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 is the more tender pleading of a father rather than stinging words of rebuke.

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

*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.*

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.
- 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

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.

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 encouraged of all. And the things in which Paul would admonish them he lived and taught wherever he went. His was a consistent example, 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 words of affection or rod of correction. Their “father” would

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?*

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 already 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 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 Jesus 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 who were the troublers would be made evident to all.

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 (John 6).

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

(1 Cor. 5:5)

Class 6 – I Corinthians 5

People are ever given to imbalance, tending to drift toward one extreme or the other. One of the vital challenges in the study of our God in His Word is to find and hold to a balanced view of Him, lest we turn things in our thinking and end up with a God of our own making rather than clearly perceiving 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 then tends to shape the way we handle each other and the way we handle ourselves. There is 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 yet how blistering Paul's terms could be when dealing with sin and sinners. While willing himself to be accursed from Christ for his own Jewish nation, 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 is the heart of God that we find as we do.

Paul has dealt hard with this church at Corinth so

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.

far in this epistle, because in his love for them it was a strong hand that they needed. It is 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 actually like doing such 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 is instruction as to the how and when of church discipline that we find here. Paul in these next three chapters turns his attention to matters of moral purity.

5:1-5 – Discipline of a Person

Vs. 1-2 – Problem announced.

Vs. 1 – “*It is reported commonly*” – This would suggest an awareness far beyond just “*the house of Chloe*”, who had reported to Paul on the nature of things among the believers there (1:11). Seems it

was a known thing among many 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, resulting in this immoral involvement. There may very likely have been “justifying” circumstances, reasons they would have pointed to leading them into each other’s arms. 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 perhaps suggest that he was a member of the church but she was not.

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

*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.*

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 this situation. Where they should be mourning 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 tacit approval to the situation. Pride is self-centredness, and the inwardly focused nature of self-centredness neglects too many of the things we should rightly act upon out of love for God and others. Undue self-focus robs us of the proper awareness of others to which God has called us. Compare Philippians 2:4; Romans 15:2; Hebrews 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.

Vs. 3-5 – Proper action.

Vs. 3 – Paul had already determined the appropriate course of action based upon the information he had.

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,*

Under normal circumstances Paul's presence would be required to make proper enquiry, as the church leaders 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 unrepentant sin in His church. Compare Matthew 18:15-17. It is implied here that the procedure Jesus specified would be followed. The man would be confronted with his wrong, and should he refuse to hear fair rebuke two or more would then go together to confront him again. Should he still refuse 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 and why must be made clear to the membership.

“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 participants mentioned here in the Lord and His apostle joining them in this most difficult assignment. It is always a question of who you are more wishing to please, men or God.

“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. This statement we must put together with Christ’s words in Matthew 18:18-20. In the context of church discipline He promises;

- To affirm in heaven what is concluded on

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.*

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*” – From our angle, 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 other side of such removal. Not only are we removing “*that wicked person*” from our midst, but we are 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 it is the Lord here joining the faithful church in turning the disciplined soul over to Satan's abuse, 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 greater eternal glory. Implied here as well perhaps is the suspicion that this man may not have been saved though involved in the church, and therefore his shameful actions. Compare in I Timothy 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. Would not such harsh action taken against this man (and his woman) be offensive to the unchurched? Would there not be a grave risk of pushing unsaved folks even farther away from the Lord and salvation through such stern principles? In view of the vastly immoral society around them, would it not be wiser to go more softly, to refrain from such strong measures, to allow the Spirit of God to do the convicting of those in the wrong? Should we really be "playing the Holy Spirit" in such cases? Have you heard people say such things? Yet what is God's clear counsel here, and thus the way of true wisdom? Remove him! 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 people. In all such confrontations those with unrepentant hearts make much of the *way* the confrontation was handled, while 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 careful cautions as to the details of procedure here, suggesting the relative unimportance of such things. No mention is made of potential attitudes or responses in those confronted, again suggesting the relative irrelevance of such concerns. Just get in there and begin the process of dealing with that one living in sin in the church. If he/she turns to repentance and right, then you will have “*gained thy brother*” as Jesus put it. If he/she will not repent, it just does not really matter how you go about it, it will not be correct enough for them, I can assure you. But it does not matter what they think of the one(s) confronting or of the church behind them. The 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

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

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 foolishly focused upon things of no real consequence, truly damaging things were being neglected.

“*Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?*” – Could they not see that while focused on folly corruption was allowed that would lead on to eventual ruin? This is spoken as if it was a known proverbial principle in their day. Paul uses it again in Galatians 5:9. Leaven is used in these contexts to describe the progressively spreading influence of evil. Wrong cannot be allowed to remain without leading to the further increase of wrong, until “*the whole lump*” or body is infected by it. In fact “*the whole lump*” was already touched, 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

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:

avoiding the permeating, 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. The influence of unrepentant sinners must be taken out of a Christian church, and out of a Christian's circle of friends, 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 carnal choices arise out of our old nature, the way that ruled in us before we found Jesus 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 unchecked is simply inconsistent with what we have become in Jesus.

"As ye are unleavened" – As believers in Jesus and a part of Christ's body these were declared righteous in their position before Him, even as Peter had become "*clean every whit*" by faith in Jesus (John 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. God gave this feast of Passover to Israel as a foreshadow pointing to Jesus as the Lamb of God whose blood applied would become the place of refuge. Only through believing in Jesus, as if His shed blood applied to a life, is deliverance found from “the death angel” of God’s just judgment upon our sin (Ex. 12). In the feast of Unleavened Bread, which immediately followed Passover, all leaven was to be removed from the houses of the Jews for the 7 days of the feast. Though the reason for this requirement may not have been clear in the old era, in Jesus it becomes clear, for it pictured the way of a believer in Jesus Christ. Following deliverance through the Passover Lamb one is then to walk in a leavenless life of purity throughout the duration of the “feast” of his new life in Jesus 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*”. Thus the deliverance that we now find in Him is *from sin* and its ruinous results. All that we are and have in Jesus leads us away from the leaven of sin. His way in a believer

*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.*

leads toward sin's removal, and eventually its *complete* removal (Dan. 9:24). We cannot easily continue to embrace our sin, the great enemy of our soul, while at the same time rejoicing in Jesus, our Saviour from sin. We are not meant to play both sides at the same time. We cannot look with mingled sorrow and delight upon the death of our Saviour for us while freely continuing to dabble with that deadly poison that killed Him. Thus the leaven of evil must be removed from church and home if we would know the full joy of the feast of His presence, if we would fellowship with Him at His table.

Vs. 8 – Again, if we would joyfully “*keep the feast*” of a close walk with our Lord then it must be without the “*old leaven*” of the old ways of our sin nature, when 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*” (Ephesians 2:2-3).

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

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.*

“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 harbouring inward venom.

“But with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” – The word translated sincerity speaks of what is 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 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 is not that

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.

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 (John 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.

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 and remain unrepentant. The danger would be in allowing our actions to suggest some implied approval or tolerance for what they do. And it is not that we are to get weird with this, finding cause for avoidance with 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 freely practicing evil then there is perhaps good cause to question the reality of his salvation. John raises this same point 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 John 5:18).

Beyond only unrepentant 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

*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.*

tend to speak of what is in us, and of what we may 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, 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 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 some gross evil. Under the law

offenders were to be executed directly by stoning. Within this age of grace there is a sense in which proper 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 a matter close to His heart, and therefore one no godly church is wise to avoid where required.

Consider carefully 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 is the true and living God who makes it very relevant indeed!

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 brought 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 are unable to discern spiritual things. Thus there is a sense in which the simplest among the saved more capable than the wisest of the world to discern right and truth. Paul’s point is to expose the foolishness of going to a lesser facility when you have access to the very best on earth among godly believers?

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?*

“Before the unjust, and not before the saints” – Paul does not suggest here that all secular judges are unjust in their dealings. He uses the term *“unjust”* to refer to those who are not justified or declared righteous before God through faith in Jesus Christ, in contrast to *“the saints”* who are so justified by faith. The term *“saint”* speaks of believers as those who are sanctified or set apart from the world to God. In the same way the O.T. commonly refers to those who are saved or lost as the *“righteous”* or the *“wicked”* or *“ungodly”* (Psalm 1). Though an unsaved person may be relatively righteous, yet not having received *God’s* righteousness by faith he has not been cleansed of his sin, and thus still stands as wicked and condemned before God.

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 honourable (4:8-10) Paul enquires whether they were not actually yet quite ignorant!

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

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 we are held accountable 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). 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 should not take this so far as to insist 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 may refer to involvement in the condemning of evil angels at the last, those spirits that have so troubled the saints throughout the ages. It can only suggest an eventual place of authority higher than God's angels, pointing to exalted roles to one day be given to God's saints. If we shall be lifted to such a level of responsibility surely we are capable of

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?*

handling the relatively small concerns of everyday life on earth.

Vs. 4 – If you should have situations 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 chapter 4 Paul did not write to intentionally shame them (vs. 14), now he does. They were a people greatly at fault in this matter.

“Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you?” – Again this was a bit of a slam against their professed wisdom. So now Paul is asking, “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

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

fostering peace among them. Clearly the world's wisdom was not working for them. When we walk in the fear of God and in the truth of His Word there is peace, from the inside out, from within our hearts outwardly to our environment. So 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 Jesus is it before the world when Christian brothers cannot get along with each other and must call upon the world to step in and sort them out?” Yet notice here that believers can be a mess, and a mess before the world, and yet still be believers. Again, Paul does not raise a question of their salvation, when *we* might be inclined to do so because of such sinfully selfish responses.

Vs. 7 – *“Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you”* – Paul seems to step back now from the matter of their taking their cases to secular court, to

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?*

consider the more fundamental concern 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? Those humbly walking in the fear of God do not tend to form or foster such infighting. 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 when 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 rampant 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?” Oh it is faith in God as our Keeper that gives the strength for this most difficult option, only if you can *“trust in the Lord with all your heart”* (Psalm 3:5). Compare King Amaziah in II Chronicles 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 (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 give thee much more than this”*. Do not worry about the finances. Do not worry about what you have spent or lost. Just be sure you are wise to 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. It is good advice if we are willing to hear and heed it. Just keep your trust in the Lord and take the wrong and absorb the loss.

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

Just let yourself be defrauded. He does not deny the significance and injustice of the loss. He implies that it was indeed fraud. But He calls us to just quietly let it go. 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 among brothers. The “*eye for an eye*” and “*tooth for a tooth*” is the way of the old era. The way of the new is here, painful though it may be (Matt. 5:38-42). Compare Hebrews 10:34, where beyond “willingly”, they “*took joyfully the spoiling of their goods*”.

