

DIGGING DEEPER
1 CORINTHIANS



1 Corinthians

Digging Deeper

Acknowledgements

Many of the basic thoughts used in this study of 1 Corinthians, comes from the "Life Application Bible Commentary" published by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. We have used their ideas liberally with their permission. We alone assume responsibility for the contents here, but we appreciate Tyndale giving us permission to use their materials.

The lesson outlines and notes in this booklet were prepared and edited by Tim McManigle, of FBC Missions.

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# 1 CORINTHIANS 1

## INTRODUCTION / 1:1–3

Through various sources, Paul had received reports of problems in the Corinthian church, including jealousy, divisiveness, sexual immorality and failure to discipline members.

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

- Paul was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin and a descendant of Abraham (**2 Corinthians 11:22**). Born in Tarsus, he had been raised as a strict Pharisee and had been educated in Jerusalem under Gamaliel (**Acts 22:3**). Though born to Jewish parents, Paul was also a Roman citizen (**Acts 22:27–28**). Out of this diverse background, God fashioned a valuable servant, using every aspect of Paul’s upbringing to further spread the gospel message across the Roman Empire. During Paul’s ministry, he took three missionary journeys, covering thousands of miles as he carried the gospel across Asia and into Europe.
- Following the style of first-century letters, Paul began his letter to the Corinthians by introducing himself as the writer: *This letter is from Paul*. Then he described himself as *chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus*. God chose Paul to be his “*chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel*” (**Acts 9:15**). Paul had not sought this apostleship; rather, God had chosen him. Thus, Paul could truthfully say that he was an apostle “by the will of God.” Paul was not one of the original twelve disciples (later called apostles), but the risen Christ Jesus had confronted him on the road to Damascus and had called him to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles (**Acts**

**9:3–19).** The apostles' mission was to be God's representatives: They were messengers, and delegates directly under the authority of Jesus Christ. They had authority to set up and oversee churches and to discipline them if necessary (which Paul did in his two letters to the Corinthian church).

- The *brother* named *Sosthenes* may have been Paul's secretary, who had written this letter as Paul had dictated it. He was probably the Jewish synagogue leader in Corinth (**Acts 18:17**) who had been beaten during an attack on Paul and then later became a believer. Sosthenes was well known to the members of the Corinthian church, so Paul included his familiar name in the opening of the letter.

**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:**”

- Paul wrote this letter *to the church of God that is in Corinth* while he was visiting Ephesus during his third missionary journey (**Acts 19:1–20:1**). Corinth and Ephesus faced each other across the Aegean Sea. Paul knew the Corinthian church well because he had spent eighteen months in Corinth during his second missionary journey (**Acts 18:1–18**). While in Ephesus, he had heard about problems in Corinth (1:11). Approximately the same time, a delegation from the Corinthian church had visited Paul to ask his advice about their conflicts (16:17). Paul's purpose for writing was to correct those problems and to answer questions that church members had asked in a previous letter (7:1).

- Corinth, a giant cultural melting pot with a great diversity of wealth, religions, and moral standards, had a reputation for being fiercely independent and as evil as any city in the world. The Romans had destroyed Corinth in 146 B.C. after a rebellion. But in 46 B.C., Julius Caesar had rebuilt it because of its strategic seaport. By Paul's day (A.D. 50), the Romans had made Corinth the capital of Achaia (present-day Greece). It was a large city, offering Rome great profits through trade as well as the military protection of its ports. But the city's prosperity made it ripe for all sorts of corruption. Idolatry flourished, and there were more than a dozen pagan temples, employing many prostitutes. On a hillside above the city sat the Temple of Aphrodite, which employed a thousand women who were there to fulfill "worshippers'" sexual pleasures. In the city, the Temple of Apollo employed young men whose job was to fulfill the sexual desires of male and female "worshippers." The gross immorality of the city made even pagans in other cities uncomfortable. To call another person a sinner, one merely needed to call that person a "Corinthian." No wonder Paul had come to this city "in weakness; timid and trembling" (2:3 NLT).
- Yet out of this moral wasteland God formed a church through Paul's ministry. Paul recognized this group of believers as sanctified in Christ Jesus, (set apart for God's possession and use). Sanctification takes place at salvation (**I Corinthians 1:2**), and is the will (**I Thessalonians 4:3**) and work of God (**I Thessalonians 5:23**) to sanctify a person; therefore this was not the work of the Corinthians, but the work of God alone. Paul referred to the Corinthian believers as "saints." These people were not "saints" because of any merit of their own; they were "called to be saints" because they were chosen and set apart by

God. “Called” means designed by God. God had identified them to be saved sinners. Consider **1Corinthians 1:9**.

- By including a salutation to *all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, Paul was making it clear that, although this letter was dealing with specific issues facing the church at Corinth, all believers could learn from it. The Corinthian church must have included a great cross section of believers; wealthy merchants, common laborers, perhaps former temple prostitutes, and middle-class families. Because of the wide diversity of people and backgrounds, Paul took great pains to stress the need for both spiritual unity and Christ like character.

**1:3 “Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

- “Grace” means God’s undeserved favor, his kindness shown clearly in his free gift of salvation given in Christ. Receiving it brings peace (**Romans 5:1**), not only the peace that Christ established between believers and God through his death on the cross (**Romans 5:1**); but also as we read in this verse 3, peace from God. The Bible also tells us that we may also obtain the peace of God (**Colossians 3:15**) in a world of noise, confusion, and relentless pressures. People long for peace. Many give up the search, thinking it is impossible to find, but true peace of heart and mind is available through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul used “grace and Peace” as a standard greeting in all of his letters (**Romans 1:7; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2**). He wanted his readers to experience God’s grace and peace in their daily living.



- “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”; Paul makes a distinction between the Father and the Son, as he did in **2 Corinthians 13:14**; now see in **I John 5:7** and **I Peter 1:2**. God is a triune God; three persons in one. (Example – the sun has light, heat, and energy, but it is all one sun.)

## **PAUL THANKS GOD / 1:4–9**

The problems in the Corinthian church are seen in almost every word Paul wrote in his letter. He realized that the believers were struggling with internal, as well as external, problems.

**1:4: “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;”**

- In this letter, Paul would include strong words to the Corinthians, but he began on a positive note of thanksgiving. Paul affirmed their privilege of belonging to the Lord. He gave *thanks to ... God* for the Corinthian believers because only by *the grace of God* can anyone come to believe and be accepted into God’s family. That grace has been made available only *in Christ Jesus*. Paul most often would begin his letters with a word of thanks for the believers to whom he was writing (**Romans 1:8**; **Philippians 1:3–7**; **Colossians 1:3–8**).

**1:5–6 “That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:”**

- By God’s grace, believers are accepted into God’s family (1:4). As a result of grace, God made them rich in every way. Evidently, the Corinthians were putting too much emphasis on possessing the gifts of

the Spirit and not enough emphasis on Christ, who enabled them to have those gifts. They had been enriched in their speaking about God and in their knowledge of him. God's grace had increased their ability to speak about their faith, as well as their spiritual knowledge and understanding. These facts, both seen by Paul himself and reported to him by others, served to confirm the testimony of Christ in the Corinthian believers. The changed lives of these believers validated the truth of the gospel message that had been preached to them (**Colossians 1:6** speaks of the fruit of the gospel).

**1:7 “So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:”**

- The Corinthian church members had all the spiritual gifts they needed to live the Christian life, to witness for Christ, and to stand against the paganism and immorality of Corinth. The word translated “spiritual gift” is *charisma*, a word used in three different ways in the New Testament: (1) for salvation (as in **Romans 5:15**); (2) for God's good gifts generally (as in **Romans 11:29**); (3) for special gifts given to believers by the Holy Spirit (as in chapter 12). Most likely, Paul was referring to the second option; God's good gifts generally. These believers in Corinth lacked nothing; they had all the giftedness necessary to live the Christ-life. Therefore, they more eagerly looked forward in faith and hope to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. This statement refers to the second coming of Christ. As part of the gospel message, the promise of Christ's return in triumph encourages all believers as we eagerly await the time when we will live with him forever (**I Peter 4:7, 13**). The spiritual gifts God has given to believers here on earth are merely a foretaste of what is to come.

**1:8 “Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

- There will be an *end* to the eager waiting of believers (1:7), because Christ will return. Here, that second coming is called *the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Not only have the believers received gifts for edifying and establishing the church, but Christ would also keep them strong until that “end” should come. Because Christ has died for believers, given them spiritual gifts, and promised to return for them, Paul guaranteed these believers that God would also consider them *blameless* (**Romans 8:33–34; Ephesians 1:7–10**). This guarantee is because of what Jesus Christ has accomplished for us through his death and resurrection.

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

- Believers need never doubt God’s grace, his gifts, or his promise to give them eternal life because *God is faithful*. God always does just what he says. God has promised, and because he cannot lie (Titus 1:2), believers can be certain that all of his promises will come true. God himself had *called* each of the Corinthian believers *into the fellowship of his Son*, and that call will never be rescinded. **Revelation 4:11** makes clear that God created us for His pleasure. In **Matthew 4:19; Mark 6:7**, we see that the call of God is first to Himself. God’s desire for each of His children is to call us “into the fellowship” (a deep, intimate, abiding relationship) with His Son Jesus Christ.

## **PAUL APPEALS FOR HARMONY / 1:10–17**

In this large and diverse Corinthian church, the believers were favoring different preachers. Because the whole New

Testament had not yet been written, the believers depended heavily on preaching and teaching for spiritual insight into the meaning of the Old Testament. However, they had split into factions; each following their favorite preacher or leader, even though the leaders spoke the same message.

Paul admonished the believers to remember the singular message that had brought them to faith, and to stop comparing messengers.

**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.”**

- The phrase “brothers and sisters” emphasizes that all Christians are part of God’s family, and share a unity that runs deeper than blood relatives. Paul had founded the church in Corinth on his second missionary journey. Eighteen months after he had left, arguments and divisions had arisen, and some church members had slipped back into an immoral lifestyle. Paul wrote this letter to address the problems, to clear up confusion about right and wrong, and to remove the immorality among them. Because Paul was an apostle (1:1), he had the right to *appeal; by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ*. This authority, however, had apparently been questioned by some, probably false teachers; so Paul would further explain his apostolic authority later in the letter. In reality, Paul was appealing to them, not even on the basis of his own authority but, rather, on that of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Paul simply told the Corinthian believers to *stop arguing*. He had heard about these arguments through some members in the church (1:11). The

arguments were between factions or *divisions* that had developed in the church itself, with various teachers (1:12-13). Thus, Paul was pleading with the folks for harmony and one mind, united in thought and purpose. To be perfectly united does not mean that Paul required everyone to act or think exactly the same. Instead, by God's grace in the finished work of Christ, he wanted them to set aside their arguments and focus on what truly mattered; Jesus Christ. The internal divisions would only cause strife and hinder the gospel, as well as make the church look ridiculous to those outside. For more on unity, see **John 17:20-24** and **Ephesians 2:14-19**.

**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.”

- This woman named *Chloe* is unknown. Apparently, she was well-to-do, with servants (*members of [her] household*) traveling and handling the family's interests between Ephesus and Corinth. It is unknown if she was a believer, but some members of her household were. Paul was writing this letter from Ephesus, and Chloe may have lived in Ephesus with some of her servants having been to Corinth. There they could have heard about what was going on in the Corinthian church and may have reported this back to Paul. Or Chloe may have lived in Corinth; thus, when her servants had come to Ephesus, they had given Paul the details. In either case, these firsthand observers *told* Paul about the *arguments* that were going on in the Corinthian church. This contention had to be dealt with; hence, Paul wrote this letter to them.

**1:12–13** “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. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”

- The divisions in the Corinthian church threatened to destroy it. These factious groups followed different preachers for different reasons.
- Some of the believers followed *Paul*, who had founded their church. Although Paul was Jewish, he had been called as a missionary to the Gentiles, so he probably attracted many of the Gentile believers. Paul taught deeper truth, but apparently he was not a great communicator (**2 Corinthians 10:10**). Others chose to follow Peter (*Cephas*). A Jew and one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, Peter probably attracted many of the Jewish believers who had come to doubt Paul’s apostolic authority. It is unknown whether Peter had ever been to Corinth, although some of the Jews may have heard him in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2). Or it is likely that the believers simply knew that Peter was the leader of the apostles. A third group chose to follow *Apollos*, an eloquent and popular preacher who had a dynamic ministry in Corinth (**Acts 18:24; 19:1; Titus 3:13**). Apollos was from Alexandria and had become distinguished for his speaking ability. Oratory and eloquence were highly valued in the culture of the day, so Apollos probably attracted the highly educated and distinguished believers in the congregation. Finally, a fourth group claimed to *follow Christ*. This group may have boasted a special relationship to Christ, or they may have been positioning themselves above the others, saying that they had chosen to follow Christ alone, not any human leader (**2 Corinthians 10:7**).
- Paul used a series of rhetorical questions. First he asked whether Christ could be *divided*. This is a

graphic picture of what happens when the church (the body of Christ) quarrels and argues. Christ is one; the church is one. No church ought to split into warring factions. Then Paul asked if he, himself, had been *crucified* for them. Again the answer is obviously no. Only One had been crucified for the believers; indeed, only One *could* be crucified to pay the penalty for sins. Third question: Were the believers *baptized into the name of Paul* (or even of Peter or Apollos)? Again, the answer was no. They were baptized into the name of the One who had been crucified for them. This whole idea of factions was wrong; Paul did not exempt those who desired to follow him, nor did he point out any flaws in the teachings of Peter and Apollos. They all taught the gospel; but their demeanor and delivery were different. This had caused the cliques—and Paul refused to go along with any of it. Such divisions are disastrous for any church.

**1:14–16** “I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.”

- Paul’s rhetorical question in 1:13, “Were you baptized into the name of Paul?” led him to note that he had baptized very few people in Corinth. He saw this as providential and thanked God that he had baptized only *Crispus* (perhaps the same man mentioned in Acts 18:8), *Gaius* (possibly the man noted in **Romans 16:23**), and *the household of Stephanas* (referring to the entire family, perhaps servants as well; (16:15, 17). While Paul certainly had many converts in the city, he had not baptized them all. Because he had baptized only a few, no one could say that *they were baptized in [Paul’s] name*. No one could claim that

Paul had been baptizing people in order to obtain their loyalty as their special leader. Clearly he was not attempting to make disciples for himself.

- Baptism replaced circumcision as the initiation rite of the new order; Christians need only “one baptism” by which they publicly acknowledge their one faith in one Lord. Far from it being divisive, water baptism is a key unifying factor in the church. While baptism was an important public sign of identification with Christ, it appears that the apostles focused on preaching and left the baptizing to others (1:17 and **Acts 10:48**), except in a few cases, such as the ones that Paul noted here.

**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.”**

- When Paul said *Christ did not send me to baptize*, he was not minimizing the rite of baptism. Instead, he was pointing out that Christ had sent him to preach the gospel (**Acts 9:15**), and his primary task was to proclaim the message.
- Paul made clear that neither he, nor the other apostles and preachers spoke with words of human wisdom. In his presentation of the gospel message, Paul did not depend upon the rhetoric or philosophical arguments so admired by the Greeks. To do so would have emptied the message, the cross of Christ, of its power, and it would have drawn people to the preachers rather than to the message of salvation in Christ.

**CHRIST BRINGS US LIFE FROM GOD / 1:18–31**



The Greeks highly valued wisdom. Paul showed in the following verses, however, that there is the kind of “wisdom” that the world worships, and there is the true wisdom that comes from God alone.

**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.”**

- Paul had not come to Corinth to make disciples for himself; he had come to “preach the gospel” (1:17). But this preaching was not according to the world’s wisdom; it was not filled with philosophical arguments or supernatural acts. Paul’s preaching was *the message of the cross*; Jesus Christ crucified on behalf of sinners. Such a message always has two results, for ultimately all of humanity will end up in one of these two classes. (1) The gospel message sounds *foolish to those who are on the road to destruction*. For those who desire worldly wisdom, the message of the cross seems ridiculous. “Who wants a crucified king?” (2) But for those who are being saved, the gospel message is the very power of God. Paul wrote to the Romans, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (**Romans 1:16**). The gospel message is more than a true story and a good way to live; it is “the very power of God.”

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

- Paul summarized **Isaiah 29:14** to emphasize a point that Jesus often made: God’s way of thinking is not like the world’s way (normal human wisdom). “The wisdom of the wise” and “the understanding of the

intelligent” refers to world-centered wisdom and intelligence. These are not wrong, but they are worthless as a means of salvation. The context of the passage in Isaiah is that God hates those who “draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote” (**Isaiah 29:13** NRSV). Thus, God says he will destroy their wisdom and intelligence because it can never help them find him. People can spend a lifetime accumulating human wisdom and yet never learn how to have a personal relationship with God. They must believe in the crucified and risen Christ to receive eternal life and the joy of a personal relationship with the Savior. Whether they use their “wisdom” and “intelligence” to search for God or to attempt to dismiss him, they will only find themselves doomed to frustration and, ultimately, to eternal separation from God.

**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?”**

- No human wisdom or intelligence can either discover or disprove God. No human reasoning can bring salvation. So all those who have lived by their own wisdom; *the philosophers, the scholars, and the world’s brilliant debaters*; will be left with nothing. God had already made them all look *foolish* and showed that their “wisdom” was useless nonsense. Their wisdom would be “useless” because it could do nothing to provide salvation that can come only through the cross.

**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.”**

- In his complete sovereignty and *in his wisdom*, God decided that people *would never find him through human wisdom*. Instead, he chose a crucified Savior and a message of salvation preached by weak human beings to save all who believe. This looks like foolishness to the “high and mighty” of this world. Many people of Paul’s time, and many today, mock the message of the gospel. The worldly wise will not find God; those who believe the message of the cross will find him and be saved.

**1:22–24 “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”**

- Many *Jews* considered the Good News of Jesus Christ to be foolish because they thought the Messiah would be a conquering king who did many spectacular *signs* and miracles (**I Corinthians 1:22**). Although Jesus had performed miracles during his ministry on earth, many Jews who observed his miracles firsthand had refused to believe (**Matthew 12:38–39; 16:1–4; Mark 8:11–12; Luke 11:16; John 6:30**). Jesus had not restored David’s throne in the way that they had expected. Besides, he had been executed as a criminal (**Deuteronomy 21:23**); how could a criminal be the Savior? This proclamation of *Christ crucified* was a contradiction of all that they believed, and it became a *stumbling block* to them (**Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:8**).
- The *Greeks* (also here called *Gentiles*) did not believe in a bodily resurrection; they did not see in Jesus the

powerful characteristics of their mythological gods, and they thought no reputable person would be crucified. To them, death was defeat, not victory. It did not make sense in their worldly wisdom that any god would do such a thing as come to earth to be killed. The Greeks worshiped *wisdom* and revered their great thinkers and philosophers. To them, the gospel message just didn't make good sense to them, the proclamation of "Christ crucified" was *foolishness*.

- While some Jews and Greeks tripped over the message of "Christ crucified," it was a different story for those who are called; those who God has chosen to embrace and believe the gospel (**2 Thessalonians 2:13**). Many people, both Jews and Greeks, will not stumble over the message, but will find that the gospel of Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1:18).

**1:25 "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."**

- This verse provides the key to Paul's words in chapters 1-3. The message of Christ's death for sins sounds foolish to those who don't spiritually understand and believe. They think that they, by their own wisdom, can find the "ultimate reality" or make for themselves the best life; however, they will be greatly disappointed. Their wisest plans cannot even compare to God's most insignificant act. Paul's words do not imply that God could ever be foolish or weak; instead, he was making the point that *human wisdom* and *human strength* cannot begin to compare to God. What the world sees as foolishness (Christ's death for our sins) is God's truth. The cross was reserved for criminals in Paul's day. How could such an act have any power? Yet this "foolishness" in the world's eyes is wiser than any human plan that could have been

laid, for through Christ's death alone comes salvation. Even an act that had appeared to be weakness (a human body dying on a cross) was far stronger than any human strength, for Christ would come back to life. Humanly speaking, death seems to be the end of the road, the ultimate weakness. But Jesus did not stay dead. His resurrection demonstrated his power over death. And through what had appeared to be weakness, Christ accomplished what no amount of human strength could ever accomplish. By his death, people are saved from eternal death and given everlasting life if they trust him as Savior. The "foolish" people who simply accept Christ's offer are actually the wisest of all, because they alone will live eternally with God.

**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:"**

- Having shown the difference between God's wisdom and what people of this world call wisdom, Paul urged his readers to *remember* that few of them had any worldly achievements *when God called* them. Few would have been considered *wise in the world's eyes* (referring to the intellectuals or philosophers). Few were *powerful* or influential (referring to the politicians and decision makers in government). Few were *wealthy* (literally "those of noble birth"). Among the earliest disciples, five were fishermen, one was a tax collector, and the careers of the rest are unknown. None had the status of education or wealth (though Matthew may have had some money, he had gotten it through tax collection, not high status by any means). By using these three terms, Paul was pointing out that intellectual, political, and social position are not necessary qualifications for being chosen by God. In fact, just the opposite was true. Yet they had been

called by God. Clearly, God does not seek out the people whom the world admires; instead, he reveals himself to humble hearts, regardless of their worldly position. To the worldly wise, it would have made more sense for God to call the leaders and the influential people. But God does what seems foolish to the world; he calls those who do not have these characteristics and achievements. Paul explains why in the next verse.

- I expect to be amazed by three things when I first arrive in heaven. I will be delighted by those I find are actually there. I will be shocked to note who isn't there whom I assumed I would see. And then I will be speechless with wonder as I realize that by God's grace I am there! *Charles Spurgeon*

**1:27    “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;”**

- God “called” (1:26) and *God chose*; both of these works refer to conversion, God’s “call” on a person that draws him or her to salvation (**John 6:44**). God’s call and choice did not go out to the high and mighty; instead, God chose *what is foolish in the world to shame the wise... what is weak in the world to shame the strong*. Upon those “foolish and weak” people, God showered his mercy, giving them “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1:24). God would shame those thought to be wise and strong by the world by choosing not to reveal Himself to them.
- This sounds strange to the world. Why would God not choose leaders and influential people who could make sweeping reforms and be followed by the

masses? God does not choose as people choose. His sovereign choice is not based on anything that people can do or achieve. No amount of human knowledge or influence can replace or bypass Christ's work on the cross.

**1:28–29** “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: That no flesh should glory in his presence. “

- God chose the foolish and the weak, the *things despised by the world*, so that those chosen can never *boast in the presence of God*. This choosing of ordinary people was a major theme of the Old Testament. God used Moses (Exodus 3), Deborah (Judges 4–5), Gideon (Judges 6–8), and many other people of humble origin to show that success came through His power, not theirs. The foolish and weak can never say that God chose them because of their talent or intelligence. Instead, God chooses those who are *counted as nothing at all* by the world and turns them into great people for Him. People's abilities, social standing, or knowledge have nothing to do with God's choice. Skill and wisdom do not get a person into God's kingdom; faith in Christ does, so no one can boast that his or her achievements helped him or her secure eternal life. Salvation is totally from God through Jesus' death. No one can do anything to earn salvation; people need only believe what Jesus has already done for them.

**1:30–31** “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

- Here Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that at salvation, God took them out of Adam and placed them in Christ; (a new position in Christ). God is the source of believers' existence and the reason for their personal and living relationship with Christ. Their union and identification with Christ results in having wisdom from God and knowledge (**Colossians 2:3**), possessing right standing with God (righteousness, **2 Corinthians 5:21**), being made holy (sanctification, **1 Thessalonians 4:3-7**), and having the penalty for sins paid by Jesus (redemptions, **Mark 10:45**).
- Because salvation is completed by God's grace, any boasting before God is nonsense. If believers must boast, they are to boast in the Lord. These words come from **Jeremiah 9:23-24** and refer to the saved individuals glorifying in the Lord's acts on their behalf. So the redeemed people of the New Testament boast not in their salvation, but in God alone, who provided that salvation through his grace.



## 1 CORINTHIANS 2

### THE SPIRIT GIVES WISDOM / 2:1–16

**2:1–2** And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. “

- The words “when I came to you” refer to Paul’s first visit to Corinth during his second missionary journey (A.D. 51), when he founded the church (**Acts 18:1–18**). As Paul had explained in chapter 1, the gospel message, by its very simplicity, appears foolish to those who think themselves wise by human standards. Paul was a brilliant scholar and could have overwhelmed his audience in Corinth with intellectual arguments, *proclaiming the mystery of God in lofty words or wisdom*. While this may have led to a measure of intellectual assent, it may not have led them to saving faith. Faith that depends on clever arguments and great oratory can be undermined if another logical argument or better speaker comes along. Faith grounded in the truth of God’s Word and the power of the Holy Spirit, however, cannot be undermined. So Paul decided instead to “know nothing among [them] except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” Paul shared the simple message of Jesus Christ, who had been crucified for the world’s sins, and let that simple message move into the Corinthians’ hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit (2:4). The power of the gospel message is not found in a preacher’s eloquent words or ability to logically argue every detail. The power lies in the message itself: “Jesus Christ and him crucified” for sin.

**2:3–4 “And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: “**

- Paul came to Corinth not as a powerful preacher and debater ready to take on the city but, rather, *in weakness; timid and trembling*. His attitude was not fearful, but utterly dependent upon God for the important task of bringing the gospel into this wicked and idolatrous city. Prior to coming to Corinth, Paul had faced many discouraging ministry challenges. At Philippi, his ministry started strong but was nearly ruined by Jewish opposition (this also occurred in Thessalonica and Berea). In Athens, Paul had very little positive results. Paul's confidence was not in his keen intellect or debating ability, but in his knowledge that the Holy Spirit was empowering and guiding him. Paul was not denying the importance of study and preparation for ministry; he had a thorough education in the Scriptures. He did not depend, however, on using wise and persuasive speeches to convict, convince, and convert folks; that was the role of the Holy Spirit.
- God is completely sovereign in this process that seems foolish to the world. A “weak” preacher with a *plain* message of the cross to an audience of “lower-class” or “nonintellectual” people seemed like a recipe for disaster. But with God's sovereignty and the Holy Spirit's power, a body of believers grew up and stood up to the surrounding sinfulness and idolatry of Corinth.
- Paul mentioned that the Holy Spirit had been powerful among them (Paul's preaching had come “with a

demonstration of the Spirit's power"). Paul's point was that the power of their conversion was not through him and his preaching but through the Holy Spirit.

**2:5 “That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”**

- Paul deliberately chose not to use the style of persuasion and speech that so fascinated those in the Greek world. Instead, he brought a simple message that depended upon the Holy Spirit's working in the lives of people for its effectiveness. Paul did not want his listeners focusing on the speech he gave, or how he presented it, or whatever other human wisdom might have been used to persuade the Corinthians to believe. Instead, Paul wanted them to trust in the simple gospel message and so trust the power of God for their salvation (**Romans 1:16**).

**2:6–7 “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: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:”**

- The Corinthians were accustomed to philosophical debates, whether engaging in it or simply listening to it. But, as Paul already noted, he did not come to them with clever arguments, he came with the simple gospel message. When Paul did not entertain his listeners with words of worldly wisdom, many criticized him, considering him unlearned and his message unimportant. Worldly wisdom appeals to the rulers of this world, but offers nothing. Who are “the rulers of this world”? Based on 2:8, this may refer to those who participated in Jesus' crucifixion.

- When Paul was among mature Christians, he did speak with words of wisdom, but this was Godly wisdom that came from God. “Hidden wisdom” refers to God’s offer of salvation to all people made available through Jesus’ death on the cross. This plan was “hidden” because only through God’s wisdom and the insight given by his Spirit can people comprehend it. Attempting to understand this plan with the human intellect and through philosophical discussions will not reveal truth. Only God, through the Holy Spirit can reveal it (2:10).
- This plan had been *made for our benefit before the world began*. God knew the entire cycle of the creation, fall, and salvation through his Son before he made the earth and placed Adam and Eve in it. This “hidden wisdom” is literally “for our glory”. This reveals God’s great plan for the human race; that despite the Fall, he would bring some to 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.”**

- This “secret or hidden plan” had not been revealed to *the rulers of this age* (those who are impressed by worldly wisdom, 2:6). “Rulers” refers to the rulers in Palestine (the Pharisees, Sadducees, King Herod) and the Roman rulers (such as Pilate and the soldiers under his command). If these leaders had truly understood who Jesus was and the eternal consequences of rejecting him, *they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*. This is at the heart of Paul’s irony: The very ones who were trying to kill Jesus were actually carrying out God’s will. Thinking they were getting rid of a nuisance, they were really

crucifying the very Lord of glory, God incarnate. Jesus was misunderstood and killed by those whom the world considered wise and powerful.