Vs. 8 – “*Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud*” – There is a touch of emphasis here on “You yourselves are wronging and defrauding”. While campaigning for right they 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!

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,*

Vs. 9-10 – “*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?*” – Paul was still addressing those considering themselves wise among the believer there, yet suggesting their ignorance (“*know ye not?*”). His thought here 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 wrongdoing, but he makes the point that our lives express the way of the unsaved in so responding.

Paul then expands the list to include other sinful ways that can be true of believers upon occasion, yet ways that are consistent with 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

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

“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 involves himself in sodomy. These two types of individuals seem to convey the two sides of a homosexual relationship, the first the more passive female role and the second 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 subtle stealth, such as pick-pockets and shop-lifters. It is the sneaky 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 a strong 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.

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.

“But ye are washed...sanctified...justified” – These words describe three great truths accomplished at the moment we were saved. In Christ we are *“washed”* from the defilement of our sin. We are *“sanctified”* or set apart or consecrated as holy and wholly for the Lord. We are *“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 these believers what they were in their cleansed and holy *position* before the Lord was a strong call to holy *practice* before men.

“In the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” – All that we are and 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

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.*

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 open door to depravity. Paul now sought to curb the abuse of freedom. Our Christian liberty was never meant to be Christian license, the liberty to walk into any dark way without caution or guilt. Compare 10:23.

“*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 led away from purity by my freedom, then my practice of liberty can become sin to me. Compare 10:32-33. A truly godly Christian life is a sincere quest for the very best for all, for “*things that are excellent*”, not just acceptable (Phil. 1:10).

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 I will not be brought under the power of any” – Though we are free in Christ, we are not free to become enslaved by any influence, substance, ideology, passion or individual other than the Lord and His holy way.

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

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

Vs. 13-14 – Paul seems here to be contrasting things of little concern (“foods for the belly”) with 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

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

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, 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 chapter 12. Every 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 and functions. 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 Genesis 2:24, speaking of the physical relation between a man and his wife in which they express their oneness in body, heart and life. For a believer in Jesus to be so united

- 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.*
-

with a prostitute is to bring together 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, and “*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 beyond just the actual practice of immorality, but includes every visit there through our eyes and ears and thoughts as well. This command to “*flee*” implies the obvious, that we are simply not able to be strong in the heat of temptation’s pull. He does not tell us to stand. The command is to get away and to get away *quick!* Do not allow yourself to remain under the power of temptation’s attractions even for a moment. Compare Joseph’s faithful flight from the arms of

*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.*

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 Proverbs 6:32-33. A man was only meant to be physically involved with one living woman within the sanctity of one marriage. Anything outside of this biblical specification is running against God's perfect will and is even a stroke or blight against one's own life.

- Because our body is purchased by God as His own possession or 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 freely 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 are married (7:4), even so we in a sense lost our right to our body when we were

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.*

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 O.T. era. 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 is 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.

And unto the married I command,
yet not I, but the Lord,
Let not the wife
depart from her husband:
But and if she depart,
let her remain unmarried,
or be reconciled to her husband:
and let not the husband
put away his wife

(I Cor. 7:10-11)

Class 8 – I Corinthians 7:1-16

With chapter 7 Paul now generally turns 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 begins now 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 is 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 as well. And if God’s Word does not seem to line up precisely with all the details of the romance novel version of love and courtship then consider carefully which version needs to change? We must remember as well that Paul is

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

writing to answer questions in this portion, not to 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 point is that it is good for a man to remain single without the need for intimacy with a wife. So he begins his discussion here in defence of celibacy, or remaining single and remaining pure in that condition. As a rule he will advise marriage, yet at the outset Paul would make the point clear that marriage is not a has-to-be. Celibacy is not weird, but an honourable and even preferable condition, which 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 it as 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. 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, with the reality that most people need such intimacy. 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), establishing marriage as a sacred institution according to His design. From the beginning of Christ’s earthly ministry as well, He again put His blessing on marriage with His *“beginning of miracles”*, turning water to the juice of the vine at the wedding in Cana (John 2). It was and is right as a general rule that a man and woman be united in marriage. And again, 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 among *“doctrines of devils”* (I Tim. 4:1-

3).

Do not 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 Bible.

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On the Side

One of the qualifications for an elder or pastor in I Timothy 3 is that he be “*the husband of one wife*” (vs. 2). Apart from this rather evidently making him a *him* and not a *her*, and a *man* married to a *woman*, it indicates as well that a pastor must be married only to one. This obviously prohibits him from polygamy, and probably from divorce and remarriage. But it may also 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 benevolence*” – Not due violence, but “*benevolence*”.

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

The term literally means “good will” or “kindness”. But in the context here it is 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. The Lord through His apostle is not 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 your marriage is to be the answer for this need in a man and in a woman. The woman needs to receive what a woman needs 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. Marriage cannot be about meeting only the man’s needs, but about *both* partners delighting in meeting the needs of the other. Most marital difficulties either *begin* with a neglect of physical intimacy or *result* in the neglect of it. Compare Proverbs 5:15-21 for similar commands. It is to the husband God gives command concerning his wife there in Proverbs 5, to “*let her breasts satisfy thee at all times*”. The

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.

point is that a man's *wife* must be his pleasure. But there is good instruction for the wife here as well, that she make her husband her physical delight.

Vs. 4 – A mutual handing over of ourselves takes place in marriage, which includes even our physical bodies. She owns a part interest in his body now, and he hold a share in hers. She does not have the right to deny him that in which he owns shares, nor does he have the right to deny her that in which she is part owner. And of course 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 are not getting along, the tenderness of their physical relationship is often the first thing they deny each other. But we do not 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.

Vs. 5 – “*Defraud ye not one the other*” – Again this is written as a command in the original language behind the English. To deprive or withhold from the

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.

other what is not ours to withhold is to defraud, 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 is asking for disaster. It is overlooking one very important reason why they are 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 a worthy cause or 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 of the dangers involved.

“And come together again” – It is important that they return to intimate involvement that the evil one not

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

be given opportunity to use their weakness. “*Incontinency*” (KJV) is a word used today more narrowly of the loss of bladder control. But the notion here is more generally 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 did not really command him to so speak, as if the thoughts given here were some kind of secondary revelation. Rather Paul now refers back 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 permission or allowance to seek marriage in view of the fact that most are unable to safely remain single. God does not command people to marry any more than He commands them to stay single. Such commands come only of man’s twisting of truth.

Vs. 7 – “*For I would that all men were even as I*

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.*

myself” – Paul was obviously not married at that time. Compare a hint of the same in 9:5. Whether he was never married or was once married and in some way lost his wife is unknown.

Paul implies that being unmarried is not only “*good for a man*” but it is in fact 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 is 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 before God. But do not let your culture or family expectations or some such foolishness force you into marriage when you do not need or prefer to be 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

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.*

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 never wise to so wrongly encourage this natural desire. If we seek the Lord in sincerely striving to bring “*into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*” we will substantially diminish the power of passion (II Cor. 10:5; I Cor. 10:13).

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

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

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.

“Marriage is honourable in all things, and the bed undefiled” (Heb. 13:4).

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.

“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 do

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.*

not 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 Bible portion? But what about what everybody else is doing and advising?” ***But***, let’s just be good listeners and carefully hear what God is saying for a moment, shall we? The rule here is *no separation*, if we would be pleasing to our God. And in the event of separation, whatever the cause, the rule is either no further marriage or restoration to the estranged spouse.

“*And let not the husband put away the wife*” – Again it is the same rule – *no separation!* Please lay aside

the justifications and just listen. You are right, I do not know what your “ex” was like or how that one mistreated you. But what is *God* actually saying? That is the question before us right now. In comparing the gospel accounts Jesus said;

- *“Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, commits adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband and be married to another, she commits adultery”* (Mk. 10:11).
- *“Whosoever puts away his wife, and marries another, commits adultery: and whoever marries her that is put away from her husband commits 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, His rule is *no separation*, and if separation, *remain single or reconcile*.

Now many hold with a white-knuckled grip to the “exception clause” of Matthew 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 is right here in I Corinthians 7:10-11, especially since Paul states here that he is expressing what the Lord Himself 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 am not sure what to do with that "exception clause" in Matthew's gospel, but it sure is intriguing that the Apostle Paul does not do *anything* with it, as if it just does not apply to us. The rule for us is here as plainly 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 question of where divorce

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.*

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.*

fell on the timeline in comparison to 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 the believers at Corinth. In Paul's comment that *he* was speaking on this matter and *“not the Lord”*, again he was not suggesting that he was speaking outside of inspiration. He simply meant that he was now turning to a discussion of something on which Jesus did not directly speak. Jesus spoke only generally on the matter of divorce and remarriage in response to questions put to Him.

The two phrases at the end of vs. 12 & 13, *“let him not put her away”* and *“let her not leave him”* are

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.

both written as commands, in fact it is 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 do not mess with it.

Please understand that Paul's instruction here does not allow for a believer to knowingly *enter into* marriage with an unbeliever, for this would constitute an unequal yoke, against which Paul gives command and warning in II Corinthians 6:14.

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.

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.

The opening “for” is of course a connector to the previous verse, giving a reason why the believer should not leave a mixed marriage. “Sanctified” means set apart or made holy. The nature of the sanctifying influence upon the unsaved in the home is unclear, only that the unsaved spouse as well as the children are put under some measure of redeeming impact through the presence of the one believing in Jesus. From vs. 16 we understand that this sanctifying sway does not refer to salvation or regeneration. The N.T. everywhere affirms that every individual must make his own decision to believe in 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). Again, it may be that some there at Corinth thought a believer was in some way defiled in a mixed marriage, but Paul 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 unions.

Vs. 15 – *“But if the unbelieving depart, let him*

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?*

depart” – 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 are not obligated to preserve our marriage. That is 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 the meaning of this phrase “*not under bondage*”, 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 peace there is a witness to the unsaved.

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

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 Peter 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 to remain 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 to 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. Do not miss the point in the first statement of this verse that it is in fact God who is responsible for all distributions, a restatement of 4:7.

“And so ordain I in all churches” – With the authority of God’s apostle, Paul extends this principle of

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

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 moment one at last hears God’s call to salvation and believes in Jesus Christ as Saviour. Did one enter

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

into salvation as a circumcised man? Do not seek to make changes in this regard.

Vs. 19 – *“Circumcision...uncircumcision is nothing”* – In Christ such matters are not relevant anymore, marking the change from the old covenant of law to the new covenant of grace.

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”* in Galatians 2:3.

“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 is labelled as *“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

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.*

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 coming to faith in Jesus.

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 (circumcision) 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 do not let it be a concern to you, whatever condition in which you are currently found, 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 tend more to be unconcerned, even quite satisfied with our current condition. It is a choice we make. The world gets wrought up over degrees and status, privilege and possessions, never finding peace because there is no peace in them, with their lusts ever warring in their soul. But this is not to be our way in Jesus. 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.

“But if thou mayest be free, use it rather” – If the chance to be freed from slavery should be handed to you, do not 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

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.*

to use your current situation for the Lord, rather than harbouring any consuming concern to change it. Live for Jesus in your singleness or in your slavery or in whatever place life finds you. Happily use your situation to win your fellow slaves and to be a Christian testimony to your master. In the same way Paul did not cry 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 Jesus Christ. Make the decision to just be happy right where you are and to use to the fullest the opportunities that present themselves there.

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.

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

“Be not the servants of men” – Whatever your outward condition might be, do not 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 your condition might be considered the pits. As applied to Paul’s current discussion, make the choice to be happy in your current marital situation, unless God’s gifting should lead you otherwise. As applied to our current situation in this country, do not 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 for Him right here, trusting Him to hold you in the hollow of His hand. And lead your children to the same. Remember the precious promises of protection in Psalm 91 to those who dwell *“in the secret place of the Most High”*, abiding *“under the shadow of the Almighty”*. Remember in Psalm 46 that our God is *“a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed...”*.

*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.*

Vs. 24 – “*Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God*” – Again 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 briefly in vs. 8-9. Again we get the impression that he is 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 marriage for the unmarried was one Jesus never directly addressed in His earthly ministry. 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.

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.*
7:27 *Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.*

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. Do not 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 is 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, clearly his preferred condition.

Vs. 27 – Here is the general rule, depending of course upon one’s “*proper gift of God*” (vs. 7). Do not be anxious to change your current marital condition. If you are “*bound unto a wife*” stay there.

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.

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 being single, 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 is 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 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 toward

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;*

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 John 2:18). In view of the fact that a day will indeed dawn when our “*blessed hope*” will break forth into glorious sight at Christ’s return, 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. Do not dismiss without due consideration this possible course, that you might more fully give yourself to the God who has so mercied you. It is 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

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

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. Contrast the consuming earthly commitments of 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 is 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,

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.*

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, for what we presently see will 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”* mentioned 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

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.

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 are getting into in marriage as well, and he would have us understand that singleness is an option, and a “*good*” one.

“*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

*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.*

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 now of a father who is responsible for deciding on the marriage arrangements of his children. Perhaps such a father might think he is 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 is a man she loves and/or who loves her. 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 he feels he should allow her to marry, again it is not a matter of sin or guilt for him to so proceed.

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.*

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*”. 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 is not surprising to hear him finally voice it, for this has been his lean all along in this chapter. It is really 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 allow no outside pressure to force us into something we would be better off without. There is a kind of panic that can develop in the heart of a young person, desperate to

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.

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 is pushing you? And why not the wisdom of choosing peace and contentment right where you are?

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 Romans 7:2 in illustrating our freedom from the law, when through believing in Jesus we die spiritually together with Him and are raised with Him. 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

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

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.

See how the Lord clearly requires believers to enter into marriage only with another believer. For to knowingly enter into a mixed marriage is to bind oneself in the “*unequal yoke*” forbidden in II Corinthians 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 Timothy 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 that one might be wholly devoted 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.

Wherefore, if meat
make my brother to offend,
I will eat no flesh
while the world standeth,
lest I make my brother to offend

(1 Cor. 8:13)

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 chapter 10 as well, devoting 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 appropriate 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 touch us?

The Jews apparently refused or were forbidden to partake of anything offered to a pagan idol. We find in Revelation 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 in 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. Through faith in Jesus 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 from vs. 7.

“Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth” – Knowledge on its own, as with 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 the needs and concerns of others. Where knowledge comprehends the truth concerning spiritual

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.*

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 that I know I am 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 John 4:8 & 20). The trend of Paul’s thought is that it is impossible to genuinely love God and not have a 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 *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.*

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 Isaiah 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 supreme foolishness of idolatry, even speaking 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. As well, when Paul said “*an idol is nothing*” he very likely looked beyond the actual

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

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 the believer’s much completer knowledge of reality he is fully 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 in any way 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 God or God’s own?

Vs. 5 – “*As there be gods many, and lords many*” – Paul does not speak here of the actual existence of many gods. The context makes this clear. He suggests only that in the minds and superstitions of

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.*

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

8:7-13 – Love Limits Our Freedom

*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.*

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 awareness of spiritual realities there can be no dangers involved in partaking of such foods offered to idols. 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 our own conscience and that of others that we are now called to live.

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.

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.*

“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. Their conscience is “weak” in that their standard, their understanding of what is right and acceptable, is somewhat misaligned with God’s standard of what is allowable, but they do not yet know this. So if by some circumstance they should be led into involvement with something their conscience does not consider appropriate, in this way their conscience could be *“defiled”* or offended. In participating in something which they suspect to carry a measure of wrongness before God they in effect sin against God in their violation of a standard they presume to be His.

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 *“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

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

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 it is evil for that man who eateth with offence*” (Rom. 14:20). Freedom becomes an evil when leading to offense. As with many good things in life it just depends on what you do with it.

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?

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 have helped him into sin. Your precious knowledge, though indeed more correct than his, has actually moved you to bring harm upon the soul of one “*for whom Christ died*”. Though Jesus 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 see the ugly comparison? Would you hold to your right to a cheap meal or a nice time with the risk of bringing real harm to the soul of your brother? It is the question of whether I am willing to give myself for my brothers after the

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.

example of my Saviour who gave Himself for me.

So we find a principle here. Though our liberty in Jesus 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 in the N.T. 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, requiring the same practice of all. Gladly he would deny himself 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 then 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).

Ponder Points

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

In I Corinthians 8 and Romans 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 misaligned with God’s standard of things allowable.
- 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 is fully convinced.
- 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 applied to the use of alcoholic beverages. With the magnitude of risks involved in potentially leading others (even brothers) to ruin, is it really so great a sacrifice to simply make the decision to choose non-alcoholic drinks?

“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 chapter 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 the same to God's children. It is 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 are free to choose. Marriage is indeed a liberty we have in Christ. Yet it is a liberty that comes with a marginal note that the best option, if so gifted, is to refrain from marriage and all that it offers.

Then in chapter 8 we saw a continuation of the same basic theme of liberty, now the question of whether to eat meats offered to idols, and this time the issue carrying a bit of a sharper edge of right and wrong. For this matter involves 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. Thus the use of things sacrificed or "consecrated" to

such idols is a non-issue. Yet any and every such non-issue becomes an issue when others are hurt in the exercise of our freedom. The principle is liberty limited by love, limited by the conscience or opinions of others on 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 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 chapter 9, again holding up his own good example. The essence of his point in this chapter before us is that though he 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 possible good for others. All in fear that the gospel message he carried might in any way be hindered or diminished (vs. 12). It is the principle the Lord would press upon us. We are wise to restrict our

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,*

liberties through love that we “*might by all means save some*” (vs. 22). May we not sigh and cry for the kinds of 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 apostle*” among them (II Cor. 12:12), and the result of Paul’s influence was their own eternal rescue.

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?*

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?” – It is a return to questions, to which all anticipate a “yes” answer. Did Paul and his associates not possess the Christian liberty to eat and drink as they pleased, as per his chapter 8 discussion? Did Paul and his co-workers not 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 did Paul and company not 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 Attempting to conduct their ministry between their secular labours. Paul now uses several illustrations to demonstrate this last point.

*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?*

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, does not the law of God affirm the same? Quoting from Deuteronomy 25:4, Paul points to God’s instruction against restraining an ox from eating of the grain while threshing. They would commonly use oxen to pull a sled over the grain in separating the kernel from the chaff. Yet it is evident that this thoughtful instruction ranged beyond just the care of oxen, relating a principle “for

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?*

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 is 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 quite reasonable expectation that temporal 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*”.

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.

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 it was supremely fitting that he and those serving with him should receive their financial help, this fact supported both from the sensible equities of secular life and from biblical injunctions, yet Paul did not claim for himself this liberty available to him. Again it was a liberty he limited by love. It was a freedom unclaimed through Paul’s purpose to not “*hinder the gospel of Christ*”. Instead he and company chose the way of greater hardship, 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

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.*

their name or work.

Vs. 13 – A further illustration from the temple. Is it not 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 Matthew 10, saying “*the workman is worthy of his meat*” (vs. 10). The Lord 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

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.

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!.

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. 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 the ugly salary disputes that ministers get up to with their churches are so out of line? To 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

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.

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..

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 sincerely 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 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 in 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

9:19 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

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 is involved in such choices, both the losses and gains.

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*” – Though

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;*

9:21 *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.*

very 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 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 Gentiles he used a

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.*

different approach than in preaching to the Jews, making fewer references to O.T. portions. 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 is 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 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. Do not 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*

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

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.*

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 Christ Jesus”* (Col. 1:28). Paul’s purpose was perfect spiritual maturity in *“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

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.

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 are not wise to 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 ministry to others. If others are hurt by what we freely allow for ourselves then we are 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

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

greatly deny themselves will find even greater possibility for reward. The enjoyment of fine foods and the ease of much sleep and the pleasure of leisure 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 for reward in the next.

“But we an incorruptible” – Those who train for the games strive for a perishable, earthly crown. I have an old tarnished trophy with my name engraved on it that my wife currently uses as a stand for her pot plant. It meant much to me 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 of things eternal 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, spending it all, 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 that meant for himself and his own loss of 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 full 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 have never checked His book to find His instruction 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

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.*

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 is 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.

Whether therefore ye eat,
or drink, or whatsoever ye do,
do all to the glory of God

(1 Cor. 10:31)

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 is the question of questionable things that Paul has been dealing with since chapter 8. A question of the wisdom of using Christian freedoms that might bring harm or hinder the Lord's work in others. A question of prudence in the practice of our liberties in Christ. It is a subject Paul brings to conclusion in chapter 10 with a few more aspects of this important question. 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. 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.