**2:9–10** “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. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”

- Paul’s point is that human senses and understanding cannot begin to comprehend *what God has prepared for those who love him*. The future blessings that believers will enjoy in heaven are beyond human understanding; nevertheless, Christians believe and trust in these promises because *God has revealed it to [them] by his Spirit*. Most likely, the phrase “revealed it to us” refers to all believers who have received the indwelling Holy Spirit and are walking in the Spirit and can understand from Scripture, the wonderful future that God is preparing for them.
- Paul was explaining to the Corinthian believers that they had become very different from their unbelieving neighbors; essentially different because of the entrance of the Holy Spirit into their lives. Human beings, through the Holy Spirit, receive glimpses of what God has planned for his people.
- Who is the Holy Spirit? As we know, God is three persons in one; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God became a man in Jesus so that Jesus could die for our sins. Jesus rose from the dead to offer salvation to all people through spiritual rebirth. When Jesus ascended into heaven, his physical presence left the earth, but he promised to send the Holy Spirit so that his spiritual presence would still be

among mankind (**Luke 24:49**). The Holy Spirit first became available to the apostles on the day of the Resurrection (**John 20:22**) and then to more believers on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit empowered specific individuals for specific purposes, but now all believers have the power of the Holy Spirit available to them. (**John 14:16–28; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13; and 2 Corinthians 1:22**).

- The statement “the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God” refers to the fact that only the Spirit can reveal to believers God’s profound nature and wonderful plan. That the Spirit “searches” these things, means that he penetrates and is part of all the “deep things” of God.

**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.”**

- Paul compared the Spirit’s understanding of God with a person’s understanding of himself or herself. Just as a person cannot penetrate another person’s thought processes, so *no one can know God’s thoughts except God’s own Spirit*. The only way to know God is to walk in the Spirit (to have our mind {thinking}, will {desires} and emotions {feelings} influenced and controlled by the Spirit). The Holy Spirit is a distinct person, yet one in essence and function with God the Father. The mystery of the Trinity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; begins to unfold in verses such as this. Jesus told his disciples, at the Last Supper: *“But I will send you the Counselor; the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will tell you all about me.... It is actually best for you that I go away, because if I don’t, the Counselor*

*won't come. If I do go away, he will come because I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.... When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not be presenting his own ideas; he will be telling you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by revealing to you whatever he receives from me. All that the Father has is mine; this is what I mean when I say that the Spirit will reveal to you whatever he receives from me."* (**John 15:26; 16:7–8, 13–15** NLT)

**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."

- Believers *have not received the spirit of the world*. The "spirit of the world" is contrasted with the Holy Spirit. This should not be interpreted to mean that there is a force equal and opposite to God or the Holy Spirit. Rather, this points out that the Holy Spirit's wisdom and power comes from God, not from any earthly source. The "spirit of the world" refers to the wisdom of this age (2:6) and the wisdom of this world (1:20; 3:19), as well as to human philosophy. In contrast, believers have received *the Spirit who is from God* (**Galatians 3:5**). Jesus had told his disciples that God would send the Spirit after his return to heaven. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus had explained some of the reasons why the Spirit would come; including that believers would *understand what God has freely given* them. What God "freely gave" was a complete and eternal salvation through the death of his Son. The understanding of the salvation that had been accomplished through Jesus' death would come to the believers as the Holy Spirit revealed it to them.

**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.”**

- Here Paul explained that the gospel message had not been given with words of human wisdom because no human wisdom can adequately explain God. In order to explain spiritual truths, believers must use the Spirit's words. Paul was not merely giving his own personal views or his personal impression of what God had said. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he was writing the very thoughts and words of God.

**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.”**

- The gospel sounded foolish to many in Corinth, just as it is scoffed at by many today. This should not come as a surprise. Non-Christians cannot fully understand God; thus they cannot grasp the concept that God's Spirit lives in believers. Just as a tone-deaf person cannot appreciate fine music fully, the person who rejects God cannot understand God's beautiful message. With the lines of communication broken, a person is not able to hear what God is saying to him or her. Paul highlighted these truths about nonbelievers: (1) They *can't understand the things of the Spirit*; (2) spiritual truths all sound *foolish to them*; and (3) they do not have the Spirit.
- Unbelievers simply cannot comprehend Christ's work on the cross, see the beauty and compassion of God's divine plan, or desire to know God. All of



these mysteries remain as mere foolishness to them because the ability to comprehend, love, and glory in these realities comes directly from the Holy Spirit.

**2:15–16** “But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. “

- Because believers have the Spirit, they have the capability to make right judgments as they walk in the Spirit. Believers are themselves subject to no one’s scrutiny, meaning that nonbelievers have no authority by which to judge what Christians believe. Nonbelievers can make no judgment of spiritual matters because they do not have the Spirit; therefore, they can make no judgment of spiritual people. Paul quoted from **Isaiah 40:13** to show that a Christian is not subject to nonbelievers’ judgments about spiritual matters: “For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” Paul wondered who was ready to take human wisdom up against God’s wisdom.
- In contrast to those who do not have the Spirit and do not know the mind of the Lord, believers do *have the mind of Christ*. Believers understand as did Christ himself, the significance of all that Christ has done for us.
- No one can completely comprehend God (**Romans 11:34**), but through the working of the Holy Spirit, believers can understand spiritual truths. Christians have insight into some of God’s plans, thoughts, and actions, because with the indwelling Spirit, they have access to the mind of Christ.

## **I CORINTHIANS 3**

### ***PAUL CONDEMNNS DIVISION IN THE CHURCH / 3:1–23***

The Corinthians needed to mature in their spiritual lives. They were divided into factions regarding which preacher they liked better. These divisions in the church threatened the unity they would need in order to stand for the truth against false teachers and persecution.

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

- Continuing to speak to the believers in the church, Paul reproved them for their lack of maturity in the faith. Instead of growing in the faith, they had diverted into fleshly quarrels and factions so that Paul could not even talk to them as he would to mature, spiritual Christians. He spoke to them in his letters as though they were infants in the Christian life. These “infants” had not grown in the faith, and the proof was that they were divided and quarreled like children, as noted in the following verses.

**3:2–3 “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. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”**

- These believers in Corinth should have long since grown out of the “infant” stage into a maturing faith. Instead, they were still acting like “infants” (3:1), so Paul would need to feed them (teach them) with milk and not with solid food; meaning that he would continue to give them the basics of the faith instead of teaching them deeper truths (**Hebrews 5:12; I Peter**

**2:2**). Just as babies drink only milk because they cannot eat solid food, so these “baby Christians” must keep relearning the fundamental principles of God’s Word. Paul longed to teach them deeper truths, but he realized that they weren’t ready because they were still greatly influenced by their fleshly desires. Paul used the term *sarkikos*, from *sarks*, meaning “flesh” or “selfish human nature,” to indicate that their mind-set was worldly, characterized by selfish desires and not the desires of the Spirit. Their jealousy and quarreling proved it. To the Galatians, Paul wrote, “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (**Galatians 5:16**). James wrote, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” (**James 4:1**) Paul would not allow divisions and quarreling to destroy the church in Corinth; thus, he did not shrink from rebuking the believers.

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

- As already mentioned in 1:12–13, the cause of the divisions and quarrels had to do with loyalty to different teachers. In 1:12, Paul mentioned Peter, but here he focused on the two men who had actually preached and taught in Corinth; himself and Apollos. Paul was pointing out that to act in this way was to act like those who are not Christians. Apollos and Paul were no more than servants of God who brought the message of salvation to the Corinthians. Both men did the work the Lord gave them to do, and through their preaching, God caused the Corinthians to believe. As mere servants of the Lord, they had pointed the people toward Christ, not toward themselves. Neither Paul nor Apollos wanted a party

of followers; they wanted the people to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation and to grow up to maturity in faith.

**3:6–7 “ I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. ”**

- Part of the reason for the factions may have been the different roles Paul and Apollos had done in Corinth (“the work the Lord” gave them, 3:5). Paul planted the seed of the gospel message in the believers’ hearts. He was a missionary pioneer, the first to bring the message of salvation, and the founder of the church in Corinth. Apollos’s role was to water; to help the believers grow stronger in the faith. Paul had founded the church in Corinth; then Apollos had built on that foundation. Unfortunately, some of the believers in Corinth had split into factions that pledged loyalty to Paul, the “planter,” or to Apollos, the “waterer.”
- Paul explained to these loyal believers that they had misplaced loyalties. Paul and Apollos had only done what God had led them to do. Paul had planted the seed and Apollos had watered it; but they did not make the “seed of faith” grow. It was God who made it grow. Paul, Apollos, Peter, and any missionary or minister of the gospel is nothing more than God’s instrument. God alone brings the seed to fruition. Thus, there is no room for pride on the part of these leaders, and there is no room for divisive loyalty toward the leaders on the part of the followers.

**3:8–9 “Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers**

**together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."**

- While each servant has various functions, Paul planted (originally brought the gospel message) and Apollos watered (continued in teaching); each one was a team member with a common goal. Their goal was the same; to bring people to a saving knowledge of Christ and to see them mature in their faith. Yet, that being said, each servant is still individually responsible and will be rewarded according to the work that Christ does through them. For more on how God rewards our work, see **1 Corinthians 4:5**..
- Paul and the other preachers and teachers of the true gospel message worked together *as partners who belong to God*. Their ministry belonged not to them, but to God..

**3:10–11 “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.**

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

- Paul had been called by God to be an apostle and to take the gospel message to the Gentiles (1:1; **Acts 9:15**). God gave him the grace for this message, and, like a skilled master builder, he was doing what God had called him to do; he laid a foundation. The foundations of the church and of all believers is Jesus Christ, and no one can lay any other foundation. All true believers have the gospel message as their foundation, and each one is building on that foundation. This “building” refers to establishing the church by discipling each individual

Christian (**Ephesians 4:11-16**). Only the truth can build strong believers and thus build a strong church. The foundation may be strong, but a variety of materials might be used in the building process, as Paul describes further.

- Jesus ended his Sermon on the Mount with the same picture Paul used here (**Matthew 7:24-27**). Jesus compared two kinds of life: one constructed on the knowledge and application of his words; the other constructed without regard for Christ. Both houses can be built, but only one will stand against the winds and storms of life.

**3:12-13 “Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 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.”**

- The foundation for the building is Jesus Christ (3:11); Christians build on this foundation with a variety of materials of different quality. There is little value in attempting to find a meaning behind each of the materials Paul mentioned; most likely, he was dividing the materials into two basic classes; the valuable building materials, which were imperishable (here called *gold, silver, and jewels*), and the worthless building materials, which probably symbolize worldly wisdom (here called *wood, hay, and straw*). A workman who recognizes the quality of the foundation will build with valuable materials so that the building is beautiful, strong, and lasting. A workman who does not value the foundation will not care about the quality or longevity of the building and so will build with worthless materials. Paul was particularly speaking to church leaders who were to build their churches with

the truth of Christ, as opposed to carnal teachings based on the values and desires of the world.

- **“The fire shall test every man’s work.”** This “time of testing” that is coming “at the judgment day” refers to Christ’s second coming. At that time, believers will be separated from unbelievers, with believers receiving their reward in heaven (**1Thessalonians 5:2–9**). Believers will not be judged regarding their salvation because our salvation is sure; but we will be judged regarding what kind of work we have done.
- Christ will evaluate each believer’s contribution to the life of the church, and the judgment day will reveal whether the work was done in the flesh or in the Spirit. That which was done in the Spirit will be rewarded; that which was done in the flesh will be burned up (**1 Peter 1:7**). The Corinthian church was filled with carnal believers whose work was “wood, hay, or straw,” Christians who were immature, insensitive to one another, and vulnerable to wrong doctrines (3:1-4).

**3:14–15 “If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”**

- The only rewardable work that any man does in this life is the work that Christ does through us; this is made clear from verses like **Isaiah 64:6** and **Romans 7:18**.
- Because the foundation is the finished work of Christ, everyone who builds on that foundation will present to God the lives that they have lived by him. Some of them will present lives of gold, silver, and jewels; lives

built on the truth of the gospel and spent abiding in Christ (**Jude 25**). These builders will receive a reward. Some will present lives that amount to no more than wood, hay, and straw, and all that they accomplished in this life will be burned up. These builders will be saved, but only as through fire; as if they jumped out of a burning building and lost everything but their lives.

### **3:16 “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”**

- God’s people, all believers in Jesus Christ, are the temple of God (the Spirit of God dwells in them). While it is true that each individual is a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (6:19), Paul was teaching here about the nature of the church or Christian community. This is a common theme in the New Testament (the following verses are quoted from the New International Version):
  - “What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the *temple* of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people’ ” (**2 Corinthians 6:16**).
  - “And in him you too are being built together to become a *dwelling* in which God lives by his Spirit” (**Ephesians 2:22**).
  - “But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are his *house*, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast” (**Hebrews 3:6**).
  - “You also, like living stones, are being built into a *spiritual house* to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (**1 Peter 2:5**).



- Corinth boasted many pagan temples and shrines, but there was only one temple for God; the Corinthian Christians were it! The “Spirit of God” is the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised would come and live in his followers (**John 14:17–20; 16:7**). The Holy Spirit draws all believers together as Christ’s body on earth; he provides the unity that should characterize them. Because every believer is a temple for the Holy Spirit (a dwelling place for him), the believers ought not to be dividing into warring factions because that destroys the temple, as the following verses emphasize.

**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.”**

- In the Old Testament, the penalty for defiling God’s dwelling (whether the tabernacle or the temple) was death (**Leviticus 15:31**) or separation from the nation (**Numbers 19:20**). The penalty for destroying God’s spiritual temple found in his people individually and in the church collectively—is no less severe. *If anyone destroys God’s temple, wrote Paul, God will destroy that person* because God’s temple is holy. How might anyone attempt to destroy God’s temple? False teaching that undermines believers’ faith, rivalry that creates dissension and rips churches apart, and weak discipleship that promotes legalism are all problems that weaken the church’s foundation. In 3:15, Paul wrote of the builder who, though he or she builds shoddily on the foundation, will yet be saved. However, this verse 17 focuses on those who are unsaved and set out to destroy the church.

**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.”**

- Thus far, most of Paul's letter has focused on the difference between the world's wisdom and God's wisdom (1:17–2:16). Some of the Corinthian believers had been fooled into thinking that they needed special knowledge or deeper wisdom in order to be saved; that Jesus' death wasn't enough for salvation. Paul admonished them to *stop fooling* themselves.
- Paul was warning the Corinthians that God's way of thinking is infinitely more valuable, even though it may seem foolish to the world (1:27). They would need to empty themselves of their pride in human wisdom in order to be filled with God's wisdom.

**3:19–20 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."**

- In 1:18, Paul had stated that "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing"; here he stated the other side; *the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight*. Two Old Testament Scriptures are used to back up his statement. The first comes from Job 5:12, where God is the one who *catches the wise in their craftiness*. In this case, the "wise" were the worldly-wise. The other reference comes from Psalm 94:11, again speaking of the worldly-wise ones, warning them that *the Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile*. No matter how wise a human being may appear, God is far wiser. Nothing that a "wise" human being can do is beyond God's understanding. God knows the thoughts of everyone. What these wise people will accomplish is futile because it concerns this world alone and will pass away (**1 John 2:17**).

**3:21–23** “Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.”

- Therefore, the Corinthian believers ought not *take pride in following a particular leader*, such as *Paul and Apollos and Peter* (1:11–12; 2:4–7), instead, they must follow Christ Jesus alone. The phrase “everything belongs to you” underscores the fact that all believers have everything because they have Christ. They need not boast about following any particular leader because they would be limiting themselves. Indeed, *all* those leaders already belonged to them because, Paul exclaimed, *the whole world and life and death; the present and the future, everything belongs to you*. They owned it all by association; everything belonged to them because they are positioned in Christ, and *belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God*.
- The “whole world” refers to the physical world, not to the world system (as in 1:20). Believers have true “life” because life only has meaning when lived in Christ. While nonbelievers are victims of life, swept along by its current and wondering if there is meaning to it, believers can live life well because they understand its true purpose. Even “death” belongs to believers because it is the way to victory and it holds no terrors. Nonbelievers can only fear death. Believers, however, know that Christ has conquered death; death is the entranceway into an eternity with God. The present and the future belong to believers because they belong to the One who holds the present and the future.

- Believers ought never to settle for faithfulness to a human leader or human ideas; they ought never to break into factions quarreling over their respective loyalties. And this should especially not occur since believers have been given *everything* from God's gracious hand.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 4

### PAUL COUNSELS HIS BELOVED CHILDREN / 4:1–21

The discussion in chapter 3 regarding the status of ministers of the gospel led Paul to further explain how believers should regard their ministers. The leaders (himself, Apollos, Peter, or others) were never to be the focus of anyone's loyalty. They do not have supernatural powers, nor do they advance their own doctrines. Their authority is given and limited by the Master Jesus Christ.

**4:1–2 Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.**

- The believers ought not to be boasting about "their" leader (3:21). Instead, Paul wrote *think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries*. As "servants of Christ," these leaders not only served their Master, but also those they were leading. As "stewards of God's mysteries," the leaders acted as managers of a household, caring for the members and dispensing the provisions as needed. Wealthy households often had stewards who managed the family resources and ran the home. Certainly, a person with that much responsibility should be found trustworthy. The same was true with the "stewards" of God's message of salvation.
- Paul and the other leaders had been entrusted with "God's mysteries." The word "mysteries" refers to "God's secret wisdom that has been hidden and will one day be revealed" (2:7); the mystery of the plan of salvation. These mysteries cannot be discovered or comprehended by human wisdom; they have been

entrusted to God's workers to be carefully taught to others.

**4:3–4** “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. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.”

- The Corinthians battled over the preacher, as well as the message that they liked most, but Paul dismissed their judgment entirely. Human judgment was as worthless before God as human wisdom (2:6). Because he had been called by God to serve, Paul owed allegiance to God alone. Paul did not concern himself with what any group of people thought of his teaching style or his message. Paul did not even depend on his own self-evaluation; “I do not even judge myself.” Paul was accountable to God and would be judged by God alone.

**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.”

- The Corinthian believers had expended much energy on making judgments concerning various leaders. Paul explained that God alone could judge the leaders because he alone knows the *deepest motives*. Human beings cannot do that, so they should *be careful not to jump to conclusions before the Lord returns as to whether or not someone is faithful*. People can see only the outside, but God can discern a person's heart (1 **Samuel 16:7**). A minister may appear to be a faithful servant but be harboring pride in his heart. At the same time, another minister may not be flamboyant or outwardly successful yet be

a sincere person of God. One group of believers may appear to be sincere, all the while harboring envy and dissension. Other believers may not appear to have much in the world's estimation yet be filled with God's Spirit and manifest his gifts.

- Believers, therefore, ought not be making such judgments. This will happen *when the Lord comes*, and then *God will give to everyone whatever praise is due* (**2 Corinthians 5:10**). At the Second Coming, those who have been faithful, as judged by God Himself, will receive praise and reward from him.

**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.”**

- Because the Corinthians had split into various cliques, each following its favorite preacher, Paul used their loyalties to himself and Apollos to illustrate what he was saying about God's ministers. The groups were not to boast about being tied to a particular preacher because each preacher was simply a humble servant who had trusted in the same message of salvation. No preacher of God has more status than another.

**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?”**

- Apparently each faction that followed a different leader also placed itself above the others. No one was better than another. Everything we have, everything we accomplish, every gift we receive all

comes from God. Therefore, wrote Paul, *if all you have is from God, how can anyone possibly boast about being better than anyone else, as if we accomplished something on our own?* The obvious answer is that no one has any right to boast about anything.

**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.”**

- With biting sarcasm, Paul exposed the rampant pride in the Corinthian church. The believers proclaimed loyalties and set themselves against one another, and many apparently looked down even on the apostle Paul (2:1-5). These believers apparently thought they had arrived, believing that they possessed all the great wisdom and knowledge they needed; they felt qualified to judge others. Paul marveled that they were able to accomplish all of this apart from those who had brought the gospel truth to them. With great irony, Paul explained that he wished he could be a king along with them, for apparently they had surpassed the apostle in wisdom and knowledge and had already reached full maturity.

**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.”**

- While some of the Corinthian believers lived as though they were kings, the apostles apparently had been passed over for such an honor. How odd that the apostles, who had been called to minister the gospel message across the world, were not reigning as kings but instead were *on display ... prisoners ... condemned to die ... a spectacle*. For almost all of the apostles, that was in fact what happened. James, the



son of Zebedee, was the first to be martyred (**Acts 12:2**). According to tradition, Peter may have been crucified by Nero. John was exiled. Paul was put to death by Nero, and Andrew was crucified in Achaia, near Corinth. While these new Christians were attempting to reign, their spiritual leaders were facing an entirely different sort of life; one filled with suffering for the sake of the gospel.

**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.”**

- Surely Paul's sarcasm shamed his readers. He pointed out the strangeness of their supposed wisdom, strength, and honor while God's apostles were considered as foolish, weak, and without honor.

**4:11–13 “Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. “**

- To further elaborate on the warped viewpoint of the proud Corinthian believers, Paul described the hardships that he and the other apostles continued to face in their ministry. Far from being honored for their preaching, rather they faced severe suffering. Not worrying about even the necessities of life, they were poorly clothed and homeless. They had been beaten (**Acts 14:19**). They worked hard with their own hands so that they would not become a burden to the people to whom they ministered (**Acts 18:1-3**). The Greeks looked down upon those who did manual labor; they considered it to be the work of slaves. Throughout his

ministry, Paul was reviled, persecuted, and slandered, yet the Spirit within gave him the power and desire to bless, endure, and speak kindly. To endure when persecuted, bless when reviled, and respond kindly when slandered reflects the teaching of Christ (**Matthew 5:38-45; 23:8-12; Mark 8:34-38; 10:42-4; Luke 6:27-36**).

- Even so, the world saw these men as no more than *rubbish, the dregs*, because they did not meet up to worldly standards of success. Paul willingly took this abuse in order to bring the message of eternal life to any and all who would believe.

**4:14–16** “I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. 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. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.”

- Paul’s previous sarcasm had not been meant to *shame* these believers *but to warn* them because they were his *beloved children* in the faith. The word “warn” refers to a parental instruction given for the benefit of the children. Paul gave this warning because he wanted the Corinthians to turn from their arrogant behavior.
- Many teachers might come and teach about Christ, but Paul portrayed a special affection for these believers; he was their spiritual father. In an attempt to unify the church, Paul appealed to his relationship with them. By “father,” Paul was making reference to the fact that he was the church’s founder; he had originally preached the Good News to them. Because Paul had started the church, he could be trusted to

have its best interests at heart, and he had the authority to warn them of their sinful ways. Paul's tough words were motivated by love, like the love a good father has for his children (**I Thessalonians 2:11**). Because the church could trust him, he boldly explained that they could follow his example (**I Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1; Philippians 3:17; I Thessalonians 1:6**).

**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.”

- Timothy had accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey (**Acts 16:1–3**) and was a key person in the growth of the early church. Timothy probably arrived in Corinth shortly after this letter (6:10); the bearers of the letter possibly being Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17). Timothy's role was to remind the Corinthians of the faith they had received; the same message that Paul was teaching about Christ Jesus in all the churches.

## **SET AN EXAMPLE**

Throughout Scripture, setting an example is stressed as an important element of discipleship. (**I Corinthians 11:1; I Thessalonians 1:6-7; I Peter 5:3**.)

- Peter taught Christian leaders to lead by example, not by commands.
- Paul told the Corinthian believers to follow his example. As the body of Christ, believers must show Christ to the world by example. Nonbelievers should be able to see Christ in believers and be so drawn to what they are eager to hear what they have to say (**Acts 20:20**).

**4:18–19** “Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. 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.”

- In their eagerness to set themselves up as leaders, the false teachers had said that Paul would not be coming back to Corinth. They assumed, therefore, that they could do as they pleased. But Paul explained that he had every intention of going back to Corinth *soon*, if this were the Lord's will. At that time, Paul would expose the *arrogant people* for who they really were. They were *big talkers*, but did *they really have God's power*? The answer would be obvious to everyone.
- It is not known whether Paul ever returned to Corinth, but it is likely. In 2 Corinthians 2:1, he wrote that he decided not to make “another painful visit,” implying that he had had a previous painful confrontation with the Corinthian believers.

**4:20** “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.”

- Being a big talker is one thing, but living by faith is quite another. Some people talk a lot about faith, they may know all the right words to say, but their lives don't reflect it. Paul said that the Kingdom of God is not just fancy talk, it is to be lived. The “Kingdom” refers not to the future reign of Christ but to the present reign of God in believers' lives. A person can live only by God's power when he or she has the Holy Spirit within, and is walking in the Spirit (**John 3:3-8; Galatians 5:16**).

**4:21    “What will ye? Shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?”**

- Paul wrote that when he came, and he would come, barring divine intervention (4:19), he would come with his authority from God as their spiritual father. Far from being afraid or weak, he would arrive ready to deal with the situation as it was. This letter would precede him, and the Corinthian believers could either receive a good scolding, or turn from their evil ways and receive gentle love.

# 1 CORINTHIANS 5

## PAUL CONDEMNS IMMORALITY IN THE CHURCH / 5:1–13

The pride that characterized the Corinthian church (4:10, 18) had so blinded the believers that they were allowing sexual immorality to take place in their fellowship. Their pride may have been such that they refused to admit that this was sin. Paul condemned the believers for allowing this sin to go on unchallenged in their midst.

**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.”**

- A report had been delivered to Paul regarding *sexual immorality* among the believers in Corinth. The Corinthian church had been unwilling to discipline this man.
- Paul stated that the problem was so evil that even the pagans didn't do it; quite an indictment on these believers. Apparently, most of the believers knew about the sinful relationship, but they had been unwilling to admit it, so Paul described the sin very clearly: *A man in your church is living in sin with his father's wife* (probably his stepmother). Whether the man had seduced this woman away from his father, or whether the woman was divorced or widowed is unclear. In any case, even the pagans would have shuddered at this; however, the church members were ignoring the situation. The Jews considered this against the law (**Leviticus 18:8; 20:11**) and the Romans had laws against it as well. Although Romans and Greeks had immoral sexual standards, this act was forbidden.

**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.”**

- The problem of arrogance in the Corinthian church was so strong that they were tolerating this type of sin, instead of sorrow and shame. The correct response should have been to rebuke this man and if he was unwilling to turn from his evil ways, remove him from the fellowship. Such sins, left unchecked, can divide and paralyze a church. This “removal” of the person was not meant to be vengeful but to bring him to repentance and to protect the church.
- Today, tolerance has become such a battle cry in the media and in political and educational circles that it has affected even the church. It is very difficult for leaders to discipline sin in church members because everyone is trying to be accepting of others. Often we hear this, “Who am I to judge? I have sin in my own life.”

**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,”**

- While those in the Corinthian church had failed to do anything about the man’s sin, Paul himself, not physically present, would tell them what should be done. Paul had weighted the matter and had passed judgment in his heart and mind, yet this phrase carries more punch than merely saying, “I have given this some thought.” As an apostle and the spiritual father of this church (4:15), Paul had the authority to make judgment regarding the matter. Paul intended his opinion to carry much weight because of his

leadership and influence as an apostle. Because he was with them in spirit, he understood the danger to the church if the sin were to remain.

**5:4–5** “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 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. “

- Paul had already passed judgment and decided what the church must do. The church would take the responsibility in dealing with this man.
- Paul wrote that the next time they were “assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus,” they should discipline the man. This should be done with the whole congregation present. Paul, the founder and father of the church, would be with them in spirit, and they would all be looking to the Lord. The entire situation was under the mighty power of the Lord Jesus to deal with the man’s spirit and to bring him to repentance.
- Paul explained the discipline that should be carried out: *Hand this man over to Satan*. This would mean excluding him from the fellowship of believers (**1 Timothy 1:20**). Without the spiritual support of Christians, this man would be left alone with his sin and Satan, and hopefully this emptiness would drive him to repentance. This amounted to excommunication from the worship, ministry, and fellowship of the church. The church had not literally given him to Satan, for only God can consign a person to eternal judgment. It was meant to force him to see the consequences of sin by living in Satan’s sphere of influence—the world apart from Christ and the church.



- The phrase, “for the destruction of the flesh” implies that the man would be subject to sickness leading to death; Satan would be permitted to afflict the man physically and thus bring him to the Lord. In **Job 2:4-10**, God is portrayed as allowing Satan to test Job with suffering. Paul also saw his thorn in the flesh (**2 Corinthians 12:7**) as administered by Satan. In this man’s case, he may die physically (**I Corinthians 11:30-32; Acts 5:1-10**), but his spirit would be saved. Paul hoped that this harsh disciplinary action might be of eternal benefit to the man.
- Excommunication as a form of discipline should be used rarely and carefully. It should be an action of the church body, not just one or two people. Its purpose should be redemptive and restorative, not vengeful or vindictive.

**5:6–7 “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? 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: “**

- Paul was writing to those who wanted to ignore this problem in the church. They boasted, but they had no grounds to boast because they were allowing a horrible sin to exist in their fellowship. Believers in any congregation have a responsibility to one another. Yeast makes bread dough rise; a little bit affects the whole batch of dough. Sins left uncorrected, no matter whether secret or blatant, affect the entire congregation, just as a little yeast works through the whole lump of dough.