10:1-13 – Wilderness Warnings

Vs. 1 – *“All our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea”* – The word “all” appears 5

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

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 (John 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 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 a rock. The first was in Exodus 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). It was Jesus quenching their thirst there, yet only when the rock was struck. It is an obvious picture of Jesus pouring forth provision for our need, yet only when struck or wounded unto death 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

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

followers of our great Deliverer, as pictured in our baptism. And we too have come to partake of all that Jesus 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 is a strong turning point in Paul's argument here. In spite of all that was made available to all of His people, *“many of them”* were left strewn about the wilderness. The phrase behind *“many”* in the original Greek here is literally *“the more”*. The majority 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 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 believe God for His gift of life in Jesus Christ. No one of us will enter heaven through our parents' faith or our spouse's faith or through what seem to be spiritual privileges such as visions, dreams, divine manifestations, or answered prayers. And

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

just because we have 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 word in the Greek here is "types". These ancient events occurred and were recorded for our benefit as types or examples pointing to similar kinds of dangers in our own day. These are given that we might learn to avoid such dangers into 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

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.

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 ends in actual defiance of God". Beware of inappropriate responses in yourself. Do not ever let the banner of "freedom" flying over your choices and activities cause you to lower the guard of your heart. "*Keep thy heart with all diligence*", God's Wisdom warns, "*for out of it are the issues of life*" (Prov. 4:23)

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 Exodus 32:6 indicates, both feasting and carnal practices were involved in their idolatry there. 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 children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen*" (I John 5:21).

Vs. 8 – "*Neither let us commit fornication*" – The

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

record of the incident referred to here is in Numbers 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 drawing them into 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.

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On the Side

What do we do with the number discrepancy here? Paul says that 23,000 died in that incident, while Moses reported 24,000 in Numbers 25:9. The answer seems to be found in the fact that Paul was highlighting the suddenness of the judgment, that

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.

“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 Numbers 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 recorded in Numbers 14, when *“all the children 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.

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.

Vs. 11 – *“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples”* – All such incidents, and the nature of God’s response back then, combine for the instruction of us in our day, we who live in this final age before the Lord’s return. We too are called to believe Him for His promises. We too are called to fear God, allowing this proper fear to move us to happily follow His way.

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 Romans 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, and leads us to choose righteousness.

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

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.

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 are not alone.
- God is very much aware, and allows the trying of our faith to prove the reality of it.
- Our God is faithful to never allow any temptation exceed our ability to endure. In Christ we do not *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 we are led to understand that we are compassed about with real threat to our spiritual well-being, as Israel of old. Yet we recognize that our God is ever aware and there for us with practical help in coping with all that we face in life.

10:14-22 – Beware Idolatry

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

Paul now turns to the particular concern of idolatry. Again, there was and remains the danger of the 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 advice 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 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 must not play

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.

too close to the fire if we would be pleasing to our Father and avoid the subtle traps of the evil one.

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 is 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 expresses the idea of our oneness together in our oneness with Christ. Together we are one in Him and He 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

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?
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.

O.T. system and then eating together of those sacrifices, is it not 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 am 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 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

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.

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

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 agreement in their worship of their gods (demons). 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

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.

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 (chapter 8), there are dangers to 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

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.*

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.

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

Vs. 25-30 – Paul now concludes with some practical comments as to proper procedures in the

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?

application of things discussed. “*The shambles*” (KJV) was a market place where foods could be purchased in their day (vs. 25). It is implied that meats used in idol worship might very well be sold at such a place. Paul now clearly states that all 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 full awareness 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 any nonsense of nasty powers residing upon anything.

Further, if an unsaved friend (a Muslim or Hindu for example) should invite you over for a meal, feel free

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:*

to eat whatever is served (vs. 27). There is 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 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.

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.

Can I do this or that to the glory of God? And according to 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. Paul does not speak of compromise in violation of the truth with these words. In pleasing "*all men in all things*" he does not mean that he would refrain from saying the hard, potentially offensive things people need to hear in leading them to the truth. He refers to avoiding offence in matters of moral indifference. 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” – Behold 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, stating, *“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves”*.

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Questions for your Consideration

What about the possession of occult paraphernalia? Do you think such things have some power or are really a concern? Apart from the question of why a believer in Jesus would not wish to burn such

things.

How do these principles relate to the purchase and display of pretty dangling crystals, feathery dream catchers or the like?

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 you believe such substances 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 given in 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;

- Chapter 7 – Consider avoiding marriage, as Paul had, for the fuller opportunities singleness offers in living for God and others. It is a “good” option, even a “better” way, and not to be lightly discounted.

Chapter 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 while the world standeth”* (vs. 13).

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

- Chapter 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).
- Chapter 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 in vs. 1 Paul now 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). 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

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 they

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.

trusted to help with their questions was something for which he was thankful. Paul rejoiced as well in their carefulness to keep the things he had before taught them, leading him to expect 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 that has raised up many an enemy of this apostle over the years. Together with some of his thoughts in chapter 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.

The order of authority presented is this;

1. God the Father.

11:4 *Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.*

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), even as God the Father and God the Son are equally God, yet with differing roles. Even so none could suggest the man any better than the woman, only that God has established an authority structure among mankind, as within the Trinity, with reasons to follow.

Vs. 4-5 – *“Every man praying or prophesying, having 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 reference to *“praying or prophesying”* does suggest a context of church gatherings in some

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.

form. The main question here concerns the phrase “*having his head covered*” (KJV). The literal phrase in the original Greek behind the English 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, this forbidden on men but required on women, 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. When we come to vs. 13-14 it becomes clear that *hair* is what Paul is referring to in this portion. He speaks of having the hair long or down the head. A man “*dishonoureth his head*”, both himself and his heavenly Master, when involved in spiritual things while wearing long hair, or as John puts it in Revelation 9:8, having “*the hair of women*”.

One point that is unspoken in this context is how the particular sign of long hair expresses the idea of subjection or submission, and therefore

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.

inappropriate for the man and appropriate for the woman. It seems to be an understood thing, that “*even nature itself*” would teach us (vs. 14), that a covering of long hair runs against the man’s God-given leadership role, while cropped hair, not hanging down the head, counters the submissive role of the woman.

“*For that is even all one as if she were shaven*” – This phrase, with vs. 6, helps to affirm the fact that it is hair and not hats under discussion here. For a woman to cut her hair short like a man’s, such that she is not properly covered, is to bring upon her the same shame as if her head were shaved.

Vs. 6 – “*Let her also be shorn*” – Paul now obviously takes the idea of hair cut short and carries it to the extreme. 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 hangs down to cover her head. These are hard words. But it seems Paul

*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.*

was dealing with a brazen lean in the women of Corinth toward taking the matter of freedom too far. There are indeed 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 proper order.

Vs. 7 – *“For a man indeed ought not to cover his head”* – For a man it is quite the opposite. His head ought not to be hidden by long hair, not if he would 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 know that it was Adam who was first created *“in the image of God”*, and Eve was later made from Adam. Perhaps the thought here is that the particular focus of the man is toward pleasing God, whereas the special focus of the woman is to be toward pleasing her man, as the fit helper of the man God created her to be (Gen. 2:20).

11:8 *For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the 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. 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 leadership role over the woman;

- 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 Timothy 2 a couple more arguments for the same God-appointed roles;

- I Timothy 2:13 – Order – Adam was first formed and later Eve was created. Woman is after man.
- I Timothy 2:14 – Nature – Though Eve was actually deceived by Satan, Adam was not,

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.*

suggesting perhaps a generally greater susceptibility to deception in women. This too serves to disqualify her from leadership.

Vs. 10 – A further cause is now supplied as to why a godly woman should “*have power on her head*” or authority over her.

“*Because of the angels*” – Again it is unclear what Paul meant by this, whether actual angels or messengers (the actual meaning of the word “angel”), and whether good angels or fallen. Unfortunately there are no clues in the context to help us. We just do not have much to go on, so do not 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

*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.*

church congregation where submission is properly lived out. Compare Hebrews 1:14 & 13:2. The idea of angels observing and learning from our example adds a bit of weight to what we do. They are surely a part of that great “*cloud of witnesses*” with which we are “*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. Is it not 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.

*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?*

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 do not miss the fact that he just continues on in these verses in the same discussion from the previous. There is no indication that Paul is now changing gears in any way. It is clearly the “covering” of hair that is under discussion in this first half of chapter 11, not hats or veils.

So please hear it. 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 is 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 is ultimately

*11:15 But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her:
for her hair is given her for a covering.
11:16 But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no
such custom, neither the churches of God.*

an authority statement, a unilateral declaration of independence, rather than merely a fashion statement.

Short hair on men offends nobody. Therefore any man genuinely interested in ministry in the lives of others will see that his hair is trimmed, clean, reasonably neat, and an offence to none.

Vs. 16 – Paul seems to state his conclusions on this matter into the form 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 have seen, divisions characterized this Corinthian congregation. But a greater problem arose when they carried their divisions to the Communion table. For as we considered in 10:16-17, this was an event meant to highlight their unity

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.

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.

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 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 toward their Christian growth.

Vs. 19 – “*For there must be also heresies among you*” – The word translated “*heresies*” here refers to factions or sects. It carries a stronger sense of divisiveness than the word translated “*divisions*” in vs. 18. It is one thing to have some difference of opinion within the church. It is quite another thing for these lines of division to become more formalized into actual fixed factions. This more settled and serious 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 professing the religion of Christ rather than truly possessing life eternal. Paul perhaps implies here that such factions are in a sense a work of God’s providence, 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 cannot 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 Jesus 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*” – “When you come together for your church

*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.*

assemblies and the taking of Communion it is 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, 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 perhaps share only with those in their close circle of friends, excluding others. How rude and thoughtless they were! Paul (God) frowns on all such exclusiveness in the church.

Vs. 22 – "If you cannot share together what you have brought then eat your meal in your own houses. Do not come together in such a selfish, ill-mannered way. Do not come with your abundance and embarrass those who are poorer among you." Paul's

*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.*

words are stern, but there was need to firmly counter such truly tasteless behaviour.

So again, believers can be selfish, thoughtless people and still be believers. It is not a sweetened lifestyle that makes one a Christian or gets one to heaven. Eternal life is a gift of God to be received from the hand of God. It is a new birth, a new creatin. And how graciously God 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 through His words and His Spirit.

Vs. 23-26 – Apparently this group meal or “love feast” either preceded or followed their practice of the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper (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 the gospel rendering of the same, yet with added details and warnings from the Lord.

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:

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 Jesus loomed over that Last Supper, yet His thoughts were all of what His followers would gain through His loss. Though man would betray Him, even that very night, yet mankind He would faithfully love and serve to 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.
- When all surface devotion dried up in the heat of persecution.
- When folks will not have Him because He denied them their will or way of doing things.

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.*

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.*

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 this breaking and partaking of bread together was to become a church ordinance, 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 Christ’s new covenant are given in Hebrews 8:10-12;

- God’s own righteousness (law) engraved on

11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

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 in remembrance 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 in expectation to the greatest happiness of our Lord’s return and kingdom.

Vs. 27-32 – Do Not Partake Unworthily.

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.

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 all carefully examine their own spiritual condition before easily partaking of the Lord's Supper. It is not that we are to avoid God's ordinance for fear of being hit with sickness and 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;

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.*

- 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” – Behind the word *“damnation”* here is a word meaning *“judgment”*. It is not that a child of God might lose his salvation through his abuse of this sacred ordinance and be condemned at the last, but that he can leave himself open to some rough handling through his careless disregard of something so important to God. 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

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.

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 John 1:9). If we are willing to be open and honest with God, if we are 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 is the Lord’s judgment, His rod of discipline that we are 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.

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.

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 meal together, it would be better to leave off this aspect for now since it is such a point of contention and abuse among you, bringing God’s punishments upon you. We will 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.

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. In this chapter he continues in this track with a consideration of things of the Spirit. This important theme he will chase to the end of chapter 14. It seems questions had been raised on this subject as well, either by the Corinthian believers themselves or perhaps by others who were questioning 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 original language 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 begins by reminding them of the way of their false religion before they found Jesus. 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 paganism. 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 God’s command in the conduct of His church rather than pandemonium (14:40).

Vs. 3 – Paul gives here a test for discerning the spirits. Never will those led by God’s Spirit speak against Jesus Christ. Indeed all who are filled with God’s true Spirit will be brimming only with clearest

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.

recognition of Christ's lordship and glory. And of course 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 Jesus is without the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9). This 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 for such a guiding principle 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.

12:4-11 – One Giver, Many Gifts

The focus of the next few verses is upon the great variety of God's spiritual gifts, yet all sourced from the same Giver. 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

12:4 *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

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 to dissatisfaction in some saints with less prominent gifts, and to pride in others with gifts deemed more important. Their jealousy and unhappiness with their lot only contributed to disunity, rather than the use of their gifts fostering their mutual growth together as God meant it to be. It becomes evident as well through Paul's teaching in these chapters that the gift of tongues was of particular interest there in that troubled church. It seems they were keen on gifts that suggested they were flying closer to the spiritual flame over those gifts more useful in benefitting others. This Paul will seek more earnestly to correct in chapter 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

12:5 *And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.*

12:6 *And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.*

abilities which believers are able to use in the Lord's work. Though there are many gifts, it is "*the same Spirit*" who gives them all.

Vs. 5 – "*There are differences of administrations*" – There are many different kinds of ministries or functions in which folks may use their gifts, yet it is "*the same Lord*" or Master who calls His saints to His various works.

Vs. 6 – "*There are diversities of operations*" – There are many different results or effects, 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 gives the increase, overseeing

12:7 *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

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 really hear that gospel tract he happened to pick up off the pavement, which actually was printed across the sea and shipped 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 it is that God weaves together His intricate work in His pursuit of souls, using circumstance and servant hearts employing the Spirit gifts He has given.

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 are all given “*to profit withal*” or to use in benefitting others. Thus the gifts are given both as evidence or

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;*

“*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, for he pointed 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 are 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.

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:*

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 Romans 12:7-8.

“*Faith*” – This cannot refer to saving faith for such is required of all who would find life in Jesus Christ. This gift of faith is likely a particular ability to believe God for great things, special tasks, or miraculous provisions.

- “*Gifts of healing(s)*” – “*Healing*” is plural in the original Greek (vs. 28) suggesting the divinely given ability to heal various forms of physical diseases or disorders. 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 or

writing all that God commanded him to speak (Deut. 18:18).

- Predominantly forth-telling or preaching, but with a measure of fore-telling or prophesying as well.
- This was a vital gift for that era when the Bible was being completed.

“Discerning of spirits”– Divine discernment to perceive spirits in people, whether good or bad, holy or evil. 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 recognised and exposed.

- *“Tongues”* – The God-given ability to speak languages not learned. This was never employed as a tool of evangelism to speed missionary outreach, but only as a means to display the Lord’s working and purpose, as at Pentecost (Acts 2).
- *“Interpretation of tongues”* – The ability to give the meaning of what has been spoken in an unknown tongue.

Please do not fail to notice what Paul put at the very

12:11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

bottom of the list here, listing last what it seems the believers there would have likely put toward the top of the pile. Though perhaps gifts of tongues and interpretation seemed more dynamic and impressive, yet from the beginning they were gifts less aimed at ministry to others and more given to selfish abuse. Paul would lead these people out of themselves and into the serving of others.

Again it is the Spirit that “*worketh all these*”, who divides His gifts “*to every man severally [individually] as He will*”. Do we ever see saints in the N.T. crying after spiritual gifts, as if these gifts must be prayed into our possession? Are we ever commanded to do so? Do we ever see believers teaching or learning how to perform the Spirit’s gifts, as if the Spirit’s giving must be combined with coaching from fellow believers. It is the Spirit who gives these gifts, seemingly fully operative.

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On the Side

Did you notice how Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit in this context? The Spirit is the One working and

*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.*

dividing according to His will. He is 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 is 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 for who He is. 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.

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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 is made up of multiple parts or members with multiple functions, all wonderfully working together as a united whole. The church is indeed as a body, the body of Christ. Compare also Romans 12:4-5; Ephesians 4:16; 5:30; Colossians 2:19.

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.

Vs. 12 – “*For as the body is one, and hath many members*” – Paul’s focus here, and that which was so important for these troubled believers to understand, was the matter of unity. Though a body has many members, each with differing functions, yet the combination of the whole is a unit.

“*So is Christ*” – Even so is the nature of the body of Christ, so it is meant to be among those who are in Christ. Though we are all different and gifted differently there must be a basic union or cohesion in Christ, or His body cannot properly function together as a unit.

Vs. 13 – “*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body*” – Paul speaks here of the church as a whole and not of a small elite portion of it. It comes clear here that all true believers are baptized with the Spirit into Christ’s body. Though these Corinthian believers were in fact carnal babes in Christ yet Paul did not in any way exclude them from this “*we all*”.

12:14 *For the body is not one member, but many.*

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?*

Some would teach that there is a second divine work of Spirit baptism which we must seek after we are 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, for Paul said *“we all”*. Believers are now commanded to *“be filled with the Spirit”* (Eph. 5:18), which may happen often, but we are baptized or indwelt only once, and that forever (John 14:16).

Vs. 14-24 – All body members are needed – With vs. 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

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.*

despising others. Again, drawing from Paul's discussion in chapter 14, it seems tongues-speaking was especially high on their wish-list of gifts to have and display. Yet 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 vital for the body to function as a body. 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. Again, it is 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, and gift placement is *His* business (vs. 6, 11). Do not 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

*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:*

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 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 one’s attractiveness. But though we can live without our eyes we will not last long without our bowels, which I suspect nobody eulogizes. The glory of a woman is her hair. It is something Solomon mentioned in his song in describing the splendour of his bride. Lose it and you live on. But not so without your bladder or kidneys, 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

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.

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 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. When in a healthy condition 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).

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.*

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 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

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?*

those gifts listed first.

- “*Gifts of healings*” – See on vs. 9.
- “*Helps*” – Those with a particular will and ability to help folks in need. Compare in Romans 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 Romans 12:8 “*he that ruleth*”.
- “*Diversities of tongues*” – Again this gift sits at the bottom of the list, displaying Paul’s purpose to overturn their view of this gift being among the chiefest. It was a gift with a particular purpose, as Paul will reveal in chapter 14, and one offering the least value in serving others.

Vs. 29-30 – “*Are all apostles?*” – In hammering home his point Paul now fires questions at his readers, all

12:31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

obviously demanding a “no” answer. One undeniable fact in the matter of spiritual things is that there must be “*diversities of gifts*” if there is to be a working 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 is God who administers this, working “*all in all*” (vs. 6) “*as He will*” (vs. 11). It is 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 is an interesting difficulty in the verb translated “*covet*” (KJV) here. In the original Greek behind the English translation 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 by them to be better than others. Or is Paul encouraging

them to zealous pursuit of the best gifts, with their sights now 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 may seem to fit with 14:1 & 39 where the coveting of gifts is encouraged, not in the sense of individuals wishing to trade their gift in for something “better”, but in the corporate sense of seeking to lift among them the value of those gifts most useful for the benefit of the whole.

“Yet show I unto you a more excellent way” – This *“more excellent way”* is the way of love, coming right up with greatest emphasis in the next chapter.

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 original 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 is better that a handle other than "*love*" be used with 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 is implied that even the gift of tongues was given for corporate benefit rather than for some private use. 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 any form of speech other than that easily

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.*

understandable to man. Yet it is 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 to believe for the miraculous, yet if missing the key ingredient he is “*nothing*”.

Understanding and knowledge here would correspond with “*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 giving in sacrifice, deeds that outwardly seem to display love. Yet though one’s self-sacrifice be total, if not moved by agape love it was the hollow pursuit of vain glory,

13:4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

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

Paul now 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 or lack thereof. It is therefore able to endure a great deal of disappointment. Often when folks do not get what they want from their marriage partner or from a friendship they will find somebody else to satisfy their desire. This is no true agape love, for a true friend loves at all times (Prov. 17:17). Job’s love was a long-suffering kind, for his trust remained in 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 does not suffer *everything*. It cares enough for the sheep to despise the wolves (Matt. 23; Gal. 5:12). It so loves the light that it must expose and confront the darkness (Eph. 5:11-13). God cares enough for the saved to ultimately condemn the lost.

- “*Is kind*” (vs. 4) – Love is generally gentle or mild in its way with others, not given to 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 be a painful thing for both speaker and hearer. Though anxious to avoid unneeded harshness, yet love is willing to say the hard thing.

Now a series 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 seeks only to build up and encourage others, not beat them down. Envy wishes only to step on others 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 does not do things inappropriate or rude. It is not excessive or extreme or weird in any way, whether in speech, dress, or behaviour, because it is 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 15 statements would best sum up the whole, this one would be a good possibility.
- *“Is not easily provoked”* (vs. 5) – Love does not tend 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 is like drenched firewood that just cannot be set alight. It is 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 are all still candles very much capable of being lit, yet it is the influence of God's Spirit within that keeps us from being easily enflamed. Thus love refuses to participate in conflicts. It just will not keep its side going. The book of Proverbs has much to say about the wisdom of such a peaceable spirit as well.