- The leaders in the Corinthian church must expel this sinful man from the fellowship, just as a cook would get rid of old yeast, so that they might be pure (*a new lump without yeast, as you really are*). This “purity” did not mean that without this man they would be sinless (Paul would address other problems in this letter). Instead, Paul understood that sin, left unchecked, would destroy the church; thus, excommunication was in order so that the believers could see the serious consequences of sin.
- Indeed, they ought not to forget that Christ gave his life and one of the reasons He gave His life was so that people could overcome sin’s power. By not dealing with this man’s sin, they were making Christ’s death of no effect. They should remember, said Paul, that *Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed*. The reference to the Passover refers to the time when the Hebrews prepared for their exodus from slavery in Egypt. They were commanded to prepare bread without yeast because they didn’t have time to wait for it to rise. And because yeast also was a symbol of sin, they were commanded to sweep all of it out of the house (**Exodus 12:15; 13:7**). In preparation for their flight from Egypt, the Hebrews followed God’s instructions by placing the blood of a lamb on the doorframes of their homes. That night, the firstborn son of every family who did not have blood on the doorframes was killed. The lamb had to be killed in order for them to have the blood to protect them. Christ is the Passover Lamb, the perfect sacrifice, who gave his blood for the sins of all who believe.

**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.”**

- The words “let us keep the feast” are not a command to keep the Jewish Passover but a figurative way of picturing what Christ is to believers. In Paul’s day, the Passover was celebrated with a ceremonial search throughout one’s home for yeast and then destroying the yeast before the Passover lamb was slain in the temple. Because Christ, the Passover Lamb, has already been sacrificed, all yeast (that is, all evil) should be removed from among his people. The old life (*with the old yeast*) was characterized by *malice and wickedness*; these have no part in Christ’s church. Born again, believers have cleansed the evil from their lives and are like *bread without yeast*, living in *sincerity and truth*. Paul wrote to the Romans, “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is” (**Romans 12:2**).

**5:9–11** “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 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. 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.”

- The words “when I wrote to you before” refer to Paul’s earlier letter to the Corinthian church, often called the “lost letter” because it has not been preserved. In that letter, he had told the Corinthians *not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin*. Either the Corinthians had misunderstood what Paul meant, or they had rejected his words by pointing out the

impossibility of not associating with sinners in a sinful world. So Paul made it clear here that he *wasn't talking about unbelievers*, for they, by nature, are involved in sexual sin, greed, swindling, and idol worship. Believers cannot disassociate themselves completely from unbelievers; they would have to leave this world. In addition, if believers had no contact with unbelievers, they would have no opportunity to tell unbelievers about Jesus Christ (**Matthew 28:18–20**).

- Paul meant that believers were not to associate with anyone who claims to be a Christian and yet has a sinful lifestyle. Paul listed a few sins such as sexual sin, greed, idol worship, abuse, drunkenness, and swindling. Believers must separate themselves from those who claim to be Christian yet indulge in sins explicitly forbidden in Scripture and then rationalize their actions. Christians who love this kind of a lifestyle are not fit to be the light of the world because they distort the picture of Christ that they present to the world. The church has a responsibility to rebuke, correct, and restore those in the fellowship who claim to be believers but live like unbelievers.

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

- The difference between believers and nonbelievers lies in their relationship to Jesus Christ, but a difference also exists in how believers are to relate to those inside and outside the church. The *outsiders* (referring to nonbelievers) are to be met where they are (even in their sinful lifestyles, 5:9–11) and offered the gospel message. Yet the believers are not to

*judge them because God will judge those on the outside.*

- In the church, however, believers have the God-given role of judging those who are sinning in these ways. The Bible consistently says not to criticize people by gossiping or making rash judgments. At the same time, however, believers are to judge and deal with carnal Christians who are involved in blatant and unrepented sin as described in 5:9-11. Paul's instructions for this in 5:1-2, comes from **Deuteronomy 17:7**. This instruction should not be applied to petty individual problems between believers. These verses are instructions for dealing with open sin in the church, with a person who claims to be a Christian and yet who sins without remorse.

**CHURCH DISCIPLINE:** Church discipline must be handled carefully, straightforwardly, and lovingly. (**Matthew 18:15–17**):

- ❖ Go to the brother or sister who sinned; show the fault to him or her in private.
- ❖ If he or she does not listen, go with one or two witnesses.
- ❖ If he or she refuses to listen, take the matter before the church.

After these steps have been carried out, the next steps are:

- ❖ Remove the one in error from the fellowship (**1 Corinthians 5:2–13**).
- ❖ The church gives united disapproval, but forgiveness and comfort are in order if he or she repents (**2 Corinthians 2:5–8**).
- ❖ Do not associate with the disobedient person who refuses to repent, and if you must, speak to him or

her as one who needs a warning (2 **Thessalonians 3:14–15**).

- ❖ After two warnings, reject the person from the fellowship (**Titus 3:10**).

## 1 CORINTHIANS 6

### BELIEVERS SHOULD NOT SUE EACH OTHER / 6:1–8

In chapter 5 Paul explains what to do with open immorality in the church. In chapter 6 he explains how the congregation should handle problems between believers.

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

- While there are certain situations that, by law, have to be submitted to the legal authorities, disputes between Christians should be handled by qualified Christian leaders in the church. Paul declared that disagreeing Christians should not have to *file a lawsuit and ask a secular court* to resolve differences among them. Why did Paul make this point? (1) If the judge and jury were not Christians, they would not likely be sensitive to Christian values. (2) The basis for going to court is often revenge; this should never be a Christian’s motive. (3) Lawsuits make the church look bad, causing unbelievers to focus on church problems rather than on its purpose.

**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?”**

- The phrase, “don’t you know” occurs six times in this chapter, indicating that Paul was pointing out to these believers facts that they should have already known and understood (6:3, 9, 15-16, 19). By going to pagan authorities to settle disputes, the Christians were acting beneath their dignity. They should be able to settle these disputes among themselves because someday (at the Second Coming), Christians

(who are co-heirs with Christ) are going to judge the world (**2 Timothy 2:2; Revelation 3:21; 20:4**). Because of this truth, believers should not take their disputes into the world, not only would this be a poor witness, but it would also reveal that there is no difference between believers and unbelievers. Instead, believers should be able to decide these things among themselves.

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

- Having just stated that Christians will eventually judge the world (6:2), Paul added that *we Christians will judge angels as well*. The use of the word “angels” without an article leaves the meaning unclear. This could mean that Paul was referring to Christians’ part in judging the devil and his demons (evil angels) at Christ’s second coming (see **2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6; Revelation 19:19–20; 20:10**). Or it could mean that the Christians will “judge angels”, or we could say preside over angels when they (the Christians) reign with Christ. Paul’s point was that, in light of the privilege that will belong to believers in the future, they *should surely be able to resolve ordinary disagreements here on earth*.

**6:4–6 “If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. 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? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers.”**

- Repeating his concern stated in 6:1, Paul asked why the Corinthian Christians were taking their disputes to unbelieving judges. That they are “least esteemed” does not mean that the believers were showing no



respect for pagan judges. Instead, these pagan judges lived by an entirely different standard than the Christians; therefore, their judgments could not be in accordance with the spiritual truth by which the Christians lived. The church then could not respect the judgments made by these judges.

- Compare this to 4:14, where he stated that he did not intend to shame but to warn them regarding their divisions. Here, however, Paul *did* intend to shame these believers. They should be ashamed if they couldn't find *anyone in all the church ... wise enough to decide* their disagreements. Apparently they had been acting with great pride (4:8), yet they couldn't handle their own disagreements. This surely should have shamed them. Instead of using the wisdom and discernment from the Holy Spirit, which was available to them as believers, they were suing each other, *right in front of unbelievers*. How much better for the believers to live "above" such matters, dealing with them in their own congregation with the help of respected leaders, so that nothing would hinder their witness for Christ in the world.

**6:7–8 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? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. "**

- The basic problem went back to the Corinthian congregation. If they had been maturing in their faith, they would not have become so carnal that the believers would actually bring lawsuits against one another. That these believers had to resort to lawsuits to settle disputes among them was already a defeat for them. Paul explained that they needed to allow themselves to be wronged and defrauded.

Mature believers are willing to “turn the other cheek” (**Matthew 5:39**).

- Any time someone is wronged, the wronged person has three choices: vengeance, justice, or grace. Vengeance is getting even, justice is discovering who is right and who is wrong; grace on the other hand, has to do with forgiveness.

**6:9–10** “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, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. “

- Paul gives a strong proclamation about those who will not inherit God's kingdom: the *sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, thieves, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, and swindlers*. By saying that none of these people *will inherit the kingdom of God*, Paul was referring to people who persist in their evil practices with no sign of remorse. Such people, if they think they are believers, need to reevaluate their lives to see if they truly believe in Christ.
- Notice Paul's opening statement: “The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” However, at the moment of salvation, we are declared positionally righteous. At that moment in time we receive the indwelling Holy Spirit whose role is to mold us into the image of Christ (**Romans 6:28-29**) which is a life-long process.

**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.”**

- The list of sins may seem rather long (6:9–10), but apparently Paul was being complete in listing what kinds of lives and lifestyles from which the Corinthian believers had come. Paul listed sexual sins such as immorality, idolatry (pointing to the sexual content of some forms of idol worship), adultery, male prostitution (the temple of Apollo employed young men whose job was to fulfill the sexual desires of male and female “worshippers”), and homosexuality (**Leviticus 18:22-29; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Timothy 1:9-11**). Even the writings of pagan authors and historians attest to the rampant immorality in the city of Corinth. Many of the believers had come out of a lifestyle where sexual perversion was part of their “worship!” Paul also listed other sins such as stealing, greed, drunkenness, slander, and swindling. When Paul had come to Corinth, this is what he found: people with the lowest morals. Yet the power of Jesus Christ had changed them.
- Paul stressed that there is no kind of sin that cannot be forgiven. When the Corinthians received Jesus Christ, they *were washed*. This refers to a cleansing process that had washed away their sins through the blood of Jesus (**Hebrews 10:22; Revelation 7:14**). They *were sanctified*, meaning that they had been set apart by God (**John 17:17; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:23**). And they *were justified*, meaning that God had declared that these believers were righteous in His sight. Believers are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The “name” refers to the character and nature of the One who justifies; He was perfect and sinless. Because Jesus took their punishment, sinners are able to come to God. The

phrase, “Spirit of our God” reminded the believers that the Holy Spirit draws people to God and indwells them when they believe.

**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.”**

- The phrase, “everything is permissible or lawful for me” appears twice in this verse and twice again in 10:23. Apparently the Christians in Corinth had been using this phrase as a license to live any way they pleased. Perhaps Paul had used the statement when he preached to them about their freedom in Christ, but they had wrongly interpreted it. By “freedom in Christ,” Paul never meant disregarding basic Christian morality and ethics. Some Christians in Corinth apparently were using this to excuse their sins, saying Christ had taken away all sin, so they had complete freedom to live as they pleased;
- Paul answered both of these excuses:
  1. While Christ has taken away sin, this does not mean that *everything is beneficial* and that believers can do what they know is wrong. The New Testament specifically forbids many sins (6:9–10) that were originally prohibited in the Old Testament (**Romans 12:9–21; 13:8–10**); however, not every possible sin is recorded. While some actions may not be specifically forbidden in Scripture, believers should know that these actions and their results would not be beneficial to themselves or to the church. Believers should be using their Christian freedom to share the gospel and show love for others instead of looking for ways to gratify themselves.

2. Some actions are not sinful in themselves, but they are not appropriate because they can control believers' lives and lead them away from God. Freedom is a mark of the Christian faith; freedom from sin and guilt, and freedom to use and enjoy all things that come from God. But Christians should not abuse this freedom and hurt themselves or others. Drinking too much leads to alcoholism, gluttony leads to obesity; we can also be mastered (enslaved or empowered) by money, sports, television, or anything that controls our life or robs our devotion to Christ or service to others. What God has allowed his children to enjoy must not grow into a bad habit that controls them.

**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.”**

- Paul's words, *food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food*, had apparently been used as an illustration to explain the Corinthians' warped understanding of Christian freedom. They seemed to believe that because the physical activity of eating and digesting food had no effect on one's Christian life; neither would other merely physical activities such as *sexual immorality*.
- Paul stated that it was true, what one eats does not affect the spiritual life. In fact, one day God will do away with both stomachs and food. However, he also stated that one could not compare eating to sexual activity. Just as the spirit affects the body, so, too, the physical body affects the spirit. People cannot commit sin with their bodies without damaging their relationship with God. While the stomach was made

for food, people's bodies were not made for sexual immorality.

- The Greek word for body used here (*soma*) refers to the whole being and personality, not to the worldly flesh. These bodies were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies. God created a physical world and pronounced it good. He promises a new earth where real people have transformed physical lives. At the heart of Christianity is the story of God Himself taking on flesh and blood and coming to live with people, offering both the abundant Christian life, and spiritual restoration.

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

- God's care and concern for the physical bodies of his children began at Creation. Jesus was put to death, but God *raised up the Lord*. Coming back to life from death is an impossibility in this world; however, God, who controls everything, brought his Son back to life and *will also raise us up by His power*. That God would bring his Son back in a body shows the value that God places on his children's physical bodies. Paul made this point to prepare for the following discussion of why the Corinthian believers must not use their bodies for sexual immorality (6:13).

**6:15–16 “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. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.”**

- This teaching about sexual immorality and prostitutes was especially important for the Corinthian church

because the temple of the love-goddess Aphrodite was in Corinth. This temple employed more than a thousand prostitutes, and sex was part of the worship ritual. Paul clearly stated that Christians should have no part in sexual immorality, even if it is acceptable and popular in the surrounding culture.

- Believers' bodies are members of Christ, and chapter 12 describes the church in this way: "Now all of you together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it" (12:27). Because believers are part of the "body," of Jesus Christ on earth, they should not take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute. The sex act unites a man and a woman in such a way that they become one body; way back in Genesis God had planned that the two shall be one flesh in marriage (**Genesis 2:24**).

#### **6:17 "But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit."**

- A person who commits sexual sin with a prostitute is "united" (joined) with him or her. By contrast, *the person who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him*. The same verb is used both times in the Greek, describing the oneness that believers have with the Lord who is spirit (**2 Corinthians 3:17–18**).

#### **6:18 "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body."**

- Paul described sexual sin as a sin that is against one's own body. As in 6:13, the word "body" refers not to the flesh, but to the whole being or person. Keep in mind that the sex act brings two people

together into oneness; it brings a man and woman together in body, soul, and spirit. Clearly other sins also affect the body or person, such as gluttony or drunkenness, but no other sin has the same effect on the whole person as sexual sin.

**6:19–20** “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? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. “

- Paul asked for the sixth time in this chapter *Do you not know?* indicating that this was a fact the Corinthians should have known but apparently had missed or forgotten. The words “your body” in this verse refer not to the corporate “body of Christ,” but to each believer’s individual, physical body. How should the Corinthian believers think about their bodies? Paul explained that each should view his or her body as a *temple of the Holy Spirit*, who was living in them.
- The believers’ physical bodies belonged to God. In them, his Spirit lived; through them, he would accomplish his work on earth. One day they will be resurrected. Jesus Christ died to pay the *price* that purchased sinful people’s freedom (**Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18–19**). His blood provided the sacrifice that made believers acceptable to God. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit came to indwell those who believed in him; He took up residence *in* their bodies. The principle “you are not your own” is very important to understand. Most people today treat their bodies as a personal convenience for doing what they want. They can wreck them with bad health practices or use them for fulfilling sinful desires. But Paul claims the body for God. Believers, therefore, ought to *honor God* with their bodies. Just as the



temple was a place for worship, sacrifice, prayer, and communion with God, so should our bodies be used to implement these high purposes.

- The body as the Spirit's temple affirms its importance to God. Christians cannot indulge their bodies because they are unimportant, nor can they punish their bodies in order to be saved or become more spiritual. We Christians honor God with our bodies as shown in **Romans 12:1-2**.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 7

### QUESTIONS ABOUT MARRIAGE / 7:1–16

After discussing disorder in the church, Paul moved to a list of questions that the Corinthians had sent him, including those on marriage, singleness, eating meat offered to idols, proper worship, orderliness in the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection. Questions that plague churches today are remarkably similar, so we can receive specific guidance in these areas from this letter. The first section (7:1-16) applies to marriage.

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

- The Corinthian believers had written to Paul, asking him several questions, or perhaps even taking issue with some of his principles, relating to the Christian life and problems in the church. Apparently this first question regarded whether people should stay married or if those previously married should remain celibate. Christians in Corinth were surrounded by sexual temptation. The city had a reputation even among pagans for sexual immorality and religious prostitution. To this sexually saturated society, Paul was delivering these instructions on sex and marriage. The Corinthians needed special, specific instructions because of their culture's immoral standards. Some believers were teaching total sexual abstinence within marriage because of a mistaken notion that sexual relations were sinful; some were proposing separating from or divorcing spouses in order to stay pure. To the first question, Paul answered that *it is good to live a celibate life* (“It is well for a man not to touch a woman,”). At first glance this may seem to contradict God's words in **Genesis 2:18**, “It is not good for the man to be alone”. Paul

maintained a high view of marriage (**Ephesians 5:25–33**). In 7:1, Paul was not stating an absolute; rather, he was simply explaining that it may be God’s will for some to remain single. Paul’s advice may have been directed at the “present distress” referred to in 7:26; he thought it would be easier to face persecution as a single person. But, as Paul would explain later in this chapter, his words do not mean that married couples should divorce or that Christians ought not to marry. For those whom God calls to celibacy, the lifestyle is in accordance with God’s will for them. They should see it as a gift to be used for God’s purposes (7:7).

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

- After saying that living the celibate life is acceptable and good, Paul quickly added that he did not mean that being married was not good. God created marriage, so it must be good. Those who can remain celibate should do so, but the believers in Corinth ought not deprive themselves of being married and try to enforce celibacy. That would set them up for failure because there is so much sexual immorality. As noted before, sexual immorality was pervasive in Corinth; many of the believers had come out of very immoral lifestyles. Paul advised, therefore, that those men and women not given the gift of celibacy from God should marry. Then they would be able to fulfill their sexual desires in the God-honoring institution of marriage.

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

- In the same way that God created marriage, he also created sexual intercourse with which the human race could reproduce as well as find great enjoyment. Just as with anything else that God created, however, sinful humanity can find a way to dirty it. God created sexual intercourse to occur only between a man and a woman, and only within the confines of the marriage commitment, but humans have used it wrongly. The Corinthians were surrounded by sexual temptations. Such temptations can be difficult to withstand because they appeal to the normal and natural desires that God has given to human beings.
- Some people in the ancient world reacted against the extreme immorality by doing just the opposite; abstaining from sex altogether. Apparently, some married people, who saw or experienced the evil of sexual relations wrongly used, began to believe that all sex was immoral, so they should abstain even in their marriages. While celibacy should be the rule for those who choose to remain single (7:1), Paul explained that it should not have any place in the marriage relationship. Marriage provides God's way to satisfy natural sexual desires and to strengthen the partners against temptation. Married couples have the responsibility to care for each other; therefore, husbands and wives should not *deprive* each other but should fulfill each other's sexual needs and desires. Notice Paul did not emphasize that one partner can demand sex from the other but rather that neither should withhold it. Both partners are to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, as well as sensitive to the needs of one another. Paul's reference to the wife's *right as a married woman* as being equal to the man's right was revolutionary in this culture of male domination. Paul stressed equality of men and women in their rights as marriage partners to give and receive from each other.

**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.”**

- A person's body belongs to God when we become a Christian because Jesus Christ bought us with His blood from the slave market of sin (6:19-20). Physically, however, our bodies belong to our spouses as well. God designed marriage so that through the union of husband and wife two become one. The sexual act brings the total persons (body, soul, and spirit) together into oneness (6:16; **Genesis 2:24**). The unity given to the married couple through their sexual relationship makes them no longer independent beings; they have become “one flesh.” So Paul said to these married believers that sex is not immoral because God created it; therefore, they should not deprive their spouse.

**7:5–6 “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. But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. “**

- The only time spouses should deprive one another of sexual intimacy would be if they mutually agree, for a period of time, in order to devote themselves to prayer. Times of devoted prayer to God are good for all believers; some may sense a need to total focus on God and so would abstain from sex or even food if it were a time for fasting. Paul also explained that it should not become a habit. Because married couples are “one flesh,” they must maintain that union and come together again. Otherwise, they would leave themselves open for Satan's temptations with sexual immorality because of a possible lack of self control.

- **This I say by way of concession, not of command.** Marriage is desirable and certainly needful in order to procreate under God's guidelines, but marriage is not commanded by God. This sentence concludes his statement in 7:5–6; which he doesn't want them to understand as if it were a command.

**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.”**

- Paul made a personal note, further explaining that celibacy is acceptable, by stating that he wished *everyone could get along without marrying* just as he did. Paul well knew that his lifestyle; itinerant travel, difficult work, not having a permanent home, danger, often being mocked and ridiculed, sometimes being beaten and jailed, all for the sake of the gospel, was not one that he could easily live out with a wife and children along. So Paul thanked the Lord for his gift of being able to remain unmarried and do what God wanted him to do with the freedom that a married man would not have. He wished that others could serve the Lord with such complete abandon.
- Paul also realized, however, that if everyone remained unmarried, there would be no Christian children and no furthering of the Christian faith to the next generation. Thus all believers are not *the same*. To some *God gives ... the gift of marriage*, and they can serve God well in that capacity. To others *he gives the gift of singleness* so they can fulfill other roles in the furthering of his kingdom. Because these are gifts from God, one should not try to force either one on anyone's life.

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

- Paul had stated the general principles regarding marriage in the previous verses; now he begins to speak to specific situations. First, he wrote instructions to the unmarried and the widows (and widowers). Paul's focus on singleness was always because of his concern for Christian's ability to bear up under persecution for their faith and to serve the Lord wholeheartedly (7:26, 32-35). Note that in a different place and situation, Paul counseled younger widows to marry (**I Timothy 5:14**). So here in Corinth he suggested to those presently not bound in marriage that it would be well for them to remain unmarried as he himself was.
- It is unknown whether Paul was ever married, if his wife left him (perhaps when he became a Christian), or if he was widowed. Some believe he was probably married at one time because marriage was required of Jewish men in positions of leadership among the Jews, as Paul had been before he became a Christian.

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

- The Corinthians seemed to have a problem with self-control, as suggested by the immorality that was so common in the city. The believers came out of that lifestyle, yet many were probably still struggling with their flesh in this area. Notice that Paul did not suggest man's effort to control himself. Instead, he told married people to give themselves to one another (7:3-4); he told single people to use their singleness as an opportunity to live for the Lord (7:7-8). Paul

understood that those who struggled with self-control should not force themselves to remain single. He said these people should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. This is not a negative comment regarding being no more than a legitimate way to release sexual pressure; instead, it is tied with the gifts of marriage and singleness that Paul had mentioned in 7:7. Those who do not have the gift of singleness, and thus have a passion that will need a proper release, ought to marry. It would be impossible to live with such a desire without having been given the grace to do so.

**7:10–11 “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.”**

- Having spoken to the unmarried people in 7:8–9, Paul now turned his attention to the married. He explained to the Corinthian believers the Christian view of divorce, given as a command, not from Paul himself, but from the Lord. Jesus had taught about divorce during his time on earth (**Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18**), saying that married people were not to divorce. While divorce was permitted because of the hardness of man's heart, it was never God's plan for married people.
- Paul explained that a wife must not separate from her husband. However, if she has already separated from her husband, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. She does not have the option to marry another man. In the same way, the husband must not divorce his wife.



**7:12–13** “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. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.”

- Next, Paul turned his attention to *the rest of you*; believers who were married to unbelievers. Apparently, there were many such couples in the Corinthian church. About this particular situation, Paul said he did *not have a direct command from the Lord*. So he did what all believers must do when Scripture doesn't state exactly what must be done in a particular situation; he inferred what should be done from what Scripture *does* say. Scripture has plenty to say about marriage. The “command” about the permanence of marriage comes from the Old Testament (**Genesis 2:24**). Paul based his advice on God's commands about marriage and applied them to the situation the Corinthians were facing.
- Because of their desire to serve Christ, some people in the Corinthian church thought they ought to divorce their pagan spouses and marry Christians. But Paul affirmed the marriage commitment. God's ideal is for marriages to stay together, even when one spouse is not a believer. To leave the marriage, even for the noblest of goals in serving the Lord, would actually be to disregard God's Word regarding marriage (**Mark 10:2-9**). Instead, the believing spouse should trust the Lord for the salvation of the unbelieving spouse (7:16). Paul makes a strong case for staying with the unbelieving spouse, and being a positive influence on the marriage. Paul, like Jesus, believed that marriage is permanent.

**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.”**

- The church included individuals who had become believers but whose spouses had not. Paul had already stated that these believers remain with their unbelieving wife or husband. He explained that the unbelieving spouse *has been sanctified* by the believing spouse. The word “sanctify” can mean to cleanse, make pure, regard as sacred. It is used in the Old Testament to describe the items that become holy because of their relationship to something already deemed holy by God. For example, the temple sanctified the gold connected with it, or the altar sanctified the gift laid on it (**Matthew 23:17, 19**). There are two views of how “sanctified” may be applied to the unbeliever. One view is that there is a godly influence on the unbeliever as the Christian spouse lives out his or her life abiding in Christ. The other view is that the Christian, who is a child of God, includes his or her spouse in the promised blessings from the Lord as they overflow to the unbeliever. “Sanctification: does not carry the meaning of “salvation;” that is, the unbelieving husband is not “saved” through his wife’s salvation. More likely, the Corinthians had heeded Paul’s advice in 5:9-11 not to associate with unbelievers. They had interpreted Paul to mean that sex with an unbelieving marriage partner would defile them. Paul affirmed the opposite.
- In this context, Paul pictured the unbelieving husband as guardian and caretaker of a home and of his Christian wife; therefore he is sanctified by God due to the man’s role in the life of one of God’s chosen ones. The same is true of the wife.

- The blessings that flow to believers don't stop there but extend to everyone around them. Among those most likely to receive benefits from God's work in believers' lives are their spouse and children. God regards the marriage as "sanctified" (set apart for his use) by the presence of one Christian spouse. The other partner does not receive salvation automatically but is helped by this relationship. The unbeliever is in a relationship with one upon whom God has his hand and whom God will bless as His child and use for his service.
- Paul calls the children of such a marriage holy because of God's blessing on the family. "Holy" here means dedicated to God by the believing parent. The believing parent is called upon to raise his or her children in the faith, and will hopefully have such an influence that the children will accept salvation for themselves.

**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."**

- While the believing spouse must not leave the marriage if the unbeliever wants to stay married (7:12-13), the opposite may also happen. The unbeliever may decide that, because his or her spouse has become a Christian, the marriage should be dissolved. So the believer must let the unbeliever go. When a separation happens for this reason, a believing man or woman is not under bondage to force the unbelieving one to remain. Another reason to not block this separation is that God has called us to live in peace, a situation that would be impossible in a home where the unbeliever felt hostile toward the believer. However, please keep in mind that any

separation should have the ultimate goal of reconciliation. Hopefully, the unbelieving one who left the marriage, will eventually come to his or her senses and return to the marriage.

**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?”**

- Another reason for believers to remain in a marriage to an unbeliever is that the believer can be a good influence on their spouse. The marriage relationship provides ample opportunity for the Christian to be a powerful witness to his or her spouse. So powerful can it be, Paul reminded them, that the unbelieving wife or husband *might be converted* because of the faithful testimony of the believing wives or husbands. For those couples who can stay together “in peace” (7:15), this is the most joyous result of all.

### **BELIEVERS SHOULD BE CONTENT WHERE THEY ARE / 7:17–24**

Paul had just finished explaining to the believers who were married to unbelievers that they should stay in their situation peacefully and live for Christ in their marriage. This passage expands his thought on that topic, explaining that just because people become Christians, this does not mean there will be changes in every area of their lives.

**7:17–19 “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. Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. “**

- Christ makes changes from within and calls people from all walks of life. While some changes are made in behavior and attitudes, the believers ought not force certain changes. For example, they ought not change marriage partners. They need not attempt to change jobs. Instead, accept whatever situation the Lord has placed you in, and continue on as you were when God first called you.
- For example; the ceremony of circumcision was an important part of the Jews' relationship with God. In fact, before Christ came, circumcision was commanded by God for those who claimed to follow him (**Genesis 17:9-14**). But after Christ's death and resurrection, circumcision was no longer required (**Acts 15; Romans 4:9-11; Galatians 5:2-4; Colossians 2:11**). For the Jews, circumcision was the sign of their covenant with God; the Greeks, however, looked down upon it as the mark of lowly people. Paul pointed out that, in God's kingdom, **circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters**. Jewish Christians did not need to pressure Gentile Christians to be circumcised (**Romans 2:25, 29; Galatians 5:6**). Instead, they should stay as they were when they became believers; any outward change would make no difference; the inner change is all that matters. As we grow into Christ-likeness and Christ lives His life out through us, we will live our lives as Christ would (**John 17:18; 20:21**).

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

- Paul repeated what he had said in 7:17 for emphasis. The believers should continue on as they were when

God called them. This refers to examples such as marriage, circumcision or uncircumcision (as noted above), job, or position in life (slave or free, 7:21-23). Obviously, it does not refer to one's spiritual, inward life; that should be growing and changing every day as believers grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (**2 Peter 3:18**).