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 (John 2:13-17). Compare Acts 15:39 & Ecclesiastes 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 delight in the evil practices of others or in those who practice them. In Romans 1:32 Paul speaks of God's judgment upon those who practice wickedness and those who "*have pleasure in them that do them*", consenting with or approving such wicked actions in others. What should we think of much of television programming if we take this one seriously? How often such "entertainments" lead us to thrill over the unrighteous actions of actor or actress, laughing when we ought to cry and delighting 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 righteous 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*

13:7 *Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

children walk in truth” (III John 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. God’s love is most sincere and rejoices in sincerity. Therefore it hides nothing and welcomes scrutiny. There is 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 are willing to see it. Compare the example of Jesus in Mark 6, how He endured 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. 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 toward them*”, for He saw them “*as sheep not having a shepherd*”. There was the enduring love of God in action! When the Father sends the rain and sunshine upon those who hate Him still, that is enduring love in action. When Jesus 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 naïve or easily deceived. Yet on the other hand love is not easily given to suspicion. Love leans toward trust, quick to give the benefit of the doubt. It does not 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 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 below.

- "*Endureth all things*" (vs. 7) – Love perseveres in the face of every adverse circumstance. Compare the undaunted servant of Isaiah 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, even though the other should respond with evil. It is how our God loved us when we were yet sinners and hated Him.

13:8-13 – Love is Eternal

In vs. 1-3 Paul describes love as the vital aspect, for

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.

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 are only meant to 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 fine hosepipe without water. Like having a house all expertly wired up but with no electricity. The channel is all there, but with no vital 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 have 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 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

*13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.
13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that
which is in part shall be done away.*

partial view, only limited answers to our questions of God and His glories. The fullest revelation is yet to come, 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 is 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 seems likely that Paul was not referring to such 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, and disregarding the all-important contents within.

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.*

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 now 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; away that changed as we grew to maturity. Thus the suggestion of change in the way of things is clearly introduced here. Compare 14:20. As well there is perhaps a touch of subtle rebuke in Paul’s words, indicating that it was time for these believers to grow up and move on from more childish ways.

Vs. 12 – *“But then face to face”* – Further on the idea of our *“in part”* awareness, Paul compares it to the

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.*

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 is 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 John 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 am 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. Yet he does not 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 chapter 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 are 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 chapter 13, God’s call is to pursue love for others above all things pursued.

“But rather that ye may prophesy” – *“Rather”* here is in the sense of “more”. Paul would rather that they seek the gift of prophesying over tongues-speaking because of its greater usefulness in conveying God’s truth to others. Again, prophesying has always been both the proclamation of God’s words for here and now as well as 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. It is the essence of preaching, the proclamation of God’s revealed Word, because God’s eternal words applied to our individual needs and situations are of greatest worth in fostering faith, stirring courage and feeding souls (Rom. 10:17). Whether one is revealing a new message from God or explaining what has already been revealed, it is the Spirit’s gifting that makes such a work truly effective.

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.

Vs. 2-5 – Paul now gives reasons why the gift of prophesying or proclamation is to be preferred over tongues in the public ministry.

Vs. 2 – Tongues-speaking in itself does not speak to men at all, for only God understands the inward expressions of praise and thanks behind the sounds coming from the mouth, while to others listening it is a mystery. Such worship may very well be sincere toward God, but what good is it to others? Please understand Paul's meaning here. His obvious point is that it is a significant mark *against* tongues-speaking 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 fully understand what is spoken, bringing great possibilities for building others up in their faith and bringing God's peace and comfort to their souls and encouraging them to more zealous activity for the Lord. God's most effective method for outreach and the uplifting of His church has always been the

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.*

preaching of His words (II Tim. 4:2).

Vs. 4 – The practice of tongues-speaking 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.

“*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

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?*

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?*

now chases this theme with illustrations.

Vs. 6 – “*What shall it profit you*” – Again Paul points 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? Are you hearing 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?”

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 would all be unclear on the meaning, for there would be *no recognition*. But if through the appropriate use of notes, timing, and rhythm one should play a well-known tune, there

14:8 *For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?*

would be immediate recognition.

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 sounds or patterns loudly trumpeted would communicate need for 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 while on the battlefield the soldiers should suddenly hear some ragtime tune trumpeted through the trees, or again some random series of blaring sounds, they would look at each other 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.

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.

Vs. 9 – “*So likewise ye*” – Now the application is made. Unless you speak with intelligible speech who is going to know what you are saying? Please do not miss the incredibly great 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. Do not miss the very negative feature of this gift that Paul so clearly presents, that from the perspective of those hearing, it is little more than sounds sent into the air. This was not a gift to be so put on a pedestal as many of God’s children still do today. How much more inferior this gift to 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 there at Corinth.

*14:10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.
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.*

Vs. 10 – Though there are many different languages spoken around the globe not one of them is meaningless to those who speak it. Paul’s reference here to the many languages of earth suggests that the tongues-speaking gift he is dealing with in this context was the same as that spoken at Pentecost. It was the divinely given ability to speak actual languages then existing on earth, not gibberish.

Vs. 11 – “*I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian*” – The term “*barbarian*” was used by the Greeks to refer to anyone not speaking their language, thus a foreigner. When one speaks in a language different from what I understand he is a foreigner to me and I to him. We cannot easily 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 mutual understanding as fellow heavenly citizens.

*14:12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of
spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying
of the church.*

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. To have such an interest he must also be keenly aware that there is a proper way to handle guns. Without this understanding he is a tragedy awaiting a happening. I might love to drive cars, and especially the great gift of a nice car I have 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. Every believers in Jesus must understand that the gifts we have from the Spirit have been given to build up the body rather than to tear it down through the introduction of subtle rifts due to the reckless, ignorant use of those gifts. There are indeed rules of the road for the use of the Spirit’s gifts. Oh how greatly needed is this message for the church of our own day!

14:13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.

14:14 For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

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 do not necessarily come together, but are two separate gifts. As well, one with a desire to benefit the body might ask for and receive the gift of interpretation. The degree to which the same 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 meaning of his own words. The intellectual part of him “*is unfruitful*”, receiving little more benefit than if a foreigner were speaking to

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.

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.

him. Even so with the practice of the gift of tongues-speaking, 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. 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, the faithful resolve of *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 is 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

14:18 *I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:*

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.*

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 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 clarion call to 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)

*14:20 Brethren, be not children in understanding:
howbeit in malice be ye children, but in
understanding be men.*

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 wickedness. But when it came to understanding the things of the Spirit it was time for them to grow up. That Paul must speak to them in this way revealed the fact of their immaturity in these matters. Compare 13:11, where Paul may have been hinting as well at the 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. In a similar way these 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 soon come to an end in fact (13:8), and they were making a toy out of it. Paul now sought to explain the dangers and violation involved, seeking to remove that gift from a play-thing status and to put it back into its proper place as the sign it was meant to be.

*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.*

Vs. 21 – *“In the law it is written”* – Paul quotes now from Isaiah 28:11-12. Isaiah’s words there were written at 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 was treating them through His words, coming to them with *“precept upon precept, line upon line”*, handling 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 was speaking 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 Deuteronomy 28 the Lord had warned His people that for their stubborn waywardness 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 repeatedly spoken to them in their own tongue through their own people or prophets, and repeatedly refused, then the Lord would at last bring down foreigners (barbarians) upon them, carrying them into captivity. And though these would come speaking in tongues other than their own, yet Israel would at last hear and understand and believe His message of judgment with greatest possible clarity, though too late! The message through such *“stammering lips and another tongue”* of their foreign captors would be rather self-evident. 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

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.

southern tribes of Judah were later sliding the same downward slope of 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 confronted with the sign He had long before given to them of “*stammering lips and another tongue*” they would know it for the sign of His judgment. It seems His judgment upon ancient Babel was a foreshadow of this same approach used repeatedly by the Lord throughout Israel’s troubled history (Gen. 11).

Now please understand what Paul was so carefully implying to those Corinthian Christians there in I Corinthians 14.

Vs. 22 – “*Wherefore tongues are for a sign*” – This gift of tongues-speaking was never meant to be

some private Christian play thing. In fact the gift was never actually meant to be for the benefit of believers at all. Tongues-speaking was given as a sign, *“not to them that believe, but to them that believe not”*. In this context *“them that believe not”* refers again particularly to the unbelieving, rebellious house of Israel. The gift of tongues was a sign operative in that early church era, from the moment the church was born at Pentecost (Acts 2), as an indicator especially to the Jewish nation that they as a people had been weighed in the balance and found wanting, for they were again drawing the stroke of God’s searing judgment upon themselves. This time through the most heinous act imaginable in their rejection and murder of their promised Messiah. Therefore as Jesus had proclaimed to the Jewish leaders in Matthew 22, the kingdom of God would be taken from Israel (for a time) and would be *“given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof”* (Matt. 22:43). The church is that “nation”, stepping into God’s special focus in the place of Israel throughout this current age, and therefore it was the *“nation”* of the church bringing the sign of *“stammering lips and another tongue”*, the warning to unbelieving Israel that again their doom was on the way. It is the reason *why* the gift of tongues-speaking folks. It is the reason why that particular, rather odd gift was given at Pentecost and

throughout the early church era. Then came 70 A.D. when God again brought His crushing blow, scattering the nation of Israel to the four winds, as He had been warning through that tongues gift. And then, just as Paul had indicated in chapter 13, the Spirit gift of tongues-speaking ceased, because the *purpose* of the gift was no more, with God's judgment having fully fallen upon the Jewish nation. History of course 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-speaking be traced, groups such as the Montanists and Irvingites, Mormons, Catholics, and cultists. Are you listening? A "practice" men referred to as tongues continued, but the Spirit gift of tongues did not. For the gift of tongues ceased with its purpose. When we understand the *why* of the gift, the *what* and *when* of it falls into place.

I fear that when Satan sets God's church to babbling and gibberish it is 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 is 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 completed 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 Corinthians 13:8-10 that the gift of prophecy, with supernatural knowledge, would pass away when the "*perfect*" or

completed had come. Then God sealed His 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 am 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 does not 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 for their treacherous murder of their Messiah. This must surely be much 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-speaking 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 is no place where sane people could find any kind of help.