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

- From religious variations in the church (circumcision and uncircumcision), Paul moved on to the social status of the believers. The church in Corinth also included people from every area of life; many of them slaves. Therefore, if a believer was a slave when he became a Christian, he could continue as a Christian slave, doing his work as unto the Lord (**Ephesians 6:5-9**). The key phrase is “care not for it” or “don’t let that worry you.” The slaves should not feel that because they became Christians they could no longer serve as slaves. Unfortunately, they may have to keep living as slaves, but they should serve Christ wholeheartedly in their position. Of course, they also were free to seek to better themselves, for Paul says, *if you get a chance to be free, take it*. Doing the will of God, as always, is what matters most (7:19).

**7:22–23 “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. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.”**

- Slavery was common throughout the Roman Empire, so many of the believers in Corinth were slaves when the Lord called them. Paul said that although the Christian slaves remained enslaved to their human masters, they were free from the bondage of sin in

their lives (**Romans 6:18, 22**). In the same way, if a person was free when the Lord called him, he was now a slave of Christ. The free people had become servants of the Savior who purchased them at a higher price than any rich person ever paid for a slave; the price, his blood (6:20; **Romans 5:9; 2 Corinthians 5:21**).

- Because God paid a great price to bring his people to Himself, he has complete authority over their lives. Because believers are servants of God, they should no longer be enslaved by the world. They live in the world, and may even be a slave in the world, but they are not of the world.

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

- This passage repeats Paul’s statement of 7:17 and 7:20. God can use people from all areas of life, so *whatever situation* God found them in, they should remain there in their new relationship with God. Because believers have been set free from sin and are free to live for God, they ought not feel either pride or shame in their position in life. Instead, they should serve God from that position, seeking to be salt and light to those who don’t know Christ.

### **QUESTIONS ABOUT SINGLENESS / 7:25–40**

**7:25–26 “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. I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. “**

- The words “now, concerning” indicate that at this point Paul began addressing another matter about which the Corinthian church had asked. In their culture, a young woman’s parents usually would make the decision about whether or not their daughter would marry. So these parents had written wondering what decisions to make regarding their unmarried daughters.
- Paul clearly stated that he had no specific command from the Lord for the believers regarding this subject; that is, he did not have a direct teaching from Jesus. This does not mean, however, that Paul’s words should be taken as any less inspired. Paul offered this advice because he knew that the Lord, in his kindness, had given him wisdom that can be trusted.
- Paul advised the young women to *remain* as they were, unmarried. He reasoned that it would be easier for them to be single than married during *this present crisis*. There has been discussion among scholars regarding the nature of the “crisis.” Some have suggested that Paul expected the Lord’s return and was referring to the certain calamities that would take place prior to the Second Coming. Most likely, however, Paul foresaw the impending persecution that the Roman government would soon bring upon Christians. He gave this practical advice because being unmarried would mean less suffering and more freedom to throw one’s life into the cause of Christ (7:29), even to the point of martyrdom. Paul’s advice reveals his single-minded devotion to Christ.

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



- Speaking to the young women not yet married, Paul had explained that “it is best to remain just as you are.” Paul now expands his advice for everyone, both men and women, married and single. A married person should not seek a divorce; an unmarried man should not look for a wife. Paul’s reasoning rested with what he had said in 7:26. Difficult times are coming for Christians.

**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.”**

- Lest he be misunderstood, Paul explained that he was not saying that it would be sinful for these young unmarried women to get married. That would be inconsistent with all of Scripture. Instead, Paul was *trying to spare [them] the extra problems that come with marriage*. Paul wanted the believers in Corinth to let go of everything; that would be much easier without the attachment of marriage. Thus, he advised the unmarried to remain that way. If they chose to marry, however, that would not be wrong.

**7:29–30 “But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; 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; “**

- As Paul had challenged the unmarried to consider their situation in light of God’s will for their lives and their brief time on earth to accomplish it, so he challenged all the brothers and sisters to look at life and realize *the time that remains is rather short*. Paul was thinking of coming persecutions and with it, the end of the believers’ freedom to witness for their faith.

Paul urged the believers not to regard marriage, home, or financial security as the ultimate goals of life. As much as possible, live unhindered by the cares of this world, which might keep us from doing God's work. Married men and women, as Paul pointed out (7:33-34), must take care of earthly responsibilities, but also abide in Christ in their marriages. If life brings them happiness or sadness or wealth, they should not be bound up in any of it.

- Paul's focus, as always, was that believers make the most of their time before Christ's return.

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

- Believers are to live detached from this world. Those who have been blessed with the things of the world, should make good use of them without becoming attached to them. Jesus commended the unbelievers in his day who used money wisely, and he encouraged the disciples to learn from them: "I tell you, use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. In this way, your generosity stores up a reward for you in heaven" (**Luke 16:9**). All of our possessions and opportunities can be shared and put to good use. Our homes can be opened, our cars loaned, and our possessions shared. Believers who have been blessed with material wealth should remember that they have been blessed by God in order to be a blessing to others. Paul did not want the believers to be "attached" to anything in this life as if that were all there is; to do so would be to forget that *this world and all it contains will pass away* (**1 John 2:17**).

**7:32–34 "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: But he that is**

**married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. 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. “**

- Marriage is a tremendous responsibility for each of the spouses involved. For a marriage to be successful, husband and wife must die to self and serve one another; they will need to be concerned about earthly responsibilities and how to please one another. Paul was not saying that this was wrong in any way; he was simply pointing out that unmarried people can focus more on the things of the Lord. Paul had noted in 7:28, his advice rests on his desire that these believers be free from the concerns of this life. Later, Paul would uphold the privilege of marriage (9:3-5).

**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.”**

- Paul gave the advice in the previous verses for their benefit, but not to place anyone under the law. These were not regulations that the churches must follow, but rather advice that came from Paul’s heart, to help the struggling believers in Corinth to be able to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord. This would be helpful as they lived out their Christianity in the midst of the immoral culture of Corinth and as they anticipated persecution for their faith.

**7:36–37 “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. 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.”**

- The phrase “passed the flower of her age” means past the prime age for marriage. In the Corinthian culture at that time, a young woman was considered “fully developed” and ready for marriage at eighteen to twenty years old. The young man may marry if he feels he ought to marry. But if he desires not to marry, this young man also does the right thing. That “he is under no compulsion” means that there is no outside pressure such as from parents or through a prior agreement; he can make his own decision.

**7:38 “So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better.”**

- When Paul wrote that *the person who doesn’t marry does even better*, he was referring to the potential time available for service to God. The single person does not have the responsibility of caring for a spouse and raising a family. Singleness, however, does not ensure service to God; true Biblical service to the Lord depends on the spiritual maturity of the individual.

**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.”**

- The Bible teaches that marriage is a lifelong contract between a man and a woman; as long as they both shall live.” Therefore, a married woman *is bound to*

*her husband as long as he lives.* The relationship was not to be dissolved for any reason. If the woman's husband were to die, however, the marriage contract would be void, and *she is free to marry anyone she wishes*, providing that this person were a Christian. This also applied to men whose wives had died.

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

- While the widow *can* remarry (7:39), that doesn't necessarily mean that she *should*. In fact, Paul's opinion was that *it will be better for her if she doesn't marry again* for the same reasons he said that the unmarried people might think about remaining single (7:25, 28, 32–34).
- When Paul stated *I think also that I have the Spirit of God*, there was nothing tentative in his meaning. Paul's advice came from the Holy Spirit, who gave him the words he needed to answer the Corinthian church's questions.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 8

### *QUESTIONS ABOUT FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS / 8:1–13*

The discussion regarding whether the Corinthian believers should eat food that had been offered to idols begins here and continues through 11:1. The Corinthians had written to Paul with questions regarding these issues, but their exact questions are unknown. Paul dealt with these questions in this first section.

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

- The Corinthian believers had sent another question to Paul; this one regarding food sacrificed to idols. Their question pertained to idolatry with its sacrifices that had permeated the Greek and Roman cultures of the day. (Paul had addressed this issue in his letter to the Roman believers in Romans 14). One might think that believers should obviously not have contact with idolatry in any form. Paul had actually prohibited such contact in 5:9-11, and the Jerusalem council had also forbidden the Christians to eat meat offered to idols (**Acts 15:20**). For believers in Corinth, however, staying clear of any contact with idolatry was nearly impossible for two main reasons. First, people often ate meals in temples or in places associated with idols. This was accepted social practice for public or private gatherings. To cut oneself off from such gatherings would be to not attend weddings or other social celebrations today. So this was a great concern for the believers. At such gatherings, a sacrifice was made to the idol. When such meat was sacrificed, the priest would divide it into three portions: One would be burned up, one would be given to the priest, and one would be given to the

offerer. If the priest did not use his portion, it would be sent to the marketplace. This caused the second concern for the believers. The meat, after being sacrificed to an idol and sold in the market, would then be bought and served in private homes. So the Corinthian believers wondered if the meat had been contaminated by its having been offered on a pagan altar, and, if by eating it, they would be participating in idol worship. Paul answered both of these concerns; most likely, the advice in 8:1-13 deals with temple-sponsored meals, while 10:23-11:1 deals with meat sold in the marketplace.

- The words “we all have knowledge” refer to knowledge that there is one true God and He is sovereign, and knowledge that idols are worthless and powerless. The conclusion, then, is that believers can eat anything because God created it, so a ceremony offering food to an idol could do nothing to contaminate the food. Since they didn’t believe in idols, and God doesn’t regard idols, Corinthian believers could eat with their friends without problems. Some believers understood this fact. Others, however, felt very strongly that to eat such meat would be wrong; their consciences were not clear. This must have become a divisive issue, because the question had come to Paul.
- Paul took the opportunity to tell them that *knowledge puffs up, but love builds up*. While these believers had a certain amount of knowledge leading to freedom, it would be of no value if they did not deal with their fellow believers in a spirit of love. Those who might be taking pride in their knowledge of Christ would only be “puffed up” and could end up dividing the church. Those who took their knowledge and used it lovingly among the believers were “building up” the church. In this situation,

acting on knowledge alone, even accurate knowledge without love for others, would harm the church.

- Paul maintained that eating meat sacrificed to idols was not good. He upheld the decision of the Jerusalem council. But he would go on to explain why he himself ate meat in private homes with Gentiles.

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

- Because “knowledge puffs up,” people who think they have much knowledge often claim to know all the answers. However, we know that no one can know everything; therefore, a person who claims to know it all shows that he or she doesn’t really know very much.
- Knowledge without love leads to a pride that will eventually fall under its own weight. However, knowledge of God produces love, for God is love (**1 John 4:8**), and **2 Corinthians 5:14** states that the love of Christ constrains/compels/motivates us. The following verses explain that true knowledge of God leads Christian to willingly help weaker believers so as not to cause them to stumble; in this context by not eating food sacrificed to idols.

**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.”**

- After dealing with the root issue of pride in this matter (8:1-3), Paul returned to the question at hand. Should



we eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols? The believers in Corinth had come out of a culture that embraced many gods, to believing in only one God. These believers knew that an idol was not really a god. Not only are idols powerless, they are imaginary and have no substance, authority, power, or ability to curse or bless. The believers' knowledge was the basis for this argument. They knew that the idols were worthless. This statement set the stage for what Paul would say about eating meat offered to idols.

**8:5–6 “For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) 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 idols themselves were phony, but they represented *so-called gods* to the many people who worshiped them, whether their abode was thought to be *in heaven or on earth*. Idolatry takes away from God the worship he is due. God created everything; even the metal, wood, and stone from which people fashion their idols. The pagans divided creation up among the various gods who ruled their own spheres, but the one true God created everything.
- There is one God and *there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live*. Paul's statement of “one God” and “one Lord” places the uniqueness and living reality of God the Father and Jesus Christ against the false Corinthian deities. This characterizes God the Father as the source and fulfillment of all creation, and God the Son, Jesus Christ, as the mediator. God is “Father,” signifying his love and desire to relate to his people. God is the source of everything created. God

is also every believer's fulfillment or destiny. Our existence meets his purposes. Next Paul wrote of the nature and work of Christ. He called Christ "Lord," a name that the Old Testament uses only in reference to God. Through Jesus Christ, God created and redeemed the world.

**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."**

- A verse to consider here is **Romans 14:23**, "Whatever is not of faith is sin."
- Basic Christian theology focuses on the fact that there is one God, who created everything, and that idols are nothing. *However*, wrote Paul, *not all Christians realize this*. They believe in the all-powerful God of the Christian faith but are not thoroughly convinced that the other gods do not exist as well. In their hearts and consciences, they have difficulty because they are *accustomed to thinking of idols as being real*. Therefore, when they eat meat that had been sacrificed as part of a religious ceremony, they were unable to separate the meat from the ceremony. Eating such meat causes them to *think of it as the worship of real gods*. This produced a troubled and weak conscience. The Corinthians' weak consciences could not discriminate between right and wrong regarding food offered to idols, so when they ate such meat, they did not eat in faith and therefore violated their consciences and sinned against God.

## **STRONGER AND WEAKER BELIEVERS**

**8:8–9 "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. 9 But take heed lest by any means**

**this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.”**

- Spiritually speaking, food is neutral, neither good nor evil, regardless of whether or not it has been sacrificed in a pagan temple to an idol. There would be nothing inherently wrong with eating such meat because food has nothing to do with one's relationship with God; cannot bring us near to God, nor can it take us farther away. Therefore, it really doesn't matter. Therefore, because it doesn't matter, Paul said that the strong believers should not force the weak to eat, but rather to love the weak. The “strong” believers knew Scripture and stood strong on God's Word and were free from legalistic constraints. Yet, they must be careful that the exercise of their freedom would not become a stumbling block to the weak.
- A “stumbling block” refers to something that might cause someone to trip or fall. The strong but insensitive Christian may flaunt his or her freedom, be a harmful example, and thus offend the consciences of others. The weak Christian may try to fence others in with petty rules and regulations, thus causing dissension. Paul wanted his readers to be both strong in the faith as well as sensitive to the needs of others.

**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;”**

- Paul offered an example of what might happen. The weak in faith Christians (those with “weak consciences” as explained in 8:7) think that it is wrong

to eat food that has been sacrificed to an idol. Strong in faith Christians know there's nothing wrong with eating such food, so they go to the temple of an idol and eat there. As noted in 8:1, this would not have been an uncommon occurrence, for most social and cultural events happened in the temples. When weak believers see their fellow Christians eating in the idol temple, the weak believers would be encouraged to violate their conscience by doing the same. If a weak believer does something that he or she is not sure is the right thing to do, that action will bring condemnation. As Paul wrote to the Romans, "Those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith" (**Romans 14:23**).

- If one believer by faith has no concern regarding where meat comes from or how it is prepared but flaunts his or her belief in order to cause one who lacks faith to be distressed, then that stronger individual is not acting in love. The conduct of stronger believers is not to be decided by what they think is their better insight into the Scriptures or what they feel would "strengthen" those weaker ones. Rather, it is to be decided by love and sensitivity. Paul was pointing out how the strong believers ought to use their freedom in public; the situation he described here was very public. If these strong believers ate meat that had been offered to idols in the privacy of their homes because they knew such meat was not tainted in any way, they could do so with liberty and without concern for the weaker believers. Strong in faith Christians ought to, at times, restrain their freedom for the sake of the weak, on the other hand, they should not be in bondage to the consciences of weak believers.

**8:11 "And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?"**

- The stronger believer must not let his or her desires become a stumbling block that could destroy a weaker brother or sister. The strong believers know they are free from concern regarding meat offered to idols, but that knowledge must not cause them to harm other believers. Therefore, strong Christians are to act in love. That other person, no matter how much the strong believer disagrees with him or her, is still someone for whom Christ died. If Christ willingly gave up his life, Christians ought to give up their freedoms as well.
- Mature Christians should not flaunt their freedom. They should be sensitive to younger converts whose faith can be destroyed by such freedom. For example, a young Christian addicted to gambling may be damaged by the strong Christian's freedom to play a card game. Some activities may be all right in and of themselves but not around weaker new converts. Weak believers must grow in the faith and, at the same time, not pass judgment on their stronger brothers and sisters.

**8:12 “But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.”**

- Throughout this passage, Paul has been addressing stronger believers. So when he wrote “and you,” he was referring to the strong in faith believers. If they were insensitive to their weaker brothers and sisters by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong, then they would be sinning both against Christ and against other Christians.

**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.”

- Paul willingly followed his own advice, stating that if what he ate would *make another Christian sin*, he would never eat meat again. Strong believers have the power and desire to restrict their freedoms for the sake of others (**Philippians 2:13**). An interesting Scripture to consider is **James 2:18**, “I’ll show you my faith by my works.” If you want to know what a man believes, then watch his life.
- In areas of disagreement, Paul counseled the believers to keep their beliefs between themselves and God. The brother or sister who believes in certain freedoms should not be trying to influence the weak in faith to “loosen up.” Those bothered by some actions should not be judging or condemning those with freedom, nor should they be trying to force their concerns on the entire church. Instead, all believers have a clear conscience before God.

## **1 CORINTHIANS 9**

### *THE RIGHTS OF APOSTLES / 9:1–27*

At the end of chapter 8, Paul stated that he would gladly give up his right to eat meat if it would help a weaker believer not to stumble. What follows in this chapter is Paul's defense of his apostleship and of his freedom to exercise, or not to exercise, his rights as a believer who is free in Christ.

- Interestingly, what reads like a relentless demand for recognition (Paul used at least sixteen rhetorical questions in a row) turns into another teaching opportunity. He hoped the Corinthians could learn something of spiritual value by understanding his attitude toward his ministry. He could have rightfully demanded many things from the Corinthians; instead, he gave them real freedom in Christ. He didn't want them dependent on others, or on himself; rather he wanted them dependent on Christ.

**9:1–2    “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? 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.”**

- In defending his apostleship, Paul reestablished his authority for those in Corinth who doubted that they should listen to him (9:3). So Paul presented his credentials as *an apostle*. In Greek, these four questions are rhetorical; they expect a “yes” answer.
- Such credentials make the advice he gives in this letter more persuasive. Second Corinthians 10–13 defends Paul's apostleship in greater detail.

- Paul had served in Corinth, and many had become believers through his ministry. If the believers doubted his authority, then they would have to doubt their faith as well. The fact that his readers had accepted Christ testified to Paul's authority among them. They were the "seal," or authentication, of his apostleship. The Corinthians' relationship with Paul was different from their relationship with any other teacher. Paul did not plant all the churches that existed, but *surely* he had planted the one in Corinth.

**9:3–4    "Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, Have we not power to eat and to drink? "**

- Earlier in this letter, Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their factions and their overly zealous loyalty to different teachers (3:1–22). Those who were *not* loyal to Paul apparently had been questioning his authority. It seems that they questioned Paul because he was not taking advantage of the rights accorded to apostles.
- Therefore, Paul asked, "*Don't we have the right to live in your homes and share your meals?*" Many in that day did not understand the concept of the church being a self-supporting unit. The apostles, as they traveled to spread the Good News, had a right to hospitality from the churches; meals and a place to stay.
- Paul had waived this right, however; he willingly worked hard in order to pay for his own lodging and food. In Corinth, he had worked as a tentmaker or leatherworker (**Acts 18:3**).



**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?”**

- Paul states that the apostles had the right to have their wives travel along with them, supported financially by the churches. Paul’s mention of “the other disciples and the Lord’s brothers and Peter” refers to others in the church who were considered to be apostles and who also had wives who had come to believe in Jesus. The brothers of Jesus (referring to Jesus’ physical half brothers) had not believed in Jesus at first (**John 7:3–5**), but after the Resurrection, they believed and attained leadership status in the church at Jerusalem (**Acts 1:14**). Peter’s wife is not mentioned elsewhere, but the Gospels record a time when Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law (**Matthew 8:14–15; Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38**).

**9:6–7 “Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? 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?”**

- *Barnabas* had traveled with Paul during the first missionary journey (**Acts 13:1–14:28**). When they prepared to embark on a second journey, a dispute between them caused them to separate; effectively creating two teams (**Acts 15:36–41**). Barnabas was also considered to be an apostle (**Acts 14:3–4, 14**). This may mean that Paul and Barnabas were the only apostles who made it a habit to work and earn their living as they traveled to spread the gospel (**4:12; Acts 18:2–3**). Because these two men had refrained from taking money from the churches, some were saying that they were not apostles (**9:3–4**). Also, tent making was regarded as lowly work, fit primarily for

slaves. They questioned whether Paul had the same authority as other apostles because they looked down on him for working with his hands. Paul asserted that he and Barnabas had the authority of apostles, even though they did not take advantage of the rights they deserved; having waived them of their own free will. Paul also made it clear in the following series of questions, however, that he was not putting himself above the other apostles. They all had a right to support from the churches, just as a man who serves in the military has his expenses covered, or one who plants a vineyard can enjoy its fruit, or a shepherd can drink some of the milk from his flock. All were fed by their occupation. This should be no different for apostles. The same holds true for Christian workers (9:10).

**9:8–10** “Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? 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? 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.”

- While Paul’s argument made sense from a *human point of view*, he did not end there, for his words held the authority of Scripture. The *Law of Moses* states, in **Deuteronomy 25:4**, “*Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.*” In ancient times, grain was often “threshed” by placing sheaves on a hard surface and then allowing oxen to drag something heavy back and forth across it. The law said that the oxen should be allowed to eat some of the grain while they worked. This law was not made to protect oxen but to illustrate a point. God’s people were to care for their animals by allowing oxen to eat while they worked,

but, Paul asked, **Wasn't he also speaking to us? Of course he was. Just as farmers who plow fields and thresh the grain expect a share of the harvest, Christian workers should be paid by those they serve.** God's ministers are to be cared for by those to whom they minister.

**9:11–12 “If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? 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. ”**

- The comparison with ministers of the gospel and farm workers sharing in the harvest (9:10) prompted Paul to use the illustration of sowing *spiritual seed among* the people of Corinth (see also 3:6). Those who had sown this “spiritual seed” may expect to receive a material harvest from the Corinthian believers.
- Then, added Paul, if others have this right of support, then most certainly those who originally had brought the gospel message to these believers should have it all the more. Paul and others (perhaps Barnabas; 9:6) had not demanded their right for support; however, they had worked to earn their own living and desired not to be a burden to the church. Paul chose to forego receiving support, and put up with the hardships of “working two jobs” so that no pagan inquiring about Christianity would be put off by the financial obligation of supporting a missionary.

**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?”**

- The phrase “don’t you know” implies that the readers should have known and understood the fact that Paul was presenting. Paul returned to the argument of 9:7 and gave two more examples of his right to receive support. It was everywhere understood that those who served in the temple or at the altar derived their livelihood from the job. As part of their pay, priests in the temple would receive a portion of the offerings as their food (**Numbers 18:8–24**). This was true in the pagan temples, as well.

**9:14 “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”**

- Paul’s explanation that God’s ministers should be supported by the churches came as an order from the Lord. This argument will be repeated in 9:17. Probably Paul was alluding to Jesus’ command in **Luke 10:7**, “Don’t hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve their pay” (**1 Timothy 5:18**). The churches were required to honor *those who preach the Good News*, and those who served among the believers should be supported by *those who benefit from* their ministry. This command from God made it possible for traveling missionaries and local ministers to focus entirely on the spread of the gospel and the growth of the church, and not be concerned about providing for their daily needs.

**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.”**

- The ministers of the gospel had a right to expect financial support. Paul noted here and in 9:12, however, that he had not used any of these rights in

Corinth because in doing so, he could hinder the spread of the gospel in that city. Paul did accept gifts from some churches, such as the Philippian church (**Philippians 4:14-19**). He must have sensed that to take financial help in Corinth would have caused some to think he desired money rather than souls. Paul willingly set aside his rights as an apostle, giving up the easier path of voluntary support for hard work, in order to bring more people in Corinth to the Lord.

- Paul hastened to add that he was not writing this in the hope that now the Corinthians would begin to give him financial help. Instead, he wanted them to know that he would continue in the ministry without expecting support; (this was his boast). Paul planned to visit Corinth again, and he wanted to be able to face those who opposed him with the fact that he had unselfishly served among them. They could not claim that his motives were impure.

**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!”**

- Paul may have “boasted” in his desire to serve the Corinthian believers freely, but he could not boast about his serving. Paul had been ordained by God to preach the gospel, and he did so, not by his own choice. *Woe* to Paul if he did not preach the gospel. The word “woe” referred to some deep sorrow that would befall him should he *not preach the gospel*. This compulsion did not mean that Paul did not enjoy this duty (**Romans 1:5; 11:13; 15:15–16; Galatians 1:15–16**); but rather, it means that, like a slave serving a beloved master, Paul served his Lord willingly and faithfully (**Acts 9:15-16**)

**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.”**

- Paul saw his call by God as a *sacred trust*; therefore, he felt that he could freely serve God as an apostle without expecting *payment*. Far from not deserving to be paid, as his detractors were saying, Paul never thought that he deserved payment for an honored duty that he had been called by God to do.

**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.”**

- God would not give Paul a special reward for preaching to the Corinthians without charge; that had been Paul’s choice. Paul’s reward came in being able to show the genuineness of his love and concern for these Corinthian believers.

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

- Paul’s goals were to glorify God and to be used by Him to bring many to Christ. Thus, he stayed free of any philosophical position or material entanglement that might sidetrack him while he died to himself and served others.

**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;”**

- Paul never compromised the doctrines of Scripture, nor did he change God's Word in order to make it more palatable to people in any given place. He never went against God's law or his own conscience. In matters that did not violate any principle of God's Word, however, Paul was willing to become like his audience in order to win them to Christ. Three groups are mentioned in these verses: Jews, Gentiles, and those with weak consciences. By saying, to the Jews I became like a Jew, Paul was stating that, when necessary, he conformed his life to the practices of those under the law even though he himself was no longer under the law (**Acts 16:3; 18:18; 21:20–26**). By conforming to their regulations and restrictions Paul had gained an audience so that he might win those under the law. He never conceded that those regulations had to be kept in order for people to become believers, but he conformed to the laws to help the Jews come to Christ. The line was a difficult one to walk, for the book of Galatians records a time when Paul rebuked Peter for acting like a Jew among the Gentiles (**Galatians 2:11–21**).

**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.”**

- As Paul conformed himself to the Jews, he also conformed to those not having the law, referring to Gentiles. Paul met them on their turf, becoming like one not having the law. This did not mean that Paul was living like a pagan in hopes of winning the pagans to Christ! As he explained, he always remembered that he was not lawless but was under the law of Christ. As Paul grew into the image of Christ, he no longer lived a self-centered life, but rather a Christ-centered life. Paul did not put undue constraints on his Gentile audiences. Unlike some

false teachers of the day, called Judaizers, Paul did not require the Gentiles to follow the Jewish laws in order to become believers (**Acts 15:1-21**). Instead, he spoke a message that would win those not having the law (**Acts 17:1-34**).

**9:22-23** “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. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.  
“

- “The weak” refers to those with a weak conscience, a subject Paul had discussed in chapter 8. In that chapter, Paul had explained that believers who were free in Christ ought to set aside certain freedoms in the presence of another believer with a more sensitive conscience. Paul followed his own advice, saying that he *became weak* when with such people and lived by their restraints so that he might win the weak. Some of the “weak” may have already been believers, but they needed to grow into a deeper knowledge of Christ and a deeper understanding of their freedom in Christ. Paul did this delicately, becoming as they were in order to gain their listening ears. He chose to *become all things to all people* (the Jews, the Gentiles, and those with weak consciences, **9:20-22**) in order to *save some*. Paul never compromised biblical truth, or his own conscience. Paul was willing to go to great lengths to meet people where they were. He had one focus: *I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings*. Paul’s life focused on taking the gospel to an unbelieving world. He spoke the truth in love for the sake of the gospel and for people, so that in the end, he and all believers could share together in the blessings of knowing Christ.



**9:24–25 “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 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. “**

- Paul’s exhortations in the previous verses were for the believers to give up their rights, to think of others first, to be wholehearted in their focus on bringing others to Christ; he called upon the Christians to die or deny themselves. Paul compared the Christian life to a race. The Isthmian games were celebrated every two years at Corinth. Typically, for ten months prior to the games, the athletes-in-training denied themselves many ordinary pleasures in order to prepare and be in top condition for the competition. Each put forth his greatest effort during the contest, setting aside all else in order to win the prize. Everyone runs, but only one person wins the prize.
- Paul told the believers to be like those athletes; he wanted every believer to run the race of life to win. The athletes practiced strict self-control so as to win a prize that will fade away. (For more on self-control, **Galatians 5:22; Titus 2:11-12**) Self control is a part of the fruit of the Spirit, and is received by grace through faith as we walk in the Spirit. Therefore, we conclude that obtaining the eternal prize is not dependent on how we run the race, but rather is a gift from God as we trust and rest in the finished work of Christ (**Philippians 2:13**).

**9:26–27 “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 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. “**

- Paul not only preached the gospel message and encouraged the believers to by faith walk in the Spirit which would produce Godly discipline and self-denial; he also practiced what he preached. He, too, practiced self-control like an athlete. Paul did not run the race aimlessly, nor was he like a boxer who misses his punches. Instead, he kept his eyes focused on the goal of Christ-likeness, running toward it with purpose in every step. By God's grace he would not be sidetracked.
- When Paul said, *I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified*, he did not mean that he feared losing his salvation, but rather that he would be disqualified from receiving his full inheritance in Christ (**Ephesians 1:18**). This passage describes the spiritual maturing process, the period of growth during believers' lives on earth when they are living "in" the world while not being "of" it.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 10

### AVOIDING IDOL WORSHIP / 10:1–11:1

In chapter 9, Paul used himself as an example of a mature Christian who in the Spirit lived a disciplined life to better serve God. Chapter 10 presents Israel as an example of spiritual maturity, shown in their self-centered overconfidence and lifestyle.