This would of course imply that such was the nature of their services there at Corinth, with the unrestrained clamour of all speaking in tongues at the same time, 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 is 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. Yet this is the very sort of thing

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.

happening out there within too many Christian circles today. It is Paul who said it first in seeking to lead God's church away from such ignorant 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 have found from God through their own searching of His words.

“He is convinced of all, he is judged of all” – The result of that more orderly approach, and with the exercise of that better gift, not only will the saved be edified and exhorted and comforted, but the Spirit is able to take the words spoken and through them 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 this supremely useful gift the sin of the hearer is

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.

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). *Here* is the way cleansing and forgiveness and life eternal are found in Jesus Christ! Praise God for the surpassing benefit of His good gifts!

"He will worship God" – Though that unsaved soul 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 away from any tendency to confusion in Christian assemblies. All that is done must be done "*unto edifying*" (vs. 26) and "*decently and in order*" (vs.

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.*

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. Participants were to suggest maybe in turn 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 a 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 requirement of such an orderly handling of the services implies an appointed leader of the assembly, one 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 carried along by the Spirit. And he would begin his brief interruption of whatever was happening in the service at the time,

14:29 *Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.*

All must come to a stop until he finished his little monologue. Such a lordly feeling of control I suspect.

“And let one interpret” – There must be one to interpret or *there was to be no tongues-speaking!* Again, all taking place and being spoken must contribute toward the benefit of all. By his 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, for Paul said *“silence”*. Nor 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 Paul’s instructions here and the sham of most of what is called tongues today becomes immediately

*14:30 If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by,
let the first hold his peace.*

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. It seems 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 all 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 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,

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.

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 discovered through the Spirit and the Word 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 here.

Vs. 32 – “*And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets*” – This comment was likely aimed at what was happening there among them at that time. 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 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 in silence while another speaks, or even to wait to speak at the next meeting. If it is a

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.

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 treading over each other in the conduct of public meetings. Indeed the degree to which there is pulsating pandemonium in the services, to that same degree it is *not* God's Spirit moving the happenings there. Speaking of this control, Clark in his commentary stated, "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 sensibility 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 Spirit (Gal. 5:22; James 3:17), while confusion is the result of selfishness.

Vs. 34-35 – "*Let your women keep silence in the churches*" – It is an interesting couple of verses we come to now, stirring much debate over 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.

particular meaning and manner in which they are to be applied. Some simply dismiss Paul's words here as likely applicable to the situation in Corinth but having little to do with our modern church scene. But such a response comes only from the desire to accommodate the Bible to our own wishes or current culture or religious fashion. Some points to consider;

- The command for the silence of women within church services is an expression of their submission. In I Timothy 2:11 Paul also connects 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 are told in 11:5 that with 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 by the Lord in II Timothy 2:12. Consider the cults begun by misguided

women teaching false doctrine (Christian Science, 7th Day Adventism, etc.).

- The larger context in these chapters is the matter of spiritual gifts. Here in chapter 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 sometimes be used as a subtle pretence for teaching and so these too are disallowed. This is only a question of involvement in the public services, and not excluding women from all forms of gifting and ministry. Compare how effective an evangelist was the woman of Sychar in John 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 vital 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 Genesis 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 is interesting to trace the very prominent role women have played in the confusion of the modern tongues movement over the past century, from the time it began with Agnes Ozman, at Parham's Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas.

14:36-40 – Confirmatory Comments

14:36 What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?

It is 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 enquired whether any among them could make claim to be a source of God’s inspired Book of instruction for Christian life and service, as he indeed could. And since that would be a No, could they therefore proclaim themselves free to use it or define it or interpret God’s Book as they pleased. Another No. God gave these words through this apostle and therefore Paul could best relate the meaning of those words.

“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?

Vs. 37 – Paul was confident that all who were truly

*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.*

spiritual or who possessed a genuine gifting to prophesy would recognize his words as from God. Now this is a very interesting statement indeed. Do not 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 by God's Spirit to recognize the same, 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, giving to God's church His completed Book of books, containing all of what God intended to be included 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 given over to the ignorance they have chosen for themselves. Paul would waste no more words on stubborn rejecters, but handed them over to God for His just dealing. Compare 5:5. It is not that Paul no longer

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.

cared or prayed for them, but there simply 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. Then a few decades later came the end to which tongues pointed, bringing to an end as well 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 to 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, dramatic gift, it was never one of the highest value in the church 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). In what a marvellous way God has tuned their error for good, for their doubts drew from God’s apostle this most priceless 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 presents as the assurance that all who are Christ’s shall be raised to life as well.

15:1-4 – Paul’s Gospel

Vs. 1 – “*I declare unto you the gospel*” – Paul holds 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

15:2 *By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.*

and in which they still stood firm in their faith. As we have often seen and considered, when it is genuine faith in Jesus 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 did not understand why. Yet his heart hold upon 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 and transformed in new birth.

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 the same in Colossians 1:23. Remember those crucial verb tenses in Hebrews 3:6 & 14.

“Unless ye have believed in vain” – This suggestion

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:*

is perhaps a bit tongue-in-cheek as Paul now 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 in Him are yet in their sins (vs. 14, 17). “Unless of course it is 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 preaching (chapter 1-2).

- Jesus was buried – Displaying His condition

15:5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

of actual death. His soul actually joined the dead (Psalm 16:10).

- Jesus rose again the third day – The Greek verb here is in the perfect tense, speaking of a past event with effects continuing to the present, expressing the meaning that Jesus exists in a condition of having been raised from death.

“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 Psalm 22 & Isaiah 53:1-9 and His resurrection in Psalm 16:10 & Isaiah 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 resurrection of Jesus 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”* – 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 (Luke 24:34). He then appeared later that evening to all gathered in the upper room (Luke 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 Saviour 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 giving 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”* – It would seem this was James the half-brother of Jesus and the writer of the N.T. book of James. Though Christ’s siblings

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.

did not believe in Him during His life (John 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 (chapters 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, to which he responded with immediate obedience, 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 and caused such havoc and heartache 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 is never too late to turn to Jesus or to present our life to Him for service

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.*

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 the marvel of God’s 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 monster 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 very highest possible God-esteem. He was not a man with *self*-confidence, but only with abounding

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.

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 and breathed God’s exceeding grace. He earned nothing, he received everything he was and had, all of grace. He claimed nothing as from himself, but all from his Saviour. He was not down and negative dwelling on his own past failings, though so intensely aware of them. He was ever up and positive because his eyes were fixed on his God of grace. It is the answer to the heartaches selfishness thinking always brings.

“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 and fully motivated for the Lord. Yet even in his intense labours Paul attributed no glory to himself.

15:11 *Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.*

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?*

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 Ephesians 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 the truth of it, thus Paul had preached there, and they at Corinth had believed the truth of the Saviour’s death, burial, and resurrection.

15:12-19 – If No Resurrection

Vs. 12 – “*How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?*” – If the risen Christ is

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.*

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, perhaps from the teachings of the Sadducees who “*say there is no resurrection*” (Mark 12:18; Acts 4:1-2), this possible arising through the Jewish element among the believers there at Corinth. Perhaps it was introduced through the Epicureans who did not believe in life after death. The source of this false teaching is not given for it mattered little 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 does not. If not, then Christ’s resurrection is excluded by the same ban. Compare the same in vs. 16.

*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.*

Vs. 14 – “*And if Christ be not risen...*” – If there is no risen Saviour then there must follow further obvious conclusions;

- Jesus could only still be dead.
- All preaching therefore that affirms that Jesus is alive 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 and is Christ’s end then so it must be our end 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?

The very core of Christianity is Jesus. And if Jesus cannot be trusted then the Christian religion is untrustworthy to the core.

Vs. 15 – “*Yea, and we are found false witnesses of*

*15:16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised
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.*

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, if Jesus did not rise. 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. Al 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 behind the English differing words are translated “*vain*” in vs. 14 & 17. In vs. 14 it is vain in the sense of empty, pointing out the hollowness of such a faith. In vs. 17 it is vain in the sense of aimless, pointing to the utter hopelessness of such a faith coming to any results. As one writer suggested, it would be like chasing the wind or shooting at stars or pursuing your shadow. Hollow and hopeless the only possible outcome! Such a faith, devoid of any worth, could not justify or cleanse anyone! Such a purposeless faith could

15:19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

only leave one still condemned, still fully carrying the terrible stain of sin before God!

Vs. 18 – *“They also which are fallen asleep in Jesus”* – *“Fallen asleep”* is how Paul commonly referred to those dead in Christ, the imagery implying of course that there is still more living in store for them. 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 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 Jesus were actually quite useless, only to leave us condemned and confounded upon leaving this life, then all of what we have endured and

15:20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

denied ourselves for Jesus 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 such 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 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

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.

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, Adam as our representative head, that our greatest enemy in death originated, therefore it was through a man, 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 the principle of death onboard, for everyone born in Adam is dying. Yet everyone born *again* in Jesus Christ is living, having received newness of spiritual life, and will be raised

15:23 *But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.*

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 in Jesus will not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

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

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.

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 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 Psalm 2 and described in Revelation 20. After Satan's final efforts, and after the rest of the unsaved of earth have revealed

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.*

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 Daniel 9:24 fully realized. Even death itself will then be cast at last to the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). This 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 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

*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.*

of every living soul then. Happy day! All of man's love and devotion will be His, and that 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 will live ever in union and communion with Him and He with us. Living in the glory of His light, never to be tempted away again. Oh the glorious 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 have already seen evidence in this church of the same foul influences from the outside in their lean toward fornication (chapter 5-6) and their abuse of the Spirit's gifts (chapter 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 against the standard of God's Book with all open-minded sincerity.

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 at first blush 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 any such views or practices in the early church.

Do not 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

*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.*

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 life 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 ignorant practices would be robbed of purpose and meaning if death was the end of it all anyway. 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

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.*

is no resurrection after all.

Vs. 30-32 – “*Why stand we in jeopardy every hour?*”
– Why are we then foolishly hazarding our lives?

Why are we living in peril for your sakes such that it is 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 is all a waste then, to no real advantage! Hey, if no resurrection then we would be wiser to recognize the brief window of this life as all that we will ever have, and we should rather 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 might rather 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. This is where the notion of no resurrection would lead.

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 such involvement (Prov. 7), even so Paul now yanks his listeners back from such foolish anti-resurrection thinking, suggested and fostered by the world 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 corrupt virtuous things”*. Even a man of the world was wise to the danger of surrounding influences leading the virtuous away from their virtues. How much more should we be wise to this. The truth of it is that the dead in Christ will indeed be raised. Thus to spend and be spent for the cause of Jesus Christ in this life is the most worthwhile cause in all of human experience. And to live for ourselves, careless concerning 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 underscores here 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 mighty means by which men might come to know God.

“I speak this to your shame” – How very strong Paul’s words, for this church of believers was holding far too loosely to a crucial aspect of *“the faith once delivered unto the saints”*. Compare 6:5. Sometimes it is necessary to shame others in love that they might see the folly of their way. Paul could do so, and undoubtedly was most effective in his approach, because his love for these people was ever

15:35 But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?

an evident thing (vs. 58; 1:4).

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 sharp response in the next verse, rather than sincerity in such questions he heard an attitude of disbelief. It is never wrong to ask questions of the Lord. But it is always wrong to cast faithless words of challenge at Him like Pilate’s *“What is truth?!”* expressing a heart of denial. It seems some there at Corinth 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 John 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 it is the same life now appearing in a new and different form.
- Though the new plant *is* the quickened seed, the plant is not as the seed (vs. 37-38). Though it is 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 cocoon is the same being though very

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.*

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 death, 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 is a body that can appear and disappear, very different from the first.

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. 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 be buried in the ground as if the planting of seeds, will at last be raised up as very different kinds of bodies, never more to be perishable. Our imperfect bodies destined to the ugly mess of physical decay will be raised in glory, never to suffer shame 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 vitality from the time we reached the peak of our

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.*

physical prime, will be raised with eternal vigour. Never is the frailty of man more evident than when failing at the last with death's relentless approach. But praise God 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 one perfectly fitted for eternal life in God's presence.

Vs. 45-46 – Now it is 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. And as "*it is written*" in Genesis 2:7, Adam being the first man created by God was made of the dust of earth, and so his first existence here was oriented toward the earth, and the same for all born of Adam.

15:46 *Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.*

“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 *“the last Adam”* (a term referring to Jesus Christ) 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”*, Jesus Christ.

Vs. 46 – Again, first must come the natural life and then the spiritual life in their proper order. Even as Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3, *“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”* (vs. 5). One must first be born physically and then he must be *“born again”* spiritually or he will have no entrance into heaven.

Vs. 47-48 – *“The first man is of the earth, earthy”* – The Greek word behind *“earthy”* at its root refers to

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.*

a pile of dirt. As the first man (Adam), the earthy, the one from the earth, returned to the earth in death (Gen. 3:19), so the second man (Jesus), the heavenly, the One “*which cometh down from heaven*” (John 6:33), returned to heaven. As the first (Adam) at his very best could only lead his race into the earth (“*terrestrial*”) from which he came, so the second (Jesus), “*the Lord from heaven*”, is able to lead His own to heaven (“*celestial*”) from whence He came.

It all depends on who we are 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 Jesus Christ, in whom we may be born again, 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 kind of body consist or appropriate for life here on earth in our present existence. 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 does not necessarily say *“we”* as if he himself expected the Lord to come before his death, but *“we”* in the sense of we the church of all true believers in Jesus. 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 most will have *“fallen asleep in Jesus”*, yet both living and dead will undergo a very definite change to another form in that moment.

Vs. 52-53 – *“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye”*– The Greek word behind *“moment”* is *atomos*, from 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 commonly used the sound of a trumpet to gather folks to important events. The Lord as well will use the same. We read of the same event in I Thessalonians 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, with the predicted sounds announcing it, all believers both dead and living will be changed from corruptible to incorruptible, from mortal to immortality, and shall be caught away to the Lord’s presence, after the manner of Enoch and Elijah, in the Rapture of the church. It is not that we will become entirely new and different beings, for our identity will remain intact. It is not that our bodies will be destroyed and replaced with entirely different physical entities. We will be the same person and yet changed in a moment to immortality, one fit for the celestial.

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.*

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.*

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 from our experience 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 Revelation 19 with the forever fall of Babylon.

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

15:57 *But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

perishable poison of decay and death.

“The strength of sin is the law” – To sin is to fall short of God’s righteous 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 in effect 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;

- Who carried our sins away in death.
- Who fulfilled all that the law required in our behalf.

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 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? Together with filling our hearts with greatest hope, confidence, and courage, they as well serve to fill our days with earnest labours. Based upon the assured truth of the resurrection, *“be ye...”*;

- *“Stedfast”* – Resolute in purpose. Unshaken from our course by even the very worst of trials.

“Unmoveable” – Firmly persistent. Unmoved 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 to which He calls 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), and calling others as well 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 indeed be a resurrection. There will in truth 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 that only Saviour 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” (II Cor. 2:14).

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 chapter 15, Paul now turns in this chapter to practical instructions concerning church offerings and his travel plans and then finally 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. for 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 again 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 is not stated why the Jerusalem believers struggled so financially but it is 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 Jesus 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 God’s warning to His people 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 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 beginning in 70 A.D. It could not have been a very easy place to live in those days.

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 once-hated Gentiles!

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. Now the same instructions he had given to the churches of Galatia in central Asia Minor (modern Turkey) he gave to 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

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.

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 of the week on which Jesus rose from death, that event so greatly highlighted in the previous chapter.

Paul (God) fully expected these believers to honour the Lord with their substance in helping those struggling saints in Jerusalem, now giving a simple explanation of how they (we) were to involve themselves in giving;

- It is to take place "*on the first day*" as an aspect of our worship of the Lord.

It is something "*every one of you*" is to take part in. Every child of God should consider 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 is God who prospered us regardless of the measure of that prosperity. Therefore it is God we must honour with "*the firstfruits of all thine increase*" (Prov. 3:9-10).

- It is to be done as a regular habit rather than

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.*

impulsively or according to emotion. Yet in our method we must never lose sight of what we are doing, why we are doing it, and for whom we so sacrifice.

- It is to be done proportionally. There is no set figure given here, but only *“as God hath prospered”* us, suggesting some percentage of our income.

“That there be no gathering when I come” – Paul wanted no money drives when he arrived, for he must attend to other things while there with them. He asked that all might be accumulated ahead of time 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 be given an official letter of appointment from the church as well. When it came to finances, especially funds folks have given in worship of the Lord, due to the dangers of suspicion and false accusation Paul

16:5 *Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia.*
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..*

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*” – His 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 a brief visit but 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 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

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.
16:8 But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost.

passing. Again, he wanted to spend some time with them rather than making only a quick whistle stop. As we have seen, there were important issues to sort out among them, which Paul presumed would require some time. And he did not wish to go to them “*now*”, perhaps partly because he did not want to be forced to deal strongly with them as he had warned. He was likely hoping that this letter sent ahead 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 “*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

16:9 *For a great door and effectual is opened unto me,
and there are many adversaries.*

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 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

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.

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 are living godly in Christ Jesus when we suffer persecution (II Tim. 3:12). We can know that we have touched a nerve of the evil one when we face his wrath through his people, particularly his people of false religions.

Vs. 10 – "Now if Timothy come" – Paul had apparently sent Timothy across the Aegean to minister in his absence in the churches of Macedonia and then onward to Greece, preparing the way for Paul's coming. It is 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 such proud and troubled folks like those at Corinth might eat for breakfast. Yet still Timothy would be there as Paul's

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.

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.

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 less of Timothy than of the man he represented. Compare I Timothy 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 that young servant's needs and help him along his way, both while there with them and onward.

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

*16:13 Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men,
be strong.*

sizeable mess there among the believers at Corinth.

Note how Paul was in no position of supreme authority, displaying no religious hierarchy then in place. 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 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 is 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 have believed and received through Jesus 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, “*grievous wolves entering in among you, not sparing the flock*” (Acts 20:29), who must be seen for what they are and withstood. 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. 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 Timothy 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 are not wrong or weak to experience such feelings. We are wrong when we allow them to cave in our courage and drive us from that field of service where God would have us remain, standing strong. We may be afraid to do or say things that need to be done or said, but do and say we must!

"Be strong" – The sense of the word here is "resolute", unswayed, unswerving 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. Do not ever allow yourself to be subtly moved to some other mission. Never forget the simple facts;

- *Proclaiming results in hearing*

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,)*

- *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.

Vs. 14 – “*Let all your things be done with charity*” – Lest vs. 13 appear too much the steely discipline, here is 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 in him a loving respect and genuine care 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 others

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.

regardless of returns.

Vs. 15 – *“They have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints”* – It is 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 upon them but something from within *“themselves”*, a voluntary decision. All who are such servants on earth will be esteemed highly 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, creating divisions such as were so prevalent there among the believers at Corinth, spoiling the testimony of a unified ministry.

*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.*

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 Philippians 2:29-30.

“Therefore acknowledge ye them that are such” – Paul was full of praise for that calibre of men, fully 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” – As we know, this couple found the Lord through Paul’s initial church-planting work there in Corinth. It was with them that Paul stayed when in Corinth,

*16:20 All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another
with an holy kiss.*

working in their tent-making business (Acts 18). We later find 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 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, perhaps in preparation for Paul to later follow.

Vs. 20 – "*Greet one another with an holy kiss*" – As we would shake hands or embrace in greeting, this "*holy kiss*" was a common Christian expression of mutual affection, a needful expression among so

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.*

divided a people as these. This kiss of greeting is usually described as “*holy*”, as a sign of affection between brother and sister without any impure motives. Compare also Romans 16:16; II Corinthians 13:12; I Thessalonians 5:26; I Peter 5:14. Though we may not follow the same particular custom, the principle is plain. We must have warm affection for each other, and show it. And if we are not willing for this then it is good indication 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 word perhaps expressing more the idea of affection. “Anyone who has no affection for the Lord

Jesus Christ let him be anathema”. “*Anathema*” refers to something cursed or 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 destruction! We cannot talk about “God” with a Muslim and think they have the same salvation we have found, or even know the same God we know. 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 is enthroned on the lap of the “Queen of Heaven” and think they have found the salvation we have found. They must love and honour Jesus Christ as supreme above all, the “*one Mediator between God and men*”. We cannot add Jesus to the many gods of the Hindu. They must renounce their pagan polytheism and love the Lord 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 “*stone of stumbling, and rock of offence*” (I Pet. 2:8). What a soul chooses to do with Jesus Christ determines whether they are 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”. It

16:23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

16:24 My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

is a word spoken as a reminder that the coming of our beloved Lord is near at hand.

Vs. 23-24 – “*My love be with you all*” – Though Paul had spoken so sharply to the troubled saints there at Corinth within these chapters, yet still he longed for God’s grace to be with them, still he would have them to know of his love for them. In fact he was willing to speak the painful truth to them only 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!