**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;”

- This chapter continues Paul’s argument concerning the lifestyle of the believers in the previous chapters. When people are “saved,” they grow in their relationship with Christ and desire to become more like him. Some of the Corinthian believers thought that because they had professed faith, went to church, and joined in the Lord’s Supper, they could then live as they pleased. But this was a false belief, as Paul would explain through the example he used from Israel’s history.
- An Old Testament example of the false belief that one can be saved and then live a faithless, God-less life can be seen in *what happened to the Jews’ ancestors in the wilderness long ago*. The book of Exodus (chapters 1 through 12) contains the record of their miraculous escape from slavery in Egypt by the intervention of God. God gave them a leader (Moses), set them free (through great miracles), and then *guided all of them* as they moved out of Egypt and headed toward the land God wanted to give. “A cloud” refers to God’s presence in the form of a cloud by day and fire by night (**Exodus 13:21–22**). Their guide was God Himself. When they came to the Red Sea, God

*brought them all safely through the waters of the sea on dry ground.* This event is recorded in Exodus 14.

- The emphasis in 10:1–4 is on the word “all,” which Paul used four or five times. Paul was making the point that *all* of the Israelites experienced the miracles of God’s protection and guidance. Yet, later, many turned away. They thought that their place among God’s people assured them the Promised Land. Assuming themselves secure, they forgot God. Because of that, many were “disqualified” from entering the Promised Land.

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

- This verse at first seems very difficult to understand. But it must be understood that “baptism” here is used as an Old Testament physical picture of a New Testament spiritual truth. And “into Moses” is used as an analogy to the Christian experience of being baptized “into Christ” (**Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27**). The Israelites were baptized into Moses, for they followed him into a place of death, it was a place of death indeed, because all of the Israelites died down there. By their experience of passing through the Red Sea, they were united together under Moses’ leadership. “When the people of Israel saw the mighty power that the LORD had displayed against the Egyptians, they feared the LORD and put their faith in him and his servant Moses” (**Exodus 14:31**). The *cloud* represented God’s presence and glory among them (**Exodus 14:19–22**), while the *sea* represented God’s salvation of his.

**10:3–4 “And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of**

**that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. “**

- Further miracles sustained the Israelites as they journeyed through the desert. God provided *spiritual food* in the form of “manna” that came from heaven (**Exodus 16:4, 14–31**). Paul called it “spiritual” because God had provided it for them. The *spiritual drink* referred to was the water Moses obtained from a rock again a provision directly from God. Moses got water from a rock both at the beginning and at the end of Israel’s journey (**Exodus 17:1–7; Numbers 20:2–13**). Paul referred to *Christ* as *that rock* who had accompanied and sustained the people, meeting their needs during their travels. The Old Testament often refers to God as a “rock” (**Genesis 49:24; Deuteronomy 32:4; 2 Samuel 22:32**). Paul’s reference to Christ as the spiritual “rock” would have connected Christ with Yahweh, thereby indicating the deity of Christ.

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

- God had performed great miracles for his people; setting them free from slavery, guiding them through the Red Sea, and giving them food and drink in a barren wilderness. Yet after all this, many or most of the people rebelled against God. The word “many” or “most” is actually an understatement; of the thousands who stood at the very edge of the Promised Land, only two men had faith enough in God to enter (**Numbers 14:5-12**). Because of their lack of faith, God caused the people to turn back from the land and wander for forty years in the wilderness. Joshua and Caleb lived long enough to enter the land (**Numbers 1:30**). In Hebrews 3-4, the wilderness example is used as a warning.

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

- Far from being irrelevant to New Testament Christians, the Old Testament provides examples from which believers can learn. In particular, the story of the Israelites' escape from Egypt teaches believers to *not desire evil as they did*. Clearly, the Israelites' status as God's people and recipients of his love and provision did not mean that all of them loved and served God in return. Instead, many actually turned away from God, as the following verses describe.

**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.”**

- This incident, when “*the people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry*,” occurred when the Israelites made a golden calf and worshiped it in the wilderness (**Exodus 32**). Paul was quoting **Exodus 32:6**. The people became *idolaters*, worshiping an image rather than God, who had brought them out of Egypt. The Israelites claimed to be worshiping God (**Exodus 32:5**); however, God was dishonored by what they were doing; both by their idol (a golden calf) and then by their “pagan actions.” “Revelry” refers to singing, shouting, and dancing that promote sexual immorality.

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

- This incident, when *23,000 of the Israelites died in one day* is recorded in **Numbers 25:1–9**. The Israelites worshiped a god of Canaan, Baal of Peor, and engaged in *sexual immorality* with Moabite women. Part of the worship of Baal, involved sexual immorality; the Israelites had engaged in actions clearly against their own laws in order to “worship” an idol. This occurred during the wanderings in the wilderness, so it involved the same group of people who had left Egypt and had already been punished for worshiping the golden calf (**10:7**). Many continued in sin, without regard for the God to whom they claimed to belong. For the believers in Corinth, the comparison would have been inescapable. Much of the idol worship there focused on ritual prostitution and sexual immorality of all kinds. God would not be pleased with those who claimed to be his but still engaged in idol worship or sexual immorality.
- Sexual sin is destructive. Instructions about sexual behavior would have been vital for 3 million people on a forty-year camping trip. But they would be equally important when they entered the Promised Land and settled down as a nation. Sexual sins have the power to disrupt and destroy the church as well. Sins involving destroy relationships and tear down the respect and trust so essential for solid marriages and secure children.

**10:9 “Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.”**

- Paul had already affirmed that Christ, as the spiritual Rock, accompanied them in their wilderness journeys (**10:4**). This verse affirms Christ’s deity and preexistence.

- This verse also recalls Israel's complaining about having been brought out into the wilderness. The people complained, "Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness? ... There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this wretched manna" (**Numbers 21:5**). The people even complained about the manna, the miracle food that God had provided (**Exodus 16:31–32**). They were testing the Lord to see what he would do, and he punished them for their complaining attitudes by sending poisonous snakes among them. Many were killed by the snakes.

**10:10 "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer."**

- This incident of grumbling occurred when the people complained against the leadership of Moses and Aaron, an event that actually happened several times. The phrase "were destroyed of the destroyer" could refer to when the Israelites grumbled at Kadesh, refusing to enter the Promised Land. God punished them with a plague (**Numbers 14:2, 36–37**). This angel of wrath is first mentioned in **Exodus 12:23**, with the last plague that came upon Egypt. Grumbling against God or against his leaders is not pleasing to Him. This was another problem that the Corinthian church was facing (3:1-9).

**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."**

- The Old Testament stories were written down as examples and warnings for believers of the first century, and for today. When the Israelites failed to acknowledge and believe God, they received



punishment. When Christ came, everything changed. The ages past reached their fulfillment, and now their lessons, recorded in the pages of Scripture, can be understood in the light of God's mercy and salvation in Jesus Christ. However, the Lord still disciplines His children (**Hebrews 12:5-11**).

**10:12 “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”**

- The Israelites had received numerous pictures of God's grace and witnessed many miracles performed before their very eyes. Yet they gave in to temptation and fell away from God. Paul warned the Corinthian Christians to *be careful*. If they began to take pride in their faith, if they began to take it for granted, if they thought they were *standing firm* that was the time to watch out lest they fall. The Corinthians were very sure of themselves, almost prideful. Paul said that if the Israelites fell into idolatry, so could some in the Corinthian church. Paul warned that those most liable to fall are those who think they won't.

**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.”**

- Temptations come into every believer's life, no one is exempt. Temptation is not sinful; the sin comes when the person gives in to temptation. Believers must not be shocked or discouraged, or think that they are alone in their shortcomings. Instead, they should realize their weaknesses and trust God to give them the power and desire to resist the temptation. (**James 1:12**) God does not leave his children alone to face whatever temptations Satan can throw at them.

Instead, *God is faithful*. He will not always remove the temptation, because facing it and remaining strong can be a growing experience, which perfect and increases our faith (**James 1:2-4**).

- The truth is that God loves his people and will always give enough grace to overcome the temptation. Temptation need never come between believers and God. Instead, it should crowd the believer toward God.

**10:14–15** “Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.

**I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. “**

- The Corinthian believers needed to be aware that any dabbling at the edges of their former lives of idol worship might lead them back into it. How much wiser, instead, to *flee from idolatry*. No believer should think that he or she can withstand any temptation, for such pride can lead to a fall (10:12). It might not be wise for believers to go to feasts where meat had been offered to idols, because it could draw them back into former sins. Even if one person were strong against such temptation, he or she might be a stumbling block for a weak person; actually becoming a temptation for someone who might not be as strong (8:9). Because they were *sensible people*, Paul trusted that they could *judge* what he had to say and realize that it would be the best course of action.

**10:16–17** “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. “

- Christians participate in Christ's once-for-all sacrifice when they share the cup of blessing (symbolizing Christ's blood) and eat the bread (symbolizing his body). The "cup of blessing" probably referred to the cup drunk at the Passover meal. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and spoke of this communion with Him through the cup and the bread in **Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-23**). Sharing in this meal signified participation in the blood of Christ and in the body of Christ. Since the early days of the church, believers have celebrated this special meal. Taking part in sharing the one loaf with other believers symbolized their unity in one body with Christ. (Paul would write in more detail about this ceremony in 11:17-34.)

**10:18 "Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?"**

- In Old Testament days, when Jews offered a sacrifice, they ate a part of that sacrifice as a way of restoring their unity with God, against whom they had sinned (**Deuteronomy 12:17-18; 14:22-27**). By offering the sacrifice and then eating a portion of the gift that had been offered, they were participating *in the altar*; that is, they were fellowshiping with God, to whom they had brought their gifts.

**10:19-20 "What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? 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."**

- Because both Christian communion and the Jewish system of sacrifice provided a relationship between God and the participants, then, by extension to take

part in a pagan sacrificial feast would provide a similar union; not with idols (for they are nothing but wood and stone), but with the demons that the idols represent. Satan and his demons are behind all idolatry, for idolatry turns people away from the true God which is always Satan's goal. Demons are fallen angels who joined Satan in his rebellion against God.

- Paul's advice here seems to focus on believers taking part in actual religious celebrations at an idol's temple. Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to "flee from idolatry" (10:14). He explained that this was not because the idols had any reality or that the sacrifices are of some value. Instead, when people sacrificed to idols, they were actually offering their sacrifices to demons. Therefore, taking part in such a religious ceremony was not a neutral activity; it amounted to them worshipping demons.

**10:21–22 “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. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? “**

- Eating at the Lord's Table has the implication of communing with Christ and identifying with his death (10:16-17). Eating at the demons' table on the other hand implies identifying with Satan by worshipping or promoting pagan activities (10:19-20). Obviously, the Christian cannot do both. It would be a contradiction to try to have a part in both the Lord's Table and the table of demons. To do so is to arouse the Lord's jealousy. When ancient Israel turned to idols, God's wrath came (10:7-8). The question, "are we stronger than he?" implies a negative answer. Because believers are not stronger than God, they should not think that they can withstand the Lord's wrath for their sin of idolatry (Deuteronomy 32:21).

**10:23–24** “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.”

- The issue of eating meat offered to idols led Paul to three conclusions that may be applied to the broad spectrum of Christian liberties:
  1. While eating such meat is essentially unimportant to one's faith, and while it is *lawful* (6:12), it may not necessarily be *beneficial* to the believer. The Christian has the freedom to eat such meat because he or she knows it doesn't matter (8:6–8). However, just because something is lawful doesn't mean that it is helpful.
  2. While believers are free to practice their freedom in Christ in matters that are *lawful*, some practices of freedom do not necessarily work to *build up* individual believers, others, or the church.
  3. Therefore, Christians are to use their freedoms, not to their *own advantage*, but to *that of the other*. As Paul had concluded at the end of chapter 8, all Christians, free in Christ, should humbly set aside their freedoms in order to edify and build up others.

**10:25–26** “Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.”

- Regarding the specific example of meat offered to idols, Paul offered this advice. First of all, the believers should feel free to *eat any meat that is sold in the marketplace*. As noted in the commentary on 8:1, meat that arrived for sale in the marketplace may have been left over from a sacrifice at a pagan altar. Paul told the believers, “*Don't ask whether or not it was offered to idols, so that your conscience won't be*

*bothered, because the earth is the Lord's and everything in it*" (quoted from **Psalm 24:1**). The believers must realize that all food was created by God and is a gift from God; therefore, the Christians were free to eat anything. And if they didn't ask, then their conscience would be clear.

**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."

- In the same way as suggested in 10:26, if the believers were invited to the home of an unbeliever for dinner, they could go. In the homes of unbelievers, the Christians might well be served meat that had been offered to idols. Paul's advice, as with buying meat in the market (10:25–26) is to *eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience*. It would probably have been a breach of hospitality to ask about the food and then to refuse to eat it. How much better to just enjoy the host's hospitality and be a witness to his family than to raise questions of conscience and so lose that opportunity.

**10:28–31** "But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that showed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

- But the situation could arise that several believers are eating a meal at the home of an unbeliever. One of the believers (the *someone* referred to here, who was

a “weaker” believer, see **8:10**) warns his fellow believers that the meat they had been served had been offered to an idol. At that point, then, the stronger believers, although they know that this really makes no difference, should refrain from eating the meat out of consideration for the conscience of that weaker believer. This is the same advice Paul gave in chapter 8. While it might not be a matter of conscience for the strong believer, if it is for another, then the strong believer should refuse to eat the meat for the sake of the weak in this context.

- **For why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.** Paul's question here, taken in context of his discussion regarding strong believers acquiescing to weaker believers in matters of conscience, means that Christian freedom, because it is freedom, should never be condemned by another. Strong believers must not allow their freedom to be condemned by weaker believers, so they should not use their freedom when that could happen.
- Simply because these strong believers can *thank God for the food and enjoy it*, no matter where it came from, they should not allow themselves to be condemned for using that freedom. It is better, said Paul, to set aside one's freedom in those situations. The bottom line is that all believers do should be done *for the glory of God*. If these strong believers had to set aside their liberties in order to win others to Christ, they should do so because this would bring glory to God.

**10:32–33** “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. “

- Paul wanted these believers to understand that the liberty God gave them was not to be used to *cause anyone to stumble* and turn away from faith; rather, as Paul described in 8:13, his entire life focused on winning others to Christ. If need be, he would never eat any meat again if it would keep others from stumbling. In things that did not really matter, Paul tried *to please everybody in every way*, whether they were *Jews, Greeks or the church of God*. In **9:19–22**, Paul had described how he served among the Jews, the Gentiles, and those weaker believers in the church, becoming “all things to all people, that I might by all means save some” (**9:22**).

## **MAKING DECISIONS IN SENSITIVE ISSUES**

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

- This verse belongs at the conclusion of chapter 10, rather than at the beginning of chapter 11, where it has been traditionally placed. Paul had just told the Corinthians that his goal was to seek the good of others, not himself. In this regard, Paul called upon them to imitate him. Elsewhere Paul had encouraged the believers to follow or *imitate* him. In **4:15–16**, he had stated, “For even if you had ten thousand others to teach you about Christ, you have only one spiritual father. For I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you. So I ask you to follow me” (**4:14–16**; **Ephesians 5:1**; **1 Thessalonians 1:6**; **2:14**). As in chapter 4, Paul’s words were not prideful. He had just spent three



chapters explaining how the Corinthian believers needed to deal with the issue of eating meat that had been offered to idols. His conclusion of the matter balanced freedom in Christ with self-less love for the “weaker” believers. All Christians should be so focused on bringing others to Christ that nothing stands in the way of that goal. Paul followed his own advice (see **8:13**; **10:33**) and encouraged the believers to follow him. The reason they could do so? Because he followed Christ, “as I follow Christ.”

- The New Testament places strong emphasis on leaders being an example and model for others. It also gives strong words to those leaders that they be worthy of emulation.
  - ❖ **Matthew 11:29**—“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” Jesus told his followers to learn from his example of gentleness and humility.
  - ❖ **Philippians 3:17**—“Join with others in following my example.”
  - ❖ **1 Thessalonians 1:6–7**—“You became imitators of us and of the Lord... . And so you became a model to all the believers.”
  - ❖ **1 Timothy 1:16**—“In me ... Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him.”
  - ❖ **1 Peter 5:3**—“Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”
  - ❖ See also **1 Corinthians 4:16** and **Hebrews 6:12**.

**1 CORINTHIANS 11**  
**QUESTIONS ABOUT COVERING THE HEAD**  
**IN WORSHIP / 11:2–16**

This section focuses primarily on proper attitudes and conduct in worship. While Paul's specific instructions may be cultural (women covering their heads in worship), the principles behind his specific instructions are timeless; for they instruct believers to show respect for one another and to have reverent behavior in worship. If a believer's actions offend members and could divide the church, then the believer should change his or her ways to promote church unity. Paul told the women who were not wearing head coverings to wear them, not because it was a scriptural command, but because it kept the congregation from dividing over a petty issue that took people's focus off Christ.

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

- Apparently, in their letter to Paul, the Corinthian believers had told him that they were *following the Christian teaching* that Paul had *passed on* to them. This “teaching” was what Paul had received from Jesus Christ himself, as well as from the other apostles.

**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.”**

- Paul commended the Corinthian believers' faithfulness to the teaching that he had passed on to them (**11:2**), but apparently they were facing problems regarding men and women in worship. In this area, they were not following Paul's instructions.

No specifics are given. The details were in a letter he had received from the Corinthians. Apparently a question had arisen about head coverings in worship (**11:10**). “For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head”. The Corinthians may have adopted cultural patterns of male-female relationships into their worship that (as some scholars argue) had blurred the distinction between males and females. It may have been customs of dress regarding hair coverings, or perhaps it involved issues of hairstyle (short or long hair for men and women). Paul began to answer the Corinthians’ question by first giving the general principle of how relationships should be regarded in the church. *The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*

- The words translated “head of” can mean origin, source of, or authority. Thus, they take the word to mean “source of life,” conveying a relational sense, as in the account that man was the source of woman’s existence (**Genesis 2:22-23; 11:7-9**). In **11:9-12**, the focus is on the relationship. Paul was not addressing as some have argued, the submission of women, but rather that the completeness or glory of the relationship not be diminished (**11:7**).
- How then is Christ “the head of every man”? There are two ways to consider Christ as “the source of life”: (1) Because Christ was present at Creation, he is the Creator of every man; and (2) Christ is every believer’s source of life in the new creation. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (**5:17**). Most likely, Paul was speaking of believers’ spiritual relationship in Christ, so the second meaning is more probable.

- In the phrase “the head of Christ is God,” Paul was not teaching that Christ was inferior to God or lesser in any way (8:6). Nor was he thinking that Christ was the offspring of God with regard to his eternal being. Paul was referring to the incarnation of Christ. Through Christ’s coming to earth, believers receive forgiveness and are united with God and with one another (3:22–23). From this theological base, Paul will address the issue of head coverings.

**11:4–5 “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. 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.”**

- In this section Paul’s main concern is irreverence in worship. The praying and prophesying mentioned here were in the context of public worship. When a man prayed or prophesied, he was to do so *without* his head covered. In contrast, when a woman prayed or prophesied, she was to do so only *with* her head covered. We do not know conclusively what the historical situation was. A woman uncovering her head could have meant (1) that she was not wearing a veil; (2) that she was not wearing a shawl or true head covering; or (3) that her hair was loose and hanging down.
- Remember that Paul gave these instructions in response to a question that had been sent to him by the Corinthian believers. Paul explained that the men were not to cover their heads because they are “the image and glory of God” (11:7); to do so would be to shame their head; Christ. So in worship, the men should not veil themselves because that would

dishonor God. Women were permitted to pray and prophesy in public; Paul's only stipulation for the Corinthian women was that they should cover their heads when doing so.

- While the general principle of distinctions between men and woman still stands, the cultural advice given here about head coverings need not be considered as binding to all the churches for all time. When Paul wrote to Timothy with advice about the women in the church in Ephesus, he did not tell Timothy to make sure the women covered their heads. Instead, his advice focused on modesty in their dress (**1Timothy 2:9–10**). The situation in Corinth may have been that women were coming to church with their heads uncovered and this was causing disruption. Although the reason for the problem is unknown, we can gather that Paul's concern was that nothing disrupt worship. So he advised the Corinthian women to cover their heads in public worship much as he advised the Christians not to eat meat offered to idols in public situations. The women were certainly free to not cover their heads just as they were free to eat meat offered to idols.
- The statement that for a woman to have her head uncovered in worship would be "*just as though her head were shaved*" is cultural and, again, the reason for the statement is unknown, although **11:6** hints that a shaved head was a disgrace. Some commentators believe that a woman with a shaved head may have been a temple prostitute or the dominant mate in a lesbian couple. Such women who became Christians not only needed to grow out their hair (**11:15**) but also to cover their heads in worship in recognition of their relationship to God and to their Christian brothers under God.

- “Praying” refers, as noted above, to public prayer during worship. “Prophesying” in the early church, refers not just to telling of future events as revealed to a person by God, but also to public speaking about religious truths, witnessing for Christ, and bringing God’s Word of encouragement to the congregation (14:31). Both men and women could do this in the early church (Philip’s daughters in **Acts 21:9**). Women prophesying fulfilled the words of the prophet Joel, “Your sons and daughters will prophesy” (**Joel 2:28**).

**11:6 “For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.”**

- To further make the point that women should cover their heads in public worship, Paul wrote that *if a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off*. In other words, if she refuses to cover her head, thus disgracing herself, then she might as well cut or shave off all of her hair because that too was a *disgrace*. Therefore, if the “uncovered” head (short or shaved hair) is a disgrace, then she ought to willingly cover her head during worship. Paul was not here referring to the woman’s hair as her covering; the covering was a sort of veil worn over the head.

**11:7–9 “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. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.”**

- The reason that *a man ought not to cover his head* in worship is because *he is the image and glory of God*; he represents and reflects God himself. Women are

also made in the image of God, for **Genesis 1:27** says, “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”. But *the woman is the glory of man*. By praying and prophesying with her head uncovered, she would be dishonoring and shaming man whose glory she was supposed to be. It could also be that man and woman together reflect the image of God (glory) and that by uncovering her head, the woman was taking something away from the identity of the man, thus depleting his part in the reflection of God’s glory. Paul reasoned this back to the order of creation. Man was created first, and then woman. “So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man” (**Genesis 2:21–22**). Genesis also explains that man was not created for woman, *but woman for man*: “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’ ” (**Genesis 2:18**).

**11:10 “For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.”**

- *For this reason*, because God’s people are to reflect the image and glory of God, the women *ought to have a sign of authority on their heads*. It is important to understand that while the stipulation of head covering is upheld in Corinth, the main point is that these Christian women had an equal status with men because of their union with Christ. They were free in Christ, equal before God, and able to pray and prophesy in the worship services. They were no longer to be regarded as inferior, which would have been their previous status in both Greek and Jewish cultures (**Galatians 3:27–28**). The head covering was

not a sign of subjection but a sign of women's willingness to be under the authority of God, just as men were under the authority of God.

- The other reason for women wearing this sign of authority is *because of the angels*. It was proper for women to wear head coverings in the worship of God because the angels would be present during this worship. **Hebrews 1:14** states that angels watch over believers and care for them, therefore we can conclude that angels observe God's people at worship. God's people, who have been saved by his grace, should live in such a way that our lives communicate to all, including angels, an awesome respect for God.

**11:11–12** “Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. “

- Paul reminded the Corinthians that all people relate to each other and to God. Clearly God created men and women as interdependent: *Women are not independent of men, and men are not independent of women*. Even though Adam was created before Eve, and even though Eve came from Adam (**1:8**), ever since *all men have been born from women*. No one is completely independent. Finally, *everything comes from God*, who is the Source of all that exists.

**11:13–15** “Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. “



- Paul called upon the Corinthian believers to judge for themselves, giving careful consideration as to how they should act according to the very nature of things. Paul's point in these verses is that men and women are different; they were created differently. When Paul referred to the "nature of things," he was referring to the fact that men should live as and look like men; women should live as and look like women. Women have been naturally given a "covering" of hair, and they should wear their hair long. The distinctions between men and women ought not to be blurred. Men and women were created alike in that they are loved by God and saved by him, and both are created in the image of God (**Genesis 1:26**). Anything that blurs their God-given distinctions in the culture or ruins their ability to share their faith has to be put aside. In the culture of Corinth, apparently long hair on a man was disgraceful, while short hair on a woman was equally disgraceful. No one seems to know the details as to why.

**11:16 "But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God."**

- In this statement Paul admonished the contentious ones at Corinth to behave appropriately in church meetings. Paul made mention to anyone who might argue with him that the other churches would stand with Paul in this matter.

### **ORDER AT THE LORD'S SUPPER / 11:17–34**

A second abuse of worship existed in the Corinthian church regarding how to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

**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."**

- At the beginning of the last section (11:2), Paul commended the Corinthians for remembering what he had taught them. Concerning this next issue in his letter, however, he had *no praise* for them. In this situation, their meetings were doing *more harm than good*.

**11:18–19** “For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.

**For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.”**

- Paul knew that there would be differences and divisions in the churches. In some cases that would be natural; those who walk in the Spirit naturally would be separate from carnal Christians, or those who were not true believers. Paul was referring to divisions that were hurting a time of fellowship that should have been drawing the believers together, not separating them.

**11:20–21** “When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. “

- The *Lord's Supper* was instituted by Jesus before he died. In a private meal with his disciples, often called the Last Supper, Jesus spoke to his disciples about the significance of this last meal: “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will

not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom' " (**Matthew 26:26–29** ). Jesus and his disciples ate a meal, sang psalms, read Scripture, and prayed. Then Jesus took two traditional parts of the Passover meal, the passing of bread and the drinking of wine, and gave them new meaning as representations of his body and blood. He used the bread and wine to explain the significance of what he was about to do on the cross.

- The Lord's Supper was celebrated from the earliest days of the church. Acts 2:41–42 says, "Those who accepted [Peter's] message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer". "Breaking of bread" refers to Communion services that were celebrated in remembrance of Jesus; they were patterned after the Last Supper that Jesus had held with his disciples before his death.
- When the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the early church, apparently it included a feast or fellowship meal followed by the celebration of Communion. At the fellowship meal in the church in Corinth, it seems that people brought food to share. Instead of sharing equally among everyone, the rich ate among themselves with their own food, leaving the poor with little or nothing. Some of the people ate and drank excessively; there was little sharing and caring. Therefore, Paul said that they were not preparing themselves to share *the Lord's Supper*, but they were merely satisfying their hunger, as they would at any meal. The feast did not demonstrate the unity and love that should characterize the church, nor was it a preparation for Communion. Approaching the Lord's Supper (Communion) with some of the church

members *hungry*, while others had gotten *drunk*, made a mockery of what was to be a holy and unifying time for the believers. Paul condemned these actions and reminded the church of the real purpose of the Lord's Supper.

**11:22** “What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.”

- Some in the Corinthian church had turned the fellowship meal into a gluttonous feast where some ate too much and others got nothing. This had made a mockery of the Lord's Supper. In addition, by the wealthy separating themselves from the poor who could bring little food, the rich were humiliating the poor. Obviously there was nothing for Paul to praise in this behavior. Instead, he advised the believers to eat and drink at home. Then, when they came to share in the feast, no one would be greedy, but they could, with self-control, wait for one another and eat only a small portion so there would be enough for everyone (11:33-34).

**11:23–24** “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: 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. “

- Paul reminded them that he had *delivered* to them what he had *received from the Lord* regarding the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Paul received the following instructions from the Lord. This probably does not mean that he had a divine, direct revelation

because the tradition of the Lord's Supper had been in circulation among the churches through the teaching of the apostles ever since the church first began. The same words of Jesus that Paul quotes are also quoted by the Gospel writers (**Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; and Luke 22:19**). Thus, it seems clear that Paul and the Gospel writers drew upon the same apostolic tradition.

- What did Christ mean when he said, "This is My body...This is My blood": The bread and wine symbolize Christ's body and blood; participating in the Lord's Supper is an important part of Christian worship. Because the Lord's Supper is commemorated *in remembrance* of the body and blood of Jesus given for the redemption of sinful people, it must never be taken lightly. Hence, Paul's instructions in the remainder of the chapter.

**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."

- As Jesus had taken the bread, had given thanks, and had broken it (**11:23-24**), *in the same manner, He also took the cup*. The "cup" represented the new covenant in Jesus' blood. In the old covenant (the agreement of God with His people before Christ came), people could approach God only through the priest and the sacrificial system. God would forgive people's sins if they would bring animals for the priests to sacrifice at the altar. When this sacrificial system was begun, the agreement between God and human beings was sealed with the blood of animals. The people of Israel first entered into this agreement after the Exodus from Egypt (**Exodus 24**). But animal's blood could not remove sin (**Hebrews 10:4**).

Therefore animal's sacrifices had to be repeated day by day and year after year.

- Jesus' death on the cross ushered in the new covenant (or agreement) between God and humanity. Under this new covenant, Jesus died in the place of sinners. Unlike the blood of animals, Jesus' blood removed once for all the sins of those who put their faith in him. And Jesus' sacrifice will never have to be repeated; it is good for all eternity (**Hebrews 9:23-28**). The new covenant fulfills everything the old covenant looked forward to (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**). Again, we read the words, "Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me."

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

- The eating of the bread and drinking of the cup are to be done on a regular basis in the churches until the return of Christ. By observing this special meal, the believers remember and proclaim the Lord's death. The periodic celebration of the Lord's Supper among believers reminds them of Christ's suffering on their behalf and of his imminent return when he will take them with him.

**11:27-28 "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. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. "**

- When Paul said that no one should take the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, he was speaking to believers who were rushing into it without considering its meaning and, thus, were "not honoring the body of

Christ” (11:29). Those who did so would be guilty of treating the symbols (body & blood) of Christ’s ultimate sacrifice irreverently. Instead of honoring Christ’s sacrifice, those who ate unworthily were sharing in the guilt of those who crucified him.

- Paul told the believers to examine themselves. No one should partake of the Lord’s Supper who had not accepted Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross for salvation. Neither should they come to the table with wrong motives or a complacent attitude toward Christ and all that He has done. Coming to the Lord’s table “in an unworthy manner” means to come without a solemn understanding of what is being remembered, and without a repentant and humble spirit before the Lord.

**11:29–30 “For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.”**

- The seriousness of the matter is revealed in these words. To eat and drink without discerning the body implies coming to the Lord’s table and not honoring the body of Christ sacrificed for our sins, but may also refer to having disregard for the body of believers.
- The Corinthians had two problems: (1) They did not distinguish this special meal from all others; and (2) they did not discern their interrelationship as believers; the body of Christ. Regarding the second problem, the Corinthians had become divided at the Lord’s Supper between the rich and the poor. To not come to the table in unity and acceptance of fellow believers revealed arrogance and ungratefulness for what Christ had done.

- To take the Lord's Supper, to eat the bread and drink the wine as though it were no more than a regular meal to satisfy hunger is to miss the purpose of this special ceremony. Those who did so were eating and drinking God's judgment against themselves. This "judgment" was severe enough as to cause some believers to be weak and ill, while others had even died. This type of disciplinary judgment highlights the importance of the Communion service. The Lord's Supper is not to be taken lightly; this new covenant cost Jesus his life. It is not a meaningless ritual, but a sacrament given by Christ to unify and strengthen believers' faith.

**11:31    "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."**

- If the believers *judged* themselves; that is, if they took time to examine themselves (**11:28**) before taking the Lord's Supper and so came to it with humble and repentant hearts; they *would not come under judgment*. While no one can come to the Lord's Supper "worthy" of Christ's redemptive work, all believers can come with the right attitude and the right motivation to remember, thank and praise God for what he has done.

**11:32    "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."**

- Paul hastened to add that the judgment of **11:29–30** was disciplinary in nature and not eternal. The judgment sent by God is meant to bring believers back to a right understanding of the Lord's Supper so they can celebrate it in the way God intended.



**11:33–34 “Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. 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.”**

- To solve the problem in Corinth, Paul advised the believers, when they gathered to celebrate the Lord's Supper, to wait for each other. They should come to this meal prepared for the Lord's Supper, not to eat a big dinner. The Phrase “if you are really hungry, eat at home” means that the people should eat dinner beforehand, so they would come to the fellowship meal in the right frame of mind. How sad to turn a blessed time of unity and thanksgiving into a time of division and judgment. Paul did not want this to be the case in Corinth.
- **I'll give you instructions about the other matters after I arrive.** Apparently there were other questions that needed Paul's *instructions*, but these questions were not urgent enough for him to take up in this letter. He would talk with the believers about these when he arrived in Corinth.

## **I CORINTHIANS 12**

### ***PAUL TEACHES ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS / 12:1–11***

Spiritual gifts had become symbols of spiritual power, causing rivalries in the Corinthian church because some people thought they were more “spiritual” than others because of their gifts. This was a terrible misuse of spiritual gifts because their purpose is always to build up and unify the church, not to divide it and promote self-importance.

**12:1 “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.”**

- The words “now concerning” introduce another question that the Corinthians had apparently asked Paul to answer. The words “spiritual gifts” refer to special motivation and abilities given by the Holy Spirit to every believer that is to be used to build up the body of believers. The word “gifts” in Greek comes from the same root word as the word “grace” (charis). Freely bestowed by God, the gifts are special endowments given to believers to enable them to do God’s will. Paul did not want the believers to be uninformed about these gifts, but, rather, to understand and use them for God’s purposes and glory.

**12:2 “Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.”**

- To contrast the work of the Holy Spirit, Paul reminded the believers of the influence of evil spirits (10:20-21). When they were pagans (unbelievers), they had been influenced and led astray to mute idols. Evil spirits had done the “influencing” and “leading astray” and had led the people to idols, which could tell the people

nothing. Evil forces were at work in the world, and the Corinthians would need to understand that what they had experienced in their pagan religion was completely different from that which the believers might experience through the Holy Spirit.

**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.”**

- The way to know whether a person is actually speaking by the Holy Spirit is to listen to what he or she says about Jesus Christ. Those who blaspheme Jesus in any way obviously are not speaking by the Spirit of God. Those who proclaim and believe that Jesus is Lord, however, are speaking by the Spirit, for only by the Holy Spirit can a person acknowledge the lordship of Christ. The Holy Spirit within believers moves them to truly believe and publicly confess Jesus Christ as Lord.

**12:4–6 “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. “**

- The answers that Paul has given to the Corinthians' questions thus far in this letter have focused on unity among believers, order in the church, and exaltation of Jesus Christ. So regarding the area of spiritual gifts, Paul was concerned that the Corinthians' focus on any particular gift would cause a division. While the specific question is unknown, Paul clearly wanted the believers to understand that tongues and miracles and healings all had a place in God's early

stages of the church, but should not be sought by everyone. In the broad context of spiritual gifts, there are many different kinds of spiritual gifts, different kinds of service in the church, different ways God works in our lives. God's people receive differing gifts, and no one gift is better than another. This seems to have been a problem in Corinth; some believers may have been belittling others' gifts. This chapter explains that all the gifts come from one source and are to be used for one purpose. The one source is the Trinity; God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The one purpose is the building up of the body of Christ, which takes place as the gifts are used and God works through His people.

- These gifts are from God; they are not earned. They are not given to believers who ask for a specific one. They are not sought after or chosen by people. God alone administers the gifts among His people. God, not believers, controls the gifts.

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

- Every believer has a spiritual gift that has been given not to cause division among the believers, jealousy regarding who received a particular gift when another person desired it or rivalry over the use of similar gifts. Instead, God graciously gives spiritual gifts as a means of building up and unifying the entire church. Spiritual gifts are not for private use or as a badge to be worn proudly; instead, they are to be used publicly to edify the church. Some gifts help those in the church to grow closer to Christ. Other gifts bring outsiders into the church. Others help to encourage those in the church who are carrying burdens. All these gifts are needed, because different needs

require different insight, wisdom, and motivation (**Ephesians 4:7-12**).

- What Paul stressed was the manifestation of the Spirit, the great variety and diversity of the gifts of the triune God (**12:4-6**), and the importance of using the gifts for the benefit of all.

**12:8 “For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;”**

- To illustrate that there are a wide variety of gifts from the Holy Spirit, Paul gave a list. This list was not meant to be exhaustive; it merely illustrates many of the different kinds of spiritual gifts. The Spirit gives many gifts; the Bible contains no definitive list of all the gifts.
- *To one* person, explained Paul, the Spirit gives *the message of wisdom*. The problem of wisdom (human versus divine) was a hot topic in Corinth. At the beginning of this letter (**1:17–2:16**), Paul spent several paragraphs explaining the difference between God’s wisdom (looking at life from God’s point of view) and human “wisdom” (worldly).
- All believers are given differing measures of Godly wisdom from the Spirit (**2:15-16**), but some are given a much deeper “message of wisdom.” This may refer to the promise of Christ (**Luke 21:15**) that the Spirit would give special wisdom to those facing adversaries and persecution. Based on Paul’s argument in chapter 1, it most likely includes recognizing Christ crucified as the basis of God’s true wisdom, and proclaiming Christ in this way. That this particular gift does not occur on any of the other lists

of gifts has led some scholars to think that this gift was especially important (and more prominent) for the believers in the Greek city of Corinth, where the issue of “wisdom” was causing much discussion.

- **To another the message or word of knowledge by means of the same Spirit.** Another person might be given *the message of knowledge*. As with “wisdom,” the Corinthians also believed they had special “knowledge.” People may think they have all kinds of wisdom and knowledge, which leads to pride, but true wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ alone. In **Proverbs 24:3-4**, we read: “By wisdom a house is built, by understanding it is established and by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.” There appears to be a natural progression from wisdom to understanding to knowledge (**Proverbs 3:19-20; 9:10**). As we begin to look at life from God’s point of view (wisdom), we gain understanding as to why God says and does certain things, which leads to applying God’s wisdom to our lives and ultimately gives knowledge (familiarity gained through experience). The same Holy Spirit takes different ones through this process and gives extraordinary wisdom and knowledge.

## **12:9 “To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;”**

- All Christians have faith and the faith that brings us to salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit. “God saved us by His grace (special favor) when we believed. And we can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God” (**Ephesians 2:8; Galatians 5:22; I Timothy 4:12-14**). Some folks, however, are given a deeper level of faith, which is an unusual measure of trust in God. **To another gifts of healing by that one Spirit.** It might be good to ponder **I Corinthians 1:22**, “For the

Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.” After the Jewish people rejected Christ and God brought the Gentiles to center stage of the bible, the sign gifts of healings, miracles, tongues, etc., began to fade from the pages of Scripture. The *gift of healing* had been manifested through Peter, Paul, and the other apostles in the book of Acts (**Acts 3:6-8; 5:15-16; 9:33-34; 14:8-10; 19:11-12**). However, as we move on through the epistles, it’s quite evident that the gift had ceased (**2 Corinthians 12:8-9; Galatians 4:12-14; Philippians 2:25-30; 1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20**). Keep in mind that God still heals.

**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:”**

- As with the gift of healing (**12:9**), the Spirit in the early church gave to some an extraordinary power to *perform miracles*. While performing a healing would be considered a miracle, the inclusion of this gift separately from healings refers to other miraculous manifestations of the Spirit (**Galatians 3:5**).
- **And to another the ability to prophesy.** The rest of the gifts mentioned in this passage focus on verbal manifestations of the Spirit. To some people, the Spirit gives a special ability to prophesy. Since the Scriptures are now complete, “prophesy” does not refer to predicting the future; but rather giving a message from God to the community of believers: “One who prophesies is helping others grow in the Lord, encouraging and comforting them” (**14:3**). In the Old Testament there are 930 mentions of prophecy. Thirty of those mentions of prophecy have to do with foretelling the future; the other 900 are

warnings from God to the nation of Israel regarding their sin and coming judgment. As with the gift of faith, the ability to share one's faith is available to everyone (**14:1-5**), but to some the Spirit gives a special measure of this gift. Paul wrote in Romans, "if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out when you have faith that God is speaking through you" (**Romans 12:6**, my paraphrase). The gift of prophecy is a discerning gift that detects deceit and is used by the Holy Spirit to protect the church from false doctrines and false teachers.

- **He gives someone else the ability to know whether it is really the Spirit of God or another spirit that is speaking.** Because there are many false teachers who claim to "prophesy" for God, some in the church are given the ability to know whether it is really the Spirit of God or another spirit that is speaking. "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (**1 John 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21**). Paul's mention of this shows his concern for the protection of truth in the church.
- **Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, and another is given the ability to interpret what is being said.** Opinions differ over exactly what Paul meant by *unknown languages*. Some believe that this refers to earthly languages that a person did not know before as in **Acts 2:4, 7-8**. Other scholars say that this refers to an "ecstatic" language, a "heavenly" language. Most likely the first view is correct. Speaking in tongues was a legitimate gift of the Spirit in the early church when the Jews, who required a sign (**1 Corinthians 1:22**) were still at center stage. The exercise of the gift demanded some guidelines (as noted in chapter



14) so that the purpose of the gift, to help the body of Christ, was not lost.

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

- This verse repeats the point made in **12:1, 4–6**; that the source of all the gifts *is the one and only Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit gives *these gifts* (again emphasizing the diversity), but they are to be used for God’s divine purpose. Because the Holy Spirit *alone decides which gift each person should receive*, there is no place for rivalry, jealousy, or pride among believers regarding their gifts. God, through his Spirit, gives to every person in the community of believers exactly the right gifts for him or her to provide what is a needed service for the church.

## **BELIEVERS ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST / 12:12–31**

Using the analogy of the body, Paul emphasized the importance of each church member. If a seemingly insignificant part is taken away, the whole body becomes less effective. Thinking that one’s gift is more important than someone else’s is an expression of spiritual pride. Devaluing the gift offends the Giver. We should not look down on those who seem unimportant, and we should not be jealous of others who have impressive gifts. Instead, we must use the gifts we have been given and encourage others to do likewise. If we don’t, the body of believers will be less effective.

**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.”**

- Paul followed the section of this letter describing the diversity of gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to the church by providing an analogy of a body (10:17). The context reveals Paul's pressing concern in the Corinthian church; that they accept diversity in their one body. Just as a body is made up of many parts, so the church is made up of many people with different gifts. It appears that the Corinthians all desired more spectacular manifestations of the Spirit's power. Paul explained, however, that while not everyone has the same gift (diversity), they still form one body (unity); the body of Christ.

**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.”**

- What gives believers unity is the one Spirit; the very same Spirit who also gives diversity through the many and varied gifts. As believers live out diversity through the gifts, they must never forget the basic fact that unites them; we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body. All believers receive the same Holy Spirit at the time of conversion. This distinguishes us from nonbelievers and unites us with one another. This “receiving” of the Spirit is here referred to as being “baptized by” the Spirit. The metaphor pictures baptism and compares believers’ experience of water baptism (**1:13-16**) to being placed into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Not only that, but the Holy Spirit also lives within believers (**6:19**). The phrase “we were all made to drink of one Spirit” means that the same Holy Spirit indwells all believers. The indwelling Holy Spirit unites all believers who might otherwise be as different as Jews from Greeks (Gentiles) or as a slave from a free person (**Colossians 3:11**).

**12:14–15 “For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? “**

- Having established that the church, the worldwide community of believers, is indeed one body, the body of Christ, Paul went on to show the necessary diversity in that body. A human body *does not consist of one member but of many*. For a body to function, each different part is essential. Individual members cannot separate themselves without harming the body. Just as a *foot* cannot decide to leave the body because it is not a *hand*, so a believer who does not have a particular gift cannot decide that he or she is not a part of the church. Not having a particular gift would *not make [that person] any less a part of the body*. Apparently, some believers in Corinth were discouraged that they did not have a particular gift, probably one of the more spectacular gifts, so they believed that they could not truly be a part of the body. But Paul explains, through this metaphor, that all the different gifts given by the Spirit to believers must be utilized in order for the church to function well as God intended. Likewise, the gifts are interdependent. Like the body, they cannot function without one another.

**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?”**

- As with the foot and the hand (12:15), so it is with the ear and the eye. The parts of the body should desire to perform only the functions for which they were made, not seeking other parts. The *ear* may prefer to be able to see, like the *eye*, but that does not mean that the ear is *any less a part of the body*. The ear will

no more be changed into an eye or given the ability to see than a believer will be able to exchange one gift for another. Instead, each believer should use his or her spiritual gift to its fullest.

**12:17 “If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?”**

- Every spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit is vital to the functioning of the body. Thus, the gifts are not given without a God-given purpose and will not be changed according to people’s preferences. If everyone wanted to be *an eye*, then the body might see very well, but it would not be able to hear. *If the whole body were an ear*, there would be no *sense of smell*.

**12:18–20 “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body.”**

- As God created human bodies to function with their *many parts* working together, so the body of Christ (the church) needs all the various gifts working in harmony. The picture of a body with *only one part* illustrates the absurdity of a church with everyone trying to have the same gift. It would not be a body at all, and it would be unable to function. While *there are many parts*, there is *only one body*, because God ordained it that way, putting *each part precisely where he wants it*. All believers, those with the spectacular gifts and those with the quieter gifts, are placed exactly where God wants them so that they might serve effectively together. They are one body with many parts, because God made it that way.

**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.”**

- Not only should each individual part realize its own importance, but all of the other parts should realize their interdependence as well. One part of the body *cannot say* it doesn't need another part. Those in the church who have the more spectacular gifts should not look down on or dismiss those with seemingly lesser gifts because, in reality, all are necessary.

**12:22 “Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:”**

- The more honored members must not look down on the more humble members (**12:21**); in fact, those who *seem to be weaker are indispensable*. These “weaker” members are those who appear to be less important in the body. These people may not be always visible, always in the front exercising their gifts, but most often are in the background using their God-given gifts and which are indispensable to the body. Those with the visible gifts could not function to their full capacity without the other indispensable members utilizing their gifts. The pastor in a church may be well versed and eloquent, but he will not be effective if the other members are not utilizing their gifts to greet newcomers warmly, to make sure the building is maintained and clean, to plan the worship service, to make certain that equipment is working properly, to follow up on people with needs, or to pray faithfully for the ministry. The church needs everyone. In reality, the less-visible members are the “indispensable” ones.

**12:23–24 “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. 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 play on words in this verse is difficult to bring out from the Greek to the English. "The parts we regard as less honorable" refers to the private parts of the body, the parts that *we carefully protect from the eyes of others*. The point of this verse is that appearances are deceiving; all parts of the body are necessary, even the ones that *should not be seen* and the *parts that have less dignity*. No one should dismiss anyone as unimportant in the body of Christ; neither should undue prominence be given to anyone. The reason for this is explained in 12:25.

**12:25–26 "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.**

**And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it."**

- The *harmony* Paul wanted *among the members* had already been discussed in **1:10**: "Now, dear brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves. Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church. I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose". Such harmony happens only when all the members, the weak and the strong, the flamboyant and the quiet, the up-front and the behind-the-scenes, use their gifts, appreciate one another, and *care for each other equally*. Such caring is demonstrated as we share in one another's joys and sorrows. As with the physical, human body, one part's suffering causes every part to suffer. When

the head aches, the whole body suffers. When a thumb is hit with a hammer, the whole body knows it. In the body of believers, therefore, *if one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it*. Believers should share one another's burdens in order to help lighten the load. Likewise, *if one part is honored, all the parts are glad*. There is no room for jealousy or strife when one person receives praise; instead, all should be praising the Lord for His goodness.

- Following Jesus will lead all believers into a wide variety of experiences. Christianity neither denies life's hardships nor dulls life's excitements. Both laughter and tears are appropriate before God. Identifying with the joys and heartaches of others is an important way for believers to show love and unity.

**12:27    “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”**

- The words, “ye are the body of Christ” refers to all believers across the world. All believers together are Christ's body. As new believers come to salvation in Jesus Christ, they join that body, receive a gift from the Holy Spirit, and have a role in the body. Therefore, each and every believer in the body of Christ is a separate and necessary part of that body. No believer is unimportant; each one has a gift to share in order to make the body function as God intends.

**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.”**

- Having established believers' unity in their diversity, Paul went on to describe this diversity by a list (not complete) of various offices and gifts. These gifts are given to *the church* by *God*, who *has appointed* those whom he has chosen to serve in these various capacities. The order of these gifts in this verse is important. The first three gifted people listed are those who proclaim the gospel and teach the truth; apostles, prophets, and teachers (**Ephesians 4:11**). These are important gifts, for there would be no church without those who share truth. Thus Paul specifically ranked them as first, second, third, to show their prime importance.
- The *apostles* include the eleven men Jesus called (without Judas Iscariot), plus others who are called apostles; such as Paul himself (**Romans 1:1**), Matthias (**Acts 1:26**), Barnabas (**Acts 14:14**), Jesus' brother James (**Galatians 1:19**), Silas (**1 Thessalonians 2:6**), and Andronicus and Junias (**Romans 16:7**). It seems that the qualifications for being an apostle were to have seen the risen Christ, to have been sent out by Christ to preach the gospel and to be used of the Lord to build the foundation of the church. Paul also noted "signs, wonders and miracles" as marks of a true apostle (**2 Corinthians 12:12**). There were only a few apostles who brought the gospel message to the world.
- God also appointed *prophets* to the church. These people had special gifts in ministering God's messages to his people. At times in the early church, they would foretell the future (**Acts 11:28; 21:9, 11**), but more often they exhorted, encouraged, and strengthened God's people (**Acts 15:32; 1 Corinthians 14:29**). God spoke through prophets,



inspiring them with specific messages for particular times and places.

- While the apostles and prophets had a universal sphere of function (the church as a whole), the *teachers* probably served in the local churches. They needed to be trustworthy and faithful stewards of the truth of the gospel. People in that day did not have their own Bibles to read, so the teachers in the local congregations continued to teach the believers in the truth after the apostles had moved on to other cities.
- The rest of this list reveals other gifts. Some of these have been noted earlier in this chapter. Some are appointed as *workers of miracles* (12:10), some have *gifts of healing* (12:9), some are *able to help others* (perhaps unusual compassion and caring), and others have *gifts of administration* to help the church run smoothly. It is significant that Paul places last the gift of *speaking in different kinds of tongues*. This was the one gift that seemed to have caused so much problem and division in the Corinthian church (12:1–3, 10). Paul placed it as a relatively unimportant gift when compared with those who share the gospel or serve in more tangible ways. Keep in mind that the sign gifts which were for the Jews (**I Corinthians 1:22**) were phasing out at this time.

**12:29–30 “Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?”**

- These rhetorical questions demand a “no” answer. Not everyone in any church falls into one of these categories. Not *all* were *apostles*; in fact, only a few could ever claim that office. Not *all* were *prophets* or *teachers* either, for God gifted some for those offices

while he gave others different gifts, some of which are listed here. Chapter 14 discusses the tongues issue in more detail. Not everyone in the church has the same gift, nor can anyone claim to have all the gifts.

- A prophet might not make a good administrator, and a helper might fail as a teacher. When people identify their own gifts, look to the Lord for His leading as to how they can use their gifts to build up Christ's body, the church. Believers should be thankful for each other, thankful that others have gifts that are completely different. In the church, believers' strengths and weaknesses can balance each other. Some people's abilities compensate for others' deficiencies. Together all believers can build Christ's church. But all these gifts will be worthless if they are used begrudgingly, out of duty, or if they are exercised without love (see also 13:1–3).

**12:31 “But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.”**

- Believers should earnestly desire gifts that benefit everyone (as opposed to an unintelligible tongue that helps no one but the speaker). The Corinthians had to get their focus off of themselves; instead, they needed to see the value in all the gifts for the benefit of all. “And yet I will show you a more excellent way,” which he does in chapter 13.

## **I CORINTHIANS 13**

### **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF LOVE / 13:1–13**

In chapter 12, Paul gave evidence of the Corinthians' lack of love in the utilization of spiritual gifts; chapter 13 defines real love; and chapter 14 shows how love works. While spiritual gifts are important to the functioning of the body (**12:12–31**), they lose their value if love is not the motivation behind them. Love is the "most excellent way" (12:31) for believers to use their gifts.

**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."**

- Great faith, acts of dedication or sacrifice, miracle-working power, or the ability to speak in any language in heaven or on earth will produce nothing without love. Although people have different gifts, love is available to everyone. Without love, speaking in another language, although a gift of the Spirit, becomes nothing more than meaningless noise. In fact, if we could speak all known languages in the world, but if it is not marked by love, it is like smacking a stick against a gong.
- The word for love used here is *agape*. The Greeks had different words that described different kinds of love. The word *agape* connotes a deep, abiding, self-sacrificing love; the kind that prefers others over self. Agape love can only come by God; His love lived through us.

**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."**

- Three gifts are mentioned in this verse; prophecy, knowledge, and faith. The gift of prophecy is a God-given ability to discern truth and error and is often used by the Lord to protect the church from false teachers. Paul explains in **14:3** that “The one who has the gift of prophecy is helping others grow in the Lord, encouraging and comforting them.” While all believers ought to study in order to understand more and be able to teach others about what they believe, some people have been given a special measure of this gift with the ability to understand all mysteries and knowledge. Such understanding and even the ability to share it with others, however, are worth nothing without love.
- “And though I have all faith.” This does not refer to saving faith, whereby people come to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior; instead, this is an unusual measure of trust in the Lord for every aspect of life. If a person has faith that could remove mountains but does not have love, Paul says the faith is worth 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.”**

- In these first three verses, Paul makes very clear that unless we are using our God-given gifts and abilities for the benefit of others, all of our deeds are of no value before God. A spiritually gifted, super human person without love is nothing.

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

- Because love is so important among the believers, Paul went on to share the characteristics of love. How does such love look when lived out in the lives of believers? First of all, love is patient. Patience (sometimes translated “long-suffering”) is an attribute of God (**Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Romans 2:4; I Peter 3:20**). In many places, God’s people are called upon to be patient (**Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:12; I Thessalonians 5:14**). Patience is also a fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22**).
- Keep in mind that true biblical love is never self-focused and always for the benefit of others.
- What does patient love among believers look like? Such love bears with certain annoyances or inconveniences without complaint. Such love is even tempered. Such love steadily perseveres. Without love, no matter how wonderful the gifts in the church, people will be impatient with one another, short-tempered, and irritable. What does it take to be patient with an unreasonable person? Death to self (**Romans 6:6**).
- **Love is kind.** **Ephesians 4:32**, we read: be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.” Kindness takes the initiative in responding generously to others’ needs. The psalms and writings of the prophets say much about God’s kindness (**Psalms 18:50; Isaiah 54:8; Jeremiah 9:24**).
- How does “kind love” look among believers? Such love is considerate and helpful, gentle and mild, always ready to show compassion, especially to those in need.

- To be kind toward someone who does not deserve our kindness requires death to self.
- **It does not envy.** The envious person desires what another person has. This seems to have been a particular problem in Corinth; those with “lesser” gifts envied those with “greater” gifts. The carnal seed of envy can lead to anger and hatred. Those who are busy envying other’s gifts are unlikely to be using their own gifts in loving service to God and others. Envious believers are self-centered and self-focused, and often feel sorry for themselves. When there is love, believers will use whatever gifts they have been given to show forth the love of Christ. They will rejoice in the Lord for the giftedness of others.
- Before we rush to trivialize these words about love by assuming they can easily fit us, let’s stop to consider that these words about love actually describe God’s character. They are descriptions of God’s perfection-in-relationship. The Holy Spirit inspired the apostle to write a breathtakingly beautiful description of the nature of God. Only God can put His character in us.  
~ Neil Wilson
- **It does not boast, it is not proud.** While some believers may have a problem with envy, those with the “greater” gifts might have a problem with boasting or pride, which again may have been a problem in Corinth. When gifted believers become inflated with self-importance, the gift becomes a way of self-advancement. Such believers are proud, taking credit for an undeserved gifts. Believers who are caught up in pride and boasting over their gifts quite often feel they are doing someone a favor, that others should be grateful to them, and that they are far superior.

**13:5 “Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;”**

- The word translated “does not behave itself unbecomingly” (*asachemonei*) refers to actions that are rude or improper. Love does not behave impolitely, discourteously, or crudely. Believers who use their gifts with love will be careful not to offend or humiliate others. This may also have been a problem in Corinth, especially in their worship services (11:2-16).
- **It is not self-seeking.** Love (*agape*) looks out for others, seeks their best interests, willingly gives up its own for the sake of another. A self-seeking person may use his or her gifts but not for the benefit of others. Instead, the gifts are only used if they can benefit the self-seeking person.
- **It is not easily angered.** The word for “easily angered” could also be translated “irritable.” Such people are bothered over many things. One believer, in the process of exercising his or her gifts, may irritate another because of the style or manner in which the gifted one is exercising his or her gifts. This is rooted in the flesh and is not the way of love. People who are “easily angered,” are often upset over personal or minor issues which renders them useless to God and stifles their service for God and the use of their gifts.
- **It keeps no record of wrongs.** Those who keep record of wrongs, remember most every offense against them. These “wrongs” are most often minor offenses or misunderstandings. Those who keep records of wrongs and personal injuries harbor resentment against other believers. Again, this all

stems from the flesh. Love, however, makes allowances for people's flaws and willingly forgives and forgets when wrongs are done. God does not keep a record of believers' wrongs (**2 Corinthians 5:19**).

**13:6 “Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;”**

- When believers show love, they do not delight in evil, either by showing superior morality over it or by taking pleasure in another's fall. Love does not take pleasure in any evil. Instead, love does the opposite, it rejoices with the truth. Through their relationship with Jesus Christ, believers possess the one and only truth, Jesus Christ (**John 14:6**). Those who love should remain untainted by evil, and instead, seek truth, desire that truth win out, protect the truth, and proclaim the truth.

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

- After explaining what love does not do (**13:4b-6**), Paul now lists four positive attributes of love. First of all, love always “bears all things,” or protects. The word in Greek, “*stego*” means “cover” or “hide by covering.” This does not refer to hiding hurtful sin but to protecting someone from embarrassment, gossip, or any other such harm. When believers love one another, they kindly and sweetly put up with others' shortcomings and failures.
- “Believes all things,” or Love *always trusts*. Basically we could say that it is a love that never loses faith and that it is willing to think the best of others. It does not mean that believers must be gullible, trusting



everyone; instead, it has the idea that they are willing to think the best as opposed to the worst of others. Love gives the benefit of the doubt. With real love, believers can deal with conflict lovingly. When Christians willingly think the best of everyone else, people are freed to be honest and open. This loving attitude comes from a deep, abiding relationship with Christ (**Psalms 62:5**).

- “Hopes all things” or Love *always* *hopes*; believers who love look forward, not backward. They seek for growth and maturity in the church, knowing that God is working in every person. They know that failure is not the end, and they trust in God who promises “that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (**Romans 8:28** ).
- “Endures all things;” Love always perseveres. Believers who love are steadfast in their faith. They endure no matter what difficulties come in their lives or the lives of others around them. Hardship and pain do not stop love. When believers persevere, they endure suffering within the body as well as persecution. They ride out storms of life and trust the Lord to save their marriages despite disappointment; they continue to trust God despite setbacks.

**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.”**

- All the spiritual gifts will eventually pass away, but love never fails and there will be no end to love. Spiritual gifts will end because they are given to build up the church. When Jesus Christ returns, the

kingdom will be established and the “building up” will no longer be necessary. Therefore where there are prophecies (**12:10; 13:2**), they will cease. This gift was to be used for sharing God’s Word boldly; protecting the church from false teachers, and helping others grow in the Lord. One day, evangelism will no longer be necessary, all prophecies will be fulfilled, and all believers will be made perfect in Christ (**I John 3:2**).

- For the same reason, *where there are tongues (12:10; 13:1), they will be stilled*; but in eternity all will understand the same language. Finally, *where there is knowledge (12:8; 13:2), it will pass away*. No one will need teachers because everyone will be given perfect knowledge of all that God has done.

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

- On this earth, outside of heaven, everything is imperfect. No matter how much people may know, they don’t know it all. No matter how much prophecy is given, it still reveals little. Not until the end, when Christ returns, will everything be made clear. At that time, all of the special gifts of the Spirit will disappear; yet love will continue (**13:8**), because love is the very essence of God Himself. “God is love,” wrote John (**I John 4:8, 10**).

**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.”

- The contrast between believers' spiritual understanding now, when they know only in part, and their lives in glory when everything will be made clear, is illustrated in human terms. A child talks, thinks, and reasons like a child. His or her understanding is incomplete. But when a child grows up, he or she matures in speech, thought, and reason, putting away childish things. So now believers know only a little, like children, but one day we will understand clearly.

**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.”**

- By way of further metaphor, believers' present spiritual understanding is like *a poor reflection in a mirror*. They see very poorly now, compared to what they will understand when they see God *face to face*. Right now, they only *know in part*; at the time of Christ's return, they *shall know fully*. The understanding will be complete. While believers' knowledge is still growing and maturing, God already knows each person *fully*.

**13:13 “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”**

- In numerous Scriptures, faith, hope, and love are presented together (**Romans 5:1-5; Galatians 5:5-6; Ephesians 4:2-5; Colossians 1:4-5; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8; Hebrews 6:10-12; 10:22-24; 1 Peter 1:3-8**). Most likely, Paul was showing that love is a spiritual reality like hope and faith, and not to be considered merely as one of the spiritual gifts. Eventually, the gifts will pass away, but faith, hope, and love will remain.

- “Faith” sometimes refers to a spiritual gift (**12:9; 13:2**) or to saving faith that God has forgiven for sins. In this context, it refers to trust in the goodness and mercy of the Lord. Such trust will see believers through until they live face to face in God’s presence. Believers also *hope*; they look forward to and confidently expect the arrival of God’s spiritual promises in their fullest form.
- Paul added that while these three remain, *the greatest of these is love*. Paul already had established that love would abide forever (**13:8**). Love is the greatest because it is one quality of the Christian life that will be fully active both in the present and on through eternity. Believers’ faith in God will be realized when they see God face to face; for where there is sight, faith is no longer needed. Similarly, the believers’ hope will be fully realized. Love will endure forever as those in the new heaven and new earth continue to love God and his people.

## **I CORINTHIANS 14**

### ***PAUL TEACHES ABOUT THE GIFTS OF PROPHECY AND TONGUES / 14:1–25***

Keep in mind that the book of Corinthians is not a book of doctrine, but rather a book of correction. The gift of speaking in tongues (speaking in an unknown foreign language) was a concern in the Corinthian church. The misuse of the gift had caused disorder in worship, and Paul now takes one full chapter to address the problem. Apparently the Corinthian believers were being drawn back into their old religious practices of emotionalism, whipping themselves into a spiritual frenzy, thinking that they were worshipping in the Spirit, but really it was a self-focused attempt at spiritual ecstasy, ecstatic emotionalism without love, with no thought or benefit for others. It actually reeked of pride and was being used as a sign of spiritual superiority. So in verses 1 through 4, Paul begins to address the problem and his conclusion is in verses 39 and 40: “Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.”

**14:1 “Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.”**

- The previous chapter, known as the “love chapter,” is nestled purposefully into this section on tongues. As beautiful as it is standing alone, chapter 13 serves as a transition from chapter 12 (regarding the various gifts of the Spirit) to chapter 14 (focusing on the abuse of one particular gift, the gift of tongues). Having described the characteristics of love and its value, Paul concluded here that for believers love should be our highest goal. Then, from that foundation, we should desire the special giftedness

that the Spirit gives. This repeats the statement of **12:31**.

- The “greater gifts: that Paul wanted the Corinthians to seek were those that edified the church. The gift of prophecy had not so much to do with predicting future events as it had to do with speaking the Word of God clearly which provides insight, warning, correction, and encouragement to the body (14:3). The Corinthians were eager for gifts, especially tongues, but Paul wanted them to be eager for the gifts that edify; namely, prophecy.
- I think it would be good for us at this point to reconsider **I Corinthians 1:22**, “The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.” All the way through the Old Testament, the Jews were looking for signs that the Messiah had come. In **Mark 16:17-18**, Jesus sent the disciples out to evangelize Jews and he made this comment, “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” Notice he said, “These SIGNS shall follow them that believe,” and then he gives five signs: 1)cast out devils; 2)speak with new tongues; 3)take up serpents; 4)they will be able to drink deadly things; 5)lay hands on the sick. So the question now becomes, are all these sign-gifts still in effect? Our answer would have to be NO. We can’t drink poison and it won’t hurt us, or take up snakes or empty a hospital of sick patients by laying hands on them. So with all this in mind, let’s move on through chapter 14.

**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.”**

- The gift of prophecy should be desired ore than the ability to speak in an unknown language because people won't be able to understand. Apparently the “tongues” mentioned are not earthly languages (such as the gift described in **Acts 2:4-12**). Instead, this refers to an “ecstatic” language unknown to the speaker or to anyone else, whereby the speaker talks to God but not to people. The implication here is that the speaker is speaking by the power of the Spirit, but the words cannot be understood by man, therefore it will all by mysterious.
- Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to stop overemphasizing the ability to speak in an unknown language. Paul's goal, as always, was the unity and edification of all the believers. Therefore his message to the Corinthians was; no one should be speaking in the presence of other human beings unless the hearers can understand what is being said.
- Paul made several points about the gift of speaking in tongues:
  - ❖ Speaking in tongues is not a requirement of salvation or of being filled with the Spirit (12:30–31).
  - ❖ Speaking in an unknown language is less important than prophecy and teaching (14:4).
  - ❖ Speaking in tongues must be accompanied by some rules (14:26-28).
  - ❖ Speaking in tongues in the first century was for the Jews.
  - ❖ Tongues was given for evangelistic purposes.

**14:3–4 “But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.”**

- Although Paul stated that he himself spoke in tongues (14:18), he emphasized prophecy because it benefits the entire church. Public worship must be understandable and edifying to the hearers. The purpose of “prophecy” is helping others grow in the Lord, encouraging and comforting them, and the one who speaks a word of prophecy strengthens the entire church. Through prophecy, speaking the Word of God clearly, believers are taught more about the Lord and their faith so they can grow as a body.
- The person who speaks in tongues does so to benefit himself. A person who prays in a tongue for personal edification should not be doing so in public worship because it does not benefit anyone else, and there is no love in that.

**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.”**

- Paul never wrote disparagingly regarding tongues, only the Corinthians’ overemphasize it. In fact, he even wished that they all could speak in an unlearned language. But the issue at hand was that the Corinthian believers were seeking that gift above all others, when other gifts were actually more helpful to the church. Repeating his emphasis in 14:1, Paul stated that prophecy is a greater and more useful gift. The one who prophesies helps others to grow and encourages and comforts them (14:3). The one



speaking in tongues has edified no one else unless someone interprets what has been said so that the whole church can benefit.

**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?”**

- In Corinth, the gift of tongues was being used as a barometer of spirituality. Therefore, Paul described the inferiority of a gift that does not edify. For example, if, on his next visit to the Corinthian church, he should come, talking in an unknown language, would that help the young church grow in Christ? Would the believers be edified, encouraged, or comforted? Obviously not. However, if he were to come to them with some new insight regarding the Word of God, then his visit would be helpful to them. Paul's point is that to be helpful, the teaching would have to be done in a language understood by the hearers.

**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?”**

- Paul argued his point with three different pictures. First, musical instruments, *such as the flute or harp*, make only noise if no one can distinguish the *tune* or *a distinction in the notes*. If an instrument is to make beautiful sounds that benefit the listener, the sounds must be harmonious.

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

- The bugler was important in a battalion of soldiers. With different note combinations, the bugler would sound the call to wake up, to retire for the evening, or the call to battle. *If the bugler doesn't sound a clear call*, however, the soldiers would be left in confusion, not knowing whether or not *they are being called to battle*. That would be disastrous if they were being attacked! Mere sounds are not beneficial; only sounds that are distinguishable and are understood by the hearers are helpful.

**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.”

- People from many lands converged in a busy city like Corinth. The residents were certainly familiar with foreigners who could not speak their language. As mere sounds mean nothing without some sort of plan and pattern of understanding (14:7–8), so human language, when not understood, accomplishes nothing. Trying to communicate in a language to a person who does not understand it would be *talking to an empty room*. Whatever is said would not benefit the hearer at all because he or she would not be able to understand the words. The language would be no more than noise to the hearers.

**14:10–12** “There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. 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. Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.”

- Just because someone doesn't understand a certain language doesn't mean that the language has no meaning. In fact, *there are all sorts of languages in the world*, and all of them have meaning. But when two people who speak different languages attempt to communicate, one is not able to *understand the meaning* of what the other is trying to say. They are foreigners to each other. *So it is with you*, concluded Paul. Just as two foreigners cannot understand each other's language, so those speaking in tongues cannot be understood by the congregation. Thus, their speaking is not beneficial to the church.
- Because the Corinthians had been so *eager to have spiritual gifts*, Paul admonished them to *try to excel in gifts that build up the church (Ephesians 4:12)*. Paul was speaking to the church as a whole, not to individuals. The literal translation of 14:12 is, "since zealots you are of spiritual things, be zealous that you may abound in the edification of the church." The church as a whole should desire to have the gifts that build up its members. God does not give us gifts for private, selfish use. The gifts are for edifying others.

**14:13–14** "Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful."

- The simple conclusion to the matter is that anyone who speaks in tongues should pray for the gift of interpretation of what he or she says in the unknown language. Up to this point, Paul had been explaining that speaking in tongues was of no value to the congregation as a whole. But if the person also has the gift of interpretation (the ability to translate), the tongue could be used in public worship if the one

praying (or someone else with the ability to translate, would then interpret in order to tell people plainly what has been said. Thus, the entire church would be edified.

- Paul wrote, *if I pray in tongues, my spirit is praying, but I don't understand what I'm saying*. That is part of the mystery of this particular gift; it does not engage the intellect in order to use it. As the person speaks, he or she does not understand his or her own words.

**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.”**

- He would pray and sing with his spirit as well as with his intellect and understanding in his own language; this would edify both himself and others. In praying and singing, both the mind and the spirit are to be fully engaged. When believers sing, they should also think about the meaning of the words. When they pour out their feelings to God in prayer, they should not turn off their capacity to think. True Christianity is neither intellectualism nor thoughtless emotionalism. ( **Ephesians 1:17–18; and Colossians 1:9.**)

**14:16–17 “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? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.”**

- Those with the gift of tongues should focus more on praying and singing in their own language in corporate worship. The reason is simple. If they were praising God in an unknown language, how can

one who finds himself among those who do not understand say “Amen” to their thanksgiving? To say “amen” means to agree with or endorse what has been said (**I Chronicles 16:36; Nehemiah 13; 8:6; Galatians 1:5; Ephesians 3:21**). If the rest of the people in the congregation do not know what a tongues-speaker has said, how can they express agreement with it? The effect of the thanksgiving is lost because no one has understood the words. Paul continued, **You will be giving thanks very nicely, no doubt, but it doesn’t help the other people present.** Certainly the one speaking in an unknown language is giving thanks very nicely, but what is needed in the assembly of believers is the capability to understand. Only then are the rest of the listeners edified. As a unified body, the believers come together to praise God, offer thanks, and learn. If various individuals attempt to continue their own private edification by speaking in tongues without interpretation, they will do so at the expense of others. In public worship, everyone should be able to understand and participate.

**14:18–19 “thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: 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.”**

- Up to this point in the letter, the Corinthians may have been thinking that Paul was putting down the gift of tongues because he did not possess it. Paul explained, however, that not only did he have the gift but that he used it more profitably than the rest of them. Then he pointed them back to the issue at hand. Paul understood the limitations of the gift of tongues when it came to edifying the body of believers, so he said that he *would rather speak five*

*intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue* because only words that are understood can instruct.

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

- In 3:1-3, Paul had explained to the Corinthian believers his concern that they were still “infants in the Christian life” and had to be dealt with like little children. Here he once again reprimanded them for their wrong thinking regarding the use of the gift of tongues. He had explained how they should view that gift in 14:1-19, and now he writes that they should not be childish in their understanding of these things, but rather, they should be mature and wise. Children prefer emotional excitement to instruction, but adults ought to know better. The Corinthians had been acting like children, enjoying the excitement that tongues offered in their assembly without realizing that they were obtaining no solid instruction. It is fine to be as innocent as babies when it comes to evil, but there is no place for continual immaturity in the Christian life. Believers are to be growing and maturing.

**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.”**

- Paul’s use of Scripture comes from **Isaiah 28:11-12**. He may have been generalizing the passage, since it is not an exact quote. Paul’s point in quoting this passage was to set up his conclusion in 14:23. The people in Isaiah’s time did not listen to the prophets who spoke in their language, and when people of other languages spoke to the Jews, they still did not

listen. So Paul was saying that speaking in tongues will convince no one. That reaction would fulfill the Old Testament words that tongues will not draw unbelievers into the church. On the contrary, it will turn them away and leave them to judgment.

**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.”**

- Paul’s conclusion was that speaking in an unlearned foreign language was a sign to unbelievers, as it was in Acts 2. The unsaved people would hear God’s Word in their language, be convinced of a spiritual reality and be motivated to look further into the Christian faith. On the other hand, prophesying (clear teaching of the deeper truths of God’s Word) is not for unbelievers, but rather for believers.

**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?”**

- If the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, the result will be chaotic noise. (Such disorderliness may have been the case, considering Paul’s further instructions in 14:27-28). They will not sound as though they are praising and praying, but rather one would think that they are all insane. This will edify no one, possibly frighten unbelievers, and hurt the witness of the church.

**14:24–25 “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: 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. “**

- Paul had already stated the value of prophesying over speaking in tongues (14:1-6); prophecy “is helping others grow in the Lord, encouraging and comforting them” (14:3). Prophecy also speaks forth the word of truth and leads people to change their attitude toward wrong doing. *They will be convicted*, reprov'd or rebuked through the probing work of the Holy Spirit, who exposes and convinces people of sin (Ephesians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 4:2).
- **As they listen, their secret thoughts will be laid bare, and they will fall down on their knees and worship God, declaring, “God is really here among you.”** Having one’s *secret thoughts; laid bare* will lead both to conviction and condemnation. Obviously, the Corinthian believers would be far less convicted if everyone were speaking in tongues. They all would feel very spiritual, with no one being convicted of any sin. But when Spirit-inspired, intelligible words of truth are spoken, those who truly *listen* will find God right there among the congregation. His presence will be made known. The listeners *will fall down on their knees and worship God* (Isaiah 45:14; Zechariah 8:23).

#### **WORSHIP IN AN ORDERLY WAY / 14:26–40**

Paul reviews the guidelines for tongues and prophecy in the church. He restates the importance of everyone being able to understand, of orderliness, and of edifying each participant.

**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.”**

- In speaking to the Corinthian believers, Paul states; when the church meets, one will sing (**Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16**), another will teach (12:29; **Romans 12:7; Colossians 3:16**), another will share some special insight God has given from the Word (12:10, 29; 13:2; 14:1), one will speak in an unknown language (12:10, 28, 30), while another will interpret (12:30).
- This verse is not to be taken as Paul’s recommendation of an order of service; his point is that various activities are appropriate in a worship service. While all of this may occur, however, *everything that is done must be useful to all and build up the body in the Lord.*

**14:27–28 “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. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. “**

- Because all activities done in corporate worship are to edify and build up all the believers, Paul gave further regulation regarding tongues to the church. He had already argued that speaking in an unknown language is not beneficial without interpretation (14:5) and certainly not when everyone is speaking at once (14:23). He goes on to say that the gift of tongues should not so dominate a person that he or she cannot control the impulse to speak. It was possible for the believers to exercise this gift in a controlled, appropriate, and orderly way. The believers who had come out of pagan cults certainly had witnessed the

ecstatic mania often associated with pagan worship rites. The gifts given to believers were radically different than the demon-induced “religious” frenzy performed by those in the cults.

- Another stipulation for use of tongues in public worship is that someone must interpret. Because there must be an interpreter, Paul continued: **But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God.** If those with the gift of tongues know that they do not have the gift of interpretation, and if no one else in the congregation is known to have that gift, then they should be silent in church.

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

- Having just explained certain regulations on the use of tongues in the assembly, Paul also placed regulations on someone speaking with the gift of prophecy. Although this was the particular gift that Paul had recommended to the believers (14:1-5), he also realized that its use had to be regulated by love, edification, and order. It is unclear who the others are; it could refer to the congregation as a whole, discussing a prophet’s words to make sure that they agreed with Scripture. Believers should never accept the words of any person without careful discernment and personal knowledge of God’s Word; otherwise, false teachers could easily obtain a hearing and lead people astray (**Acts 17:11**).

**14:30–32 “If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.”**

- In order for the worship service to continue in an orderly manner (14:40), further guidelines were needed. These words might have been directed at those who would have a tendency to dominate. One who is speaking should willingly defer to another who has received an insight into the Word. Open sharing in a worship service or Bible study could get out of control if the speakers were not careful to take turns and defer to one another as the Spirit leads. The phrase “for you can all prophesy” does not mean that everyone in the congregation has the gift of prophecy, but that those to whom the gift is given and to whom the Spirit gives a message must be allowed to speak *in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged* (14:3–6). As always, the worship service should be for the edification of the believers.
- The phrase “the spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets” means that “the people who prophesy are to be in control of their spirit and can wait their turn”. In other words, this gift, like the gift of tongues, does not send people out of control, unable to stop their mouths. He or she can control when to speak and when to defer to another. This gift could also be exercised in a controlled, appropriate, and orderly way.

**14:33 “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.”**

- The reason that the church service must be controlled and orderly is that God is not a God of disorder but of peace. In worship, everything must be done in harmony and with order. Even when the gifts of the Holy Spirit are being exercised, there is no excuse for wild and out of control disturbances. Instead, folks

should be using their gifts in an appropriate manner, always desiring to edify others.

**14:34–35 “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. 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. “**

- Does this mean that women should not speak in church services today? It is clear from 11:5 that women often prayed and prophesied in public worship. It is also clear in chapters 12–14 that women are given spiritual gifts and are encouraged to exercise them in the body of Christ. So what did Paul mean? It would be helpful to understand the context and the use of the word “silent.”
- In the Greek culture, women were discouraged from saying anything in public, and they were certainly not permitted to confront or question men publicly.
- Apparently, the women believers in Corinth, newly freed in Christ to be able to learn and take part in worship, had been raising questions that could have been answered at home without disrupting the services. In this entire chapter, Paul had been dealing with various forms of disorder and confusion taking place in the Corinthian church in particular. His words are corrective. In this instance, Paul was asking the Corinthian women not to flaunt their Christian freedom during worship. The purpose of Paul’s words was to promote unity, not to teach about the role of women in the church.

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

- This entire chapter corrects the Corinthian believers regarding their insistence on the gift of tongues as a sign of being “filled with the Spirit” and allowing it to overtake their church services. In their letter to Paul, they may even have questioned his spirituality since they had never heard him speak in tongues (hence his comment in 14:18). So Paul asked, sarcastically, *Did the Word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?* The Corinthian church was out of line with what was acceptable behavior in the churches (14:33), and they needed to make some changes. The Corinthians needed to recognize that all true believers are indwelt by the Spirit at the moment of salvation, and that they are given different gifts. This variety provided them with all the necessary “parts” (as in a “body,” 12:12-31) in order to function properly.

**14:37–38 “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. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.”**

- The authority of Paul’s words was not to be questioned. As an apostle, Paul was writing a *command of the Lord*, and they all should treat his words as such. Any true prophet among them would *acknowledge* this; anyone who claimed to be a prophet but did *not recognize* Paul’s words as authoritative was *not to be recognized*. The lines of authority went from “apostles” to “prophets” (12:28). Paul was an apostle, and those who claimed to be “prophets” would prove it by their acceptance of Paul’s words.

**14:39–40 “Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order. “**

- With the word “brethren,” Paul closed his answers to their questions about worship on a friendly note. He truly loved these believers and sought to correct their errors so that they could continue to grow in the Lord and not be sidetracked by things that had no eternal value.
- Worship services should be intelligible and marked by mutual respect and proper behavior. They should be organized in a way to enhance communication but not so as to stifle the spontaneous work of the Spirit.

## I CORINTHIANS 15

### THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST / 15:1–11

The truth never loses its power. People, however, often lose sight of truth. The struggles in the Corinthian church made it clear to Paul that they needed to refocus their attention on the gospel. He brought his letter to a close with a vigorous proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They were wandering; Paul called them back to the basics. Like the Corinthians, we must not stray from Christ. Every claim about Christianity has roots in his resurrection. What we believe about this life and the afterlife depends on what Jesus did with death.

**15:1 “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. “**

- In this final section of the letter, Paul gave a defense of the resurrection of Christ and its importance to the Christian faith. The gospel message that he had *preached* to them, that they had *received*, on which they had taken their stand was the message that had *saved* them. Paul wanted to remind them of that gospel, because apparently some had been distorting it. In fact, some of the Corinthians had come to believe that there would be no resurrection of the dead (15:12). Not only was the church in Corinth having problems with unity (as Paul tried to clear up in the previous chapters), it was also dealing with basic problems of theology. As an apostle who had himself seen the risen Christ (15:8), Paul took these Corinthian believers back to the basics of the message that they had welcomed and received. Because acceptance of that gospel had saved them, they should *hold firmly* to it. To do otherwise would

mean that they had *believed in vain*. If they could be so easily swayed to other messages, tangents, and untruths, then perhaps what they claimed as belief was not belief at all. If the faith they thought they had could not assure them of salvation, then that faith was worthless.

**15:3–4** “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

- Paul had *received* the gospel message from Christ himself, and then he *passed on* to all his listeners that same message.
- The central truth of the gospel is given here. It is the key text for the defense of Christianity. The two points that are of first importance are as follows: ***Christ died for our sins, and he rose again the third day.*** Christ as the sinless Son of God took the punishment of sin, so that those who believe can have their sins removed. The phrase “according to the Scriptures” refers to the Old Testament prophecies regarding this event, such as **Psalm 16:8-11** and **Isaiah 53:5-6**. Christ’s death on the cross was no accident, no afterthought. It had been part of God’s plan from all eternity in order to bring about the salvation of all who believe. ***He was buried.*** The fact of Christ’s death is revealed in the fact of his burial. Many have tried to discount the actual death of Christ, from the false teachers of Paul’s day to false teachers today. But Jesus Christ did die on the cross and was buried in a tomb. ***He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*** Christ came back to life from being dead in a grave “on the third day” as noted in the gospels (Friday afternoon to Sunday



morning; three days in Jewish reckoning of time). This also occurred “according to the Scriptures.”

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

- Jesus made several appearances to various people after his resurrection, some of which Paul included here. He first mentioned the appearance to *Peter*, noted in Luke 24:34 (**Mark 16:7**).
- Jesus had also been seen by the twelve apostles. The expression “twelve apostles” was a reference to the original disciples. These appearances are recorded in **Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-31**.

**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.”**

- This event is recorded nowhere else. The large number of eyewitnesses, more than five hundred, should cause doubters to give careful consideration before dismissing the Resurrection accounts of a few followers. All these people saw him at one time, and at the time of Paul’s writing, most of them were still alive. Paul could appeal to their testimony to back up his own.

**15:7 “After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.”**

- This *James* is Jesus’ brother (actually, half brother), who at first did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah (John 7:5). After seeing the resurrected Christ, he became a believer (as did Jesus’ other

brothers, Acts 1:14). James ultimately became a leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13). He also wrote the New Testament book of James. This next mention of *all the apostles* must describe an event separate from that recorded in 15:5, as well as designating the James mentioned here from the two apostles of that name.

**15:8 “And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”**

- One of the credentials to be an apostle was to have seen Jesus Christ. Paul could call himself an apostle (1:1) because he had seen Jesus *last of all; long after the others*. This event is recorded in Acts 9:3–6. The phrase “as though I had been born at the wrong time” (literally, “miscarriage”) means that Paul’s opportunity to see Jesus Christ was a special case. The other apostles saw Christ before the Resurrection; they lived and traveled with him for nearly three years. Christ appeared to Paul after His resurrection and ascension.

**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 zealous Pharisee, Paul had been an enemy of the Christian church, even to the point of capturing and persecuting believers (**Acts 9:1-3**). Here Paul reminded the Corinthian believers of the magnificent grace of God in drawing unbelievers to Himself. By calling himself the *least of the apostles*, Paul was not putting himself down (**2 Corinthians 11:5; Galatians 2:11**). Instead, he realized that although all of the apostles had been drawn out of a sinful lifestyle, Paul had gone so far as to actively persecute the church of God. He fully realized the depth of the sin from which

he had been saved, so much so that he knew he did not even deserve to be called an apostle. Only God's grace had handed him such a privilege and responsibility.

**15:10–11** “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. Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.”

- Neither Paul nor any of the apostles could take credit for achieving the position of apostle. They had all been brought to that position *by the grace of God*. Only by God's “grace,” his undeserved favor was Paul saved and enabled to serve (**1 Timothy 1:12**). Paul wrote of having *worked harder than all of* the other apostles. This was not an arrogant boast because he knew that his hard work was a result of *the grace of God that was enabling* him (**Philippians 2:13**). Because of his previous position as a Pharisee (**Acts 23:6; Philippians 3:5**) and his previous occupation of persecuting Christians, Paul's conversion made him the object of even greater persecution than the other apostles; thus his ministry was most difficult. He wrote to Timothy, “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life” (**1 Timothy 1:15–16**).
- “Whether, then, it was I or they who brought the gospel message, (15:3-4); this is what we preach”,

explained Paul, and the apostles never strayed from that message. *This is what you believed.*

### **THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD / 15:12–34**

Christians attempting to share their faith are often shocked by the world's denial of the possibility of Resurrection. The gospel is often irritating and upsetting to many unbelievers. However, for Christians, the conviction of the Resurrection gives believers hope for the future.

**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?”

- The gospel message the Corinthians had received and believed included the basic facts recorded in 15:3–4: “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”. The words “if Christ be preached” mean “since Christ was preached, that He rose from the dead.” The Corinthian believers had accepted the message of the gospel because of the promise of the Resurrection; a fact central to the Christian faith. In order to believe in their own resurrection, they had to believe that *Christ had been raised from the dead*. If they had believed that, why then were some of them saying *that there is no resurrection of the dead*? Such a belief contradicted the entire gospel message.
- The church at Corinth had a difficult time believing in a bodily resurrection. Paul wrote this part of his letter to clear up this confusion about the resurrection.

**15:13–14** “But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.”

- Paul argued that if the resurrection is not possible, then Jesus is still in the grave. If Jesus is still in the grave, then the apostles' *preaching is useless* because they preached a risen Savior. *If Christ has not been raised*, believers' faith is also useless. Why believe in a dead "Savior"? If Jesus is still dead, then his sacrifice did not appease God for believers' sin, and believers have no advocate with the Father (**Hebrews 7:25; 8:1**). They also have no Comforter in the Holy Spirit, for he was to come when Christ returned to glory (**John 16:5, 13–15**). They have no hope of eternal life if not even their Savior gained eternal life. They have no reason to believe a gospel message, centered on Resurrection, *if there is no resurrection of the dead*.
- Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime.

*Martin Luther*

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

- If Christ has not been raised from the dead, not only would the apostles' preaching be a lie (15:14), but the apostles themselves would be considered liars (false witnesses about God) because they had been preaching that God had raised Christ from the dead. If resurrection is impossible, if the dead are not raised, then Christ was not raised. This is repeated from 15:13 to drive home the point. The Corinthians had to understand the logical implications of the position they had chosen. To no longer believe in the

physical resurrection was to throw away the entire gospel message. They could not claim to be Christians without believing in the Resurrection.

**15:17 “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.”**

- Again, Paul proclaimed that if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is of no use (15:14). They have no reason to have faith if there is no Resurrection. In addition to taking away the hope of future life with God, refusing to believe that Jesus rose from the grave means that Christians are still under condemnation for their sins. If Jesus died and was never raised, then his death did nothing to accomplish justification. God raising him from the dead showed acceptance of Christ's sacrifice. If God had left Jesus in the grave, then the sacrifice was not accepted and no one has received forgiveness from sin. The condemnation for sin is death (**Romans 6:23**). To still be under condemnation means that all people will be given the ultimate penalty for their sins; death.

**15:18–19 “Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”**

- Christians carry with them, even through persecution and death, the promise of eternal life with God. Yet if Christ was never raised from the dead, and if there is no hope of resurrection, then *all who have died believing in Christ have perished!* If all the preachers lied (15:15) and no one will be raised, then not only is faith meaningless for this life, it is meaningless in death. Those who believed in Christ believed a lie; those who died because of persecution for their faith perished for no reason. Paul pointed out the

foolishness of the argument; if we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are the most miserable people in the world. If the only promise of the Christian faith applies to this life, then why believe in it? Why believe in a faith that brings with it persecution, sorrow, death, and separation? Without the resurrection, there would be no hope for justice or hope for an eternal dwelling place with God. There would be nothing but death to look forward to. If the end is the same for everyone, why not live like the pagans in sensual pleasure (15:32)? Why deny oneself? Why be miserable if the other choices bring the same result?

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

- The above argument is already settled because of the fact that Christ has been raised from the dead. The hypothetical “if” statements in the previous verses concede to the certain facts of history. Because Christ was raised from the dead, *he has become the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life again*. The “first of a great harvest” (also called the firstfruits) was the first part of the harvest that faithful Jews would bring to the temple as an offering (**Leviticus 23:10**). Although Christ was not the first to rise from the dead (he raised Lazarus and others), he was the first to be raised to never die again. He is the forerunner for those who believe in him, the proof of their eventual resurrection to eternal life.

**15:21–22 “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”**

- *Death came into the world* as a consequence of the sin of one man, *Adam* (**Genesis 3:17–19**). Adam

sinned against God and brought alienation from God and death to all humanity. Sin resulted in death. All human beings are *related to Adam* and have two characteristics in common: They are sinners; and they will die. Death is inescapable; it comes to every living thing. And the reign of death over creation began because of Adam's sin. Paul contrasted the roles of two single representative agents: Adam and Christ. Adam's sin brought condemnation and death to all; Christ's sinless sacrifice and resurrection brought *resurrection from the dead* to all who *are related to Christ* through accepting his sacrifice on their behalf. Those who believe in him *will be given new life*. This is further explained in **Romans 5:12–21**.

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

- Paul wanted to clarify, however, that *there is an order to this resurrection*. It had not already happened, as perhaps some of the false teachers were claiming. Rather, *Christ was raised first*, three days after his crucifixion, and he is the “first of a great harvest” (15:20). That “harvest” will be taken in *when Christ comes back* at his second coming. At that time, *his people*, those who believed in him as Savior, *will be raised* from death to eternal life.

**15:24–25** “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. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.”

- At the time of Christ's second coming, “the end will come,” and the resurrected Christ will conquer all evil, including death. (**Revelation 20:14**). Christ will



destroy *all dominion, authority and power* that oppose God and then hand *over the kingdom to God the Father*. At Christ's resurrection, Christ began the destruction of Satan and all his dominion. At the resurrection of the dead, all Satan's power will be broken. Christ *must reign* because God has ordained it so; what God has said cannot be changed. Christ will reign as the ultimate ruler, having *put all his enemies under his feet*. (**Psalm 110:1**).

- Because the resurrection of Christ is an accomplished fact and because the promise of the resurrection is a future fact, the promise of Christ's ultimate and final reign can be trusted as fact and anticipated by every believer.

**15:26    “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”**

- While the enemies in 15:25 were not named, one *last enemy* was here named; *death*. Death is every living being's enemy, the common fate of all humanity. Death is the last enemy that always wins. But Christ will destroy death! At the Cross and through the Resurrection, Christ has already defeated death. Yet people still die. For those who believe in Christ, however, death is merely a doorway into eternal life. Finally one day, there will be no more death. John proclaimed this in the book of Revelation: “And death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire” (20:14).

**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.”**

- As noted in 15:24–25, the one ultimately in control of all things is God the Father. This verse sounds very much like **Psalm 8:6**: “You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet”. At first “He” refers to God the Father, who *“has put everything under [Christ’s] feet.”* Because God did this, *it is clear* (or should have been to Paul’s readers) that the word “everything” *does not include God himself*. God gave the Son supreme authority over everything, except God himself.

**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.”

- *When he has done this*, when the Son has toppled all evil powers and when God has placed everything under the Son’s feet, *then the Son himself will be made subject to God*. “God” here refers to “God the Father.” No one can take God’s place, not even the Son. This must happen *so that God may be all in all*. Some have used this verse to attempt to prove the inferiority of Christ (that he was not equal with God). But this verse is not about the person, nature, or being of God (his essence) as it relates to Christ. Instead, this verse is speaking of the work or mission of Christ. In these words, Paul was not attempting to take the three persons of the Trinity and decide their relative importance. Their essential nature is always one and the same; however, the authority rests through the work each has accomplished. God sent the Son; the Son will finish the work and then will turn redeemed humanity back over to God. An interesting verse to ponder regarding the roles of the Trinity is **2 Corinthians 13:14**.

**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?”**

- To further emphasize his point about the fact of the resurrection, Paul returned to his conditional “if” clauses. *If there is no resurrection*, he asked, *what will those do who are baptized for the dead?* Apparently, some believers had been baptized on behalf of others who had died unbaptized. Nothing more is known about this practice, but it obviously affirms a belief in resurrection. Corinthian believers may have been practicing a sort of vicarious baptism for the sake of believers who had died before being baptized. The “dead” certainly referred to those who had come to faith, not to unbelievers who had died, or Paul would have condemned the practice. Paul was not promoting baptism for the dead; he was continuing to illustrate his argument that the resurrection is a reality. Paul’s apparent lack of concern over this situation probably means that, though theologically incorrect, the practice was basically harmless. Paul could have written disapprovingly of this practice, but pointing out the glaring inconsistency of their rejecting the afterlife while baptizing for the dead was sufficient. Paul had deeper theological issues to straighten out, at this point, the fact of the resurrection. If there is a resurrection, then all believers will be raised (and all who truly believed will be saved whether they have been baptized or not). If there is no resurrection, however, as some had contended, then why bother with this ritual?

**15:30–31 “And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.”**

- If there is no resurrection, believers are indeed the “most miserable people in the world” (15:19). Why should the apostles put themselves in danger every hour, dying every day for the sake of the gospel message? To suffer and face danger for the sake of a message that only has “benefits” for this life would be foolish indeed. “I die every day” refers to Paul’s daily dying to himself and exposing himself to danger. Why would any sane person do this for the sake of a gospel that only ends in death, just like anything else? This constant danger is as certain as Paul’s boasting about the Corinthian’s faith. He could make that boast in Christ knowing that Jesus had saved them and that Paul had been their spiritual father (4:15).

**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.”**

- The human enemies that Paul had faced in Ephesus had been as vicious as wild beasts (Acts 19). When Paul was in Ephesus, Demetrius stirred up people against Paul. Paul preached against Artemis, the goddess of fertility, and was disrupting Demetrius’ silver business (he made idols). Demetrius caused a furious riot against Paul.
- Paul repeated the question, *If there will be no resurrection from the dead*, then *what value was there in standing up for his faith against those in Ephesus who wanted to kill him (Acts 19:31)?* Why bother standing for anything at all? If there is nothing more to look forward to than simply to one day die and return to dust, then why deny oneself? Instead, it would make far more sense for everyone to *feast and get drunk (Isaiah 22:13)*. Life with no meaning leaves one

with the desire to simply indulge oneself and get all one can for enjoyment here and now.

**15:33 “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.”**

- This entire chapter explains why the resurrection is central to the Christian faith. Paul told the Corinthian believers not to be fooled by those who denied the resurrection and told the believers to eat, drink and be merry. Paul’s use of this bit of worldly wisdom, “bad company corrupts good character” was used to communicate that keeping company with those who deny the resurrection will corrupt true believers and damage the testimony of the church.

**15:34 “Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.”**

- Paul’s final words about this issue were simply that the Corinthians should *come to [their] senses* (literally, “to wake up out of a drunken stupor”). If they would take the time to think about it, they would realize, as Paul had argued earlier, that it would be senseless to live for a faith that offered nothing after death. To deny the resurrection amounted to *living in unbelief*, for it denied the truth of the claims of Christ and the promises of God. It was to their *shame* that some among them did not *even know God*. To not understand and believe the doctrine of the resurrection meant to not understand anything about God, for the resurrection is central to all that God has done for sinful humanity.

**THE RESURRECTION BODY / 15:35–58**

Our present bodies have been wonderfully designed for life in this world, but they are perishable and prone to decay.

Our resurrection bodies will be transformed spiritual bodies and will not be limited by the laws of nature. This does not necessarily mean we will be super people, but our bodies will be different from and more capable than our present, earthly bodies. Our spiritual bodies will not be weak, will never get sick, and will never die.

**15:35–37** “But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: 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:”

- Paul had already argued for the truth of the resurrection. Those who might still be skeptical may have further questions about this resurrection, so Paul asked two such questions himself in order to answer them: (1) *How will the dead be raised?* (2) *What kind of bodies will they have?* How could it be possible for a dead body to come back to life; and if it could do so, then what kind of body would it be?
- To Paul, these were *foolish* questions. The answers should have been obvious from nature itself. Paul compared the resurrection of believers’ bodies with the growth in a garden. A seed placed into the ground *doesn’t grow into a plant unless it dies first*. The plant that grows looks very different from the seed because God gives it a new “body.” Jesus had given the same metaphor for his own death in John 12:24, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit”. Jesus was referring to what his death would accomplish, but his analogy was the same as Paul’s. Both show the necessity of death before new life. Just as *a dry little seed*, such as a seed of wheat, *doesn’t grow into a plant unless it falls into the ground and*

*dies first*, so new bodies will not be obtained until the earthly bodies have died. And those new bodies will be different from the present bodies.

**15:38–39** “But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. 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.”

- There are different kinds of bodies; for people, animals, fish, birds. Paul was preparing the foundation for his point that bodies before the resurrection will be different from bodies after the resurrection.

**15:40–41** “There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. 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.”

- Furthermore, the *heavenly bodies* (the sun, moon, and stars) differ greatly from *earthly bodies*. Each kind of body has its own makeup created and controlled by God. Each is appropriate to its sphere of existence, and each has its own kind of *splendor* or radiance. God made many different types of bodies; certainly he can arrange and govern the existence of the resurrection body.

**15:42–44** “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”

- God's creation power will continue as dead bodies are resurrected and transformed into new bodies. Paul's continued use of the term "is sown" shows that he still has the seed from 15:36–37 in mind. Like a seed that is sown and then grows into a glorious new plant, so *it will be with the resurrection of the dead*. Believers' present physical bodies will be different from their resurrection bodies.
- First, physical bodies are *perishable*, but *raised* bodies will be *imperishable*. Every human's physical body is going to "perish" (die). Death eventually takes everyone. Those raised with Christ, however, will have bodies that will never die. These eternal bodies will live forever.
- Physical bodies are *sown in dishonor* but *raised in glory*. A dead body, by its very nature, has nothing honorable about it. But the raised body will have a "glory" that far surpasses the beauty of a flower (as compared to its seed). It will not be a raised corpse like what one might see in horror movies; it will be far more glorious than the physical body had ever been.
- Physical bodies are *sown in weakness* but *raised in power*. While the Greeks might have honored those with perfectly trained, muscular bodies, when death strikes, every body is rendered completely weak and powerless. But the raised body will be raised by the power of God himself and will have power given to it by God.
- Every physical body *is sown a natural body* but *raised a spiritual body*. The "natural" body is suited to life in the present world; however, such a body is not fit for the world to come. That future world, where Christ will



reign, will require a “spiritual” body. Each believer will no longer have a *natural body*, like Adam, designed to live on this earth; instead, each will have a *spiritual body*, like Christ had after his resurrection (15:48–49).

**15:45** “And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.”

- Paul quoted *the Scriptures* to point out the difference between these two kinds of bodies. **Genesis 2:7** speaks of *the first man, Adam*, becoming a *living person*. Adam was made from the dust of the ground and given the breath of life from God. Every human being since that time shares the same characteristics. However, *the last Adam, that is, Christ, is a life-giving Spirit*. Just as Adam was the first of the human race, so Christ is the first of those who will be raised from the dead to eternal life. Because Christ rose from the dead, he is “a life-giving spirit” who entered into a new form of existence. He is the source of the spiritual life that will result in believers’ resurrection. Christ’s new glorified body now suits his new, glorified, spiritual life, just as Adam’s human body was suitable to his natural life. When believers are resurrected, God will give them transformed, eternal bodies suited to eternal life.

**15:46–47** “Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.”

- People have *natural* life first; that is, they are born into this earth and live here. Only from there do they then obtain *spiritual* life. Paul may have been contradicting a particular false teaching by this statement. He illustrated this point by continuing: **Adam, the first**

**man, was made from the dust of the earth, while Christ, the second man, came from heaven.** The natural man, *Adam*, came first on this earth and *was made from the dust of the earth*. While it is true that Christ has existed from eternity past, he is here called *the second man* because he *came from heaven* to earth many years after Adam. Christ came as a human baby with a body like all other humans, but he did not originate from the dust of the earth as had Adam. He “came from heaven.”

**15:48–49 “As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.**

**And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”**

- Because all humanity is bound up with Adam, so *every human being has an earthly body just like Adam’s*. Earthly bodies are fitted for life on this earth, yet they have the characteristics of being limited by death, disease, and weakness (15:42–44). Believers can know with certainty, however, that their *heavenly bodies will be just like Christ’s*, imperishable, eternal, glorious, and filled with power (15:42–44). At this time, all are *like Adam*; one day, all believers will be *like Christ* (Philippians 3:21). The apostle John wrote to the believers, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

**15:50 “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.”**

- After describing the different natures of the two types of bodies (those before resurrection and those after) Paul explained his point. The resurrected bodies have to be different from these present, physical bodies because *flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God*. These bodies cannot go into God's eternal kingdom because these present bodies were not made *to live forever*. So God has prepared new bodies that will live forever. The resurrection is a fact; new bodies ready for life in eternity is also a fact.

**15:51–52 “Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”**

- With great emphasis Paul passed on to these Corinthians a mystery; knowledge given to him by divine revelation from Christ. If flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (15:50), then what about those who are still alive at the return of Christ? Paul answered the question. The phrase “we will not all sleep” means that some Christians will still be alive at the time of Christ's return. They will not die before they get their new resurrection bodies. Instead, they *will all be changed*, transformed immediately, *in the twinkling of an eye* (**1 Thessalonians 4:13–18**). A trumpet blast will usher in the new heaven and earth (**Revelation 11:15**). The Jews would understand the significance of this because trumpets were always blown to signal the start of great festivals and other extraordinary events (Numbers 10:10). At that time, when the trumpet sounds and Christ returns, *the dead will be raised imperishable*, out of the graves with their new bodies. Those still alive *will be changed*, also receiving their new bodies. This change will

happen instantly for all Christians, whether they are dead or alive.

**15:53 “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”**

- Because “flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (15:50), and because Christians are promised eternal life, then their present perishable earthly bodies must be transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die. The perishable bodies will not be thrown away or abandoned; instead, they will be “transformed” with a body that will be able to live forever.

**15:54–55 “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. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”**

- The ultimate enemy of every human being is death. It takes every one of us; it cannot be escaped. Christians, however, have been given an entirely different perspective. For believers, death is not the end; it is merely a doorway into eternal life. Most Christians will experience physical death; some who are alive at the time of Christ’s return will not. But *when our perishable earthly bodies have been transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die*, then the final victory over death will have been accomplished. Death was defeated at the resurrection of Christ, but total victory over death will not be accomplished until human beings, made from the dust of the earth, just like Adam, are given bodies that defy death. When this happens, *the Scriptures will come true*. Paul quoted from **Isaiah 25:8** and **Hosea 13:14**;

God's promises that one day death itself will no longer carry *victory* or *sting* because death will be no more (**Revelation 21–22**).

**15:56–57** “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- If it were not for sin, then there would be no sting of death. If it were not for the law, then sin would have no power. The law energizes the flesh causing sin and the wages of sin is death (**Romans 6:23; 7:7-20**). Because the law set standards that cannot be reached, all people are condemned as sinners. For those who have not had their sins pardoned at the cross of Christ, death is not a passage to eternal life but an enemy with a terrible “sting.” It is not annihilation or nothingness; it is the doorway to judgment. But for those who have come to Christ as Savior, who have laid their sins at the cross and been pardoned, they can say *thanks be to God*. They have been given *victory* over sin and death *through [the] Lord Jesus Christ*. Paul wrote to the Romans:  
*For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. And since we died with Christ, we know we will also share his new life. We are sure of this because Christ rose from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. He died once to defeat sin, and now he lives for the glory of God... For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:7–10, 23)*

**15:58** “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

- Life is not meant to be spent as a self-indulgent party, where people “eat, drink, and be merry.” Every job done by the Lord in and through us is not in vain. It is not a fruitless exercise that ends in death like everything else. Believers should be steadfast in their faith, not wavering or doubting; they should be immovable, not listening to the false teachers but standing firm in the faith, and always excelling in the work of the Lord.

## I CORINTHIANS 16

### *DIRECTIONS FOR THE OFFERING / 16:1–4*

The Corinthians had been asked to join with Christians in other areas to support the church in Jerusalem. Paul could hardly have found a more practical example of the unity of the body of Christ (12:12–13) than in his desire that all the churches give to help a suffering body of believers.

**16:1** “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.”

- The words “now concerning” indicate that this was another topic about which the Corinthians had asked (7:1; 8:1; 12:1). Paul must have spoken or written to them earlier about this so that they knew there was a need for the Christians in the Jerusalem church. Their questions apparently focused on how to go about collecting the funds. So Paul laid out for the Corinthian church, a method for giving; 1) **Purpose** (collection for the saints); 2) **Periodic** (upon the first day of the week; 3) **Personal** (everyone); 4) **Private** (lay up by him); 5) **Proportionate** (as God has prospered); 6) **Pressureless** (that there be no gathering when I come).
- The Christians in Jerusalem were suffering from poverty. While the reason is unknown, it may have had to do with a famine, such as the one mentioned in Acts 11:28–29 when the believers in Antioch had sent help to the church in Jerusalem. That collection had been carried by Paul himself and Barnabas (Acts 11:30). Apparently, the Jerusalem church was still suffering, so Paul continued to collect money from other churches to send to Jerusalem (**Romans 15:25–31; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1–15**). Paul advised the Corinthian believers to *follow the same*

*procedures* that he had given to the churches in Galatia. The procedures given to the churches in Galatia are outlined in the following verses, and Paul explained that the Corinthians should follow the same plan. He suggested that the believers set aside a certain amount each week until he arrived to take it on to Jerusalem. When he finally arrived, he took the gift and delivered it to the Jerusalem church (**Acts 21:18; 24:17**).

- Paul may have had another purpose in mind for the collection. He may have seen it as a way to provoke the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem to belief that the Messiah had indeed come. Paul believed that the conversion of the Gentiles would bring the Jews to Christ (**Romans 11:11–24**). The Jews would see the gift as a fulfillment of **Isaiah 2:2–4; 60:6–7, 11; and Micah 4:13**, where it was promised that the Gentiles would bring gifts to Jerusalem.

**16:2** “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.”

- The first procedure that the Corinthian believers should implement right away was to ask each person (or family) to *put aside some amount of money ... and save it for this offering*. This was to be done *on every Lord’s Day*. Some have suggested that this offering was to be kept at home, but Paul’s mention of setting it aside on Sunday (the day when the believers met together for worship (**Acts 20:7**), probably means that the believers were to bring the amount that had been set aside that week and place it in a special offering at church. That offering, in turn, would be held until Paul’s arrival. Paul stipulated that everyone was to give (*each of you*); no one was exempt. But he did not stipulate how much everyone should give; instead,



each should give *in proportion to what* he or she had received from the Lord's provision.

- By implementing this plan, the money would be ready and waiting whenever Paul arrived (which at this point was still an uncertain date). Paul would not have to personally make an appeal; he also did not want the church to be reduced to having to try to collect it all at once.

**16:3–4** “And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me.”

- To further distance himself from the offering, Paul suggested that the Corinthian church choose their own *messengers to deliver* the gift to Jerusalem; these men are listed in **Acts 20:4**. Paul would *write letters of recommendation* for those messengers, so that when they arrived at the Jerusalem church their mission would be explained by Paul himself and the church could readily welcome them. Paul went on to say that he may end up traveling with them if it seemed appropriate (or “advisable”).

#### **PAUL'S FINAL INSTRUCTIONS / 16:5–24**

As the Corinthians awaited Paul's next visit, they were directed to be on the alert against spiritual dangers, stand firm in the faith, be strong and behave courageously, and do everything with kindness and in love. Today, as believers await the return of Christ, this could be looked at as a Christian's job description.

**16:5–6** “Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia. And it may be that I will abide, yea, and winter with you,

that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go.”

- Paul was writing this letter near the end of his three-year ministry in Ephesus. It may have been tempting for Paul to take the next ship across the Aegean Sea from Ephesus to Corinth in order to deal with the problems and squelch those who said he was avoiding them (4:18); however, Paul explained that he would indeed visit with them *after passing through Macedonia (Acts 20:1–2)*. Paul had intended in the meantime, to send Timothy (4:17; 16:10) and Titus (**2 Corinthians 7:13**). But when he did arrive, he would *stay* with them for a time, perhaps even spending the entire *winter* there. This would not be a “passing visit” (16:7); these were not the words of a man afraid to deal with the problems in Corinth. Then he would let them send him on his way, by providing both encouragement and provisions for his next journey, *wherever* that might take him.

**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.”

- Paul knew that if he were to go immediately to Corinth, it would by necessity be *only a passing visit*, and he did not want to do that. He preferred to *spend some time* with them and would do so if the Lord permitted it. Paul made plans, but he always knew that at any moment God could intervene and change his plans.

**16:8–9** “But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.”

- Paul was writing from Ephesus and wanted to *stay* there until *Pentecost*. That meant that Paul was planning to stay well into the spring in Ephesus, travel through the summer in Macedonia (16:5), and then spend the winter in Corinth (16:6). Paul wanted to go to Corinth, but he had pressing work in Ephesus and knew that he needed to be there to take advantage of *a great door for effective work* that had been *opened* to him. Oddly enough, Paul also wanted to stay in Ephesus because of many who were opposing him. Who these were is unknown, although Acts 19 gives a clear picture of the opposition he faced in Ephesus.

**16:10–11** “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. 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. “

- As Paul was writing, Timothy (and another believer named Erastus) were traveling ahead of him through Macedonia (**Acts 19:22**). Paul expected Timothy to also arrive ahead of him at Corinth (4:17). Paul respected Timothy and had worked closely with him (**Acts 16:1–3; Philippians 2:22; 1 Timothy 1:2**). Although Timothy was young, Paul encouraged the Corinthian church to welcome him because he was *carrying on the work of the Lord*. With all the problems that had been brewing in the Corinthian church, Paul wanted to make sure that the young Timothy would have *nothing to fear* during his visit in Corinth and that *no one should refuse to accept him*. Timothy often traveled as Paul’s emissary, going ahead or staying behind in order to help the churches (**Acts 17:10–15; Philippians 1:1; 2:19; 1 Thessalonians 3:2**). Paul stated that Timothy should be accepted by the churches in the same way that they would accept Paul himself. After Timothy stayed among the

Corinthians for a while, they should *send him on his way in peace so that he may return to Paul along with the brothers.*

**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.”

- The phrase “now concerning” indicates that this was another question posed by the Corinthians. Perhaps they wondered about Apollos and wanted him to come and visit. *Apollos*, who had preached in Corinth, was doing evangelistic work in Greece (Acts 18:24–28). Apollos *was not at all willing* to go to Corinth right away, but he would do so when he had the opportunity. Perhaps Apollos’ reluctance had to do with the factions in the Corinthian church (1:12; 3:4–5) and a desire not to make the problem any worse. Paul could “send” Timothy, but he could only “strongly urge” Apollos, who apparently worked independently of Paul although preaching the same message (3:5–6; 4:1).

**16:13–14** “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity.”

- Paul’s final words to the church in Corinth sum up what he has written in this letter.
  - ❖ They were to *be on guard*. They were to be constantly watchful or alert for spiritual enemies that might slip in and threaten to destroy them, whether it be divisions (1:10–17; 11:18), pride (3:18–21), sin (5:1–8), disorder (14:40), or erroneous theology (15:12). (**1 Thessalonians 5:6, 10; 1 Peter 5:8.**)

- ❖ They needed to *stand true to what* they believed; that is, the gospel that they had been taught in the beginning, the gospel that they had accepted, the gospel that had brought them salvation (15:1–2).
- ❖ They had to *be courageous* so that they could stand against false teachers, deal with sin in the congregation, and straighten out the problems that Paul had addressed in this letter.
- ❖ They should *be strong* with the strength given by the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ They should do *everything with love* (13:1–13). Without love, they would be no more than prideful noisemakers.

**16:15–16** “I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth.”

- *Stephanas and his household* were mentioned in 1:16 as people whom Paul had baptized. Paul held up this “household” as an example of Christian living. Exactly what they were doing is unknown, but Paul made it clear that they were *spending their lives in ministry to other Christians*. They were doing exactly what Paul had been talking about in this letter. From his words, *I urge you to respect them fully*, it sounds as though they had, perhaps, even been treated with disrespect; Paul wanted to correct this.

**16:17–18** “I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied.

**18** For they have refreshed my spirit and yours: therefore acknowledge ye them that are such.”

- *Stephanas* himself had come to Ephesus to see Paul, along with two other men, *Fortunatus* and *Achaicus*, who are mentioned only here. These men may have delivered the letter that contained all the questions that Paul had been answering (7:1). These words give a glimpse into Paul's genuine joy at being able to commune with other believers. Apparently, Paul truly missed the believers in Corinth and would have loved to go immediately to see them if it had been possible, but these men made up for that absence by their presence. That they brought a letter with questions for the apostle to answer also shows that the church was seeking Paul's advice, which was a good sign. These men were *a wonderful encouragement* to Paul as representatives of the entire church. Paul wanted them to be treated with *proper honor* as well. They had taken time to serve the church by finding Paul and getting the answers to questions so that the church could deal with their problems. These men's concern for the church in Corinth was honorable indeed.

**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.”**

- Just as all the churches were working together to collect funds for the church in Jerusalem (16:1–4), so all the churches stood united as they greeted one another from distant places. As Paul had traveled across the Roman Empire, he started churches in many cities. Although far apart geographically, the churches were united in their relationship to Jesus Christ, and Paul emphasized this unity each time he would send greetings from one church to another. The phrase “the churches in the province of Asia” would have referred to the Roman province of Asia located in what is now part of Turkey. There were

churches in Ephesus (**Ephesians 1:1**), Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis (**Colossians 1:2; 4:13, 16**).

- Paul also sent greetings from *Aquila and Priscilla*. The church in Corinth would have known this married couple, for they had lived in Corinth. Both were tentmakers (or leatherworkers) whom Paul had met during his stay in Corinth (**Acts 18:1–3**). Aquila and Priscilla had followed Paul to Ephesus and had lived there with him, helping to teach others. They even risked their lives for Paul, although the exact event is unknown (**Romans 16:3–5**). The great preacher Apollos, whom so many of the Corinthian believers admired, had been taught the Christian faith by this couple (**Acts 18:26**).
- The early churches would meet in homes. Because of sporadic persecution and the great expense involved; church buildings were not constructed at this time (church buildings were not built until the third century). Many congregations were so small that the entire church could meet in one home. At other times, especially in large cities such as Ephesus or Rome, smaller groups of believers would meet regularly in various private homes (**Romans 16:5; Philemon 1:2**). Apparently, Aquila and Priscilla had opened their home for just such a gathering, and this “church” also sent its greetings to Corinth.

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

- Finally, Paul sent *greetings* from *all the brothers and sisters*. The word “all” is comprehensive; perhaps this indicates that all the house churches in Ephesus, not just the one that met at Aquila and Priscilla’s home, sent greetings to the Christians in Corinth.





