

FIRST CORINTHIANS

I. Introduction:

A. Time and Place of writing

Paul wrote this letter, as well as Second Corinthians, from Ephesus during his third missionary journey, perhaps in 56 AD. After his visit to Athens, where the apostle made his famous speech at the Areopagus during his second journey (49-52 AD.), he went on to Corinth in about 51 AD.¹

B. The City of Corinth

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary states about the city: "Perched on a narrow strip of land connecting the Peloponnesus, a peninsula of southern Greece, with central Greece and the rest of Europe, Corinth enjoyed a steady flow of trade. The city had two splendid harbor cities-Cenchreae, the eastern port on the Saronic Gulf; and Lechaem, the western port on the Corinthian Gulf."

This location, strategically positioned between the East and the West, made it the commercial capital of the Roman Empire. The isthmus was only approximately four miles wide at this point and Alexander the Great, with several Roman emperors, endeavored unsuccessfully to have a canal constructed between the eastern and western harbor to avoid the hazardous circumvention of the two-hundred-mile trip around the stormy Cape Malea. Nero is said to have broken the ground with a gold shovel. According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, smaller vessels were taken over by means of a ship tramway with wooden rails. This overland traffic between the two harbors made Corinth an extremely wealthy city. The present day canal was not constructed until 1881-93 A.D.

Corinth also had all the negative characteristic features of a thriving commercial metropolis. The city's immorality had become proverbial. "To Corinthianize" meant to be sexually immoral.

C. The Founding of the Church

In Corinth Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, a Jewish couple who had been expelled from Rome by the Emperor Claudius. They were fellow tradesmen in the business of tent making. Silas and Timothy joined them. Initially, the apostle concentrated on the Jewish section of the population, but when they rejected his preaching, he turned to the Gentiles. Yet some Jews followed Paul. We read: "Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized."² A divine revelation made Paul decide to spend one-and-a-half years in Corinth.³ When he departed, he left a thriving church behind.

Soon afterward, however, things deteriorated. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* observes: "The church had broken into factions, and was distracted by party cries. Some of its members were living openly immoral lives, and discipline was practically in abeyance. Others had quarrels over which they dragged one another into the heathen courts. Great differences of opinion had also arisen with regard to marriage and the social relations generally; with regard to banquets and the eating of food offered to idols; with regard to the behavior of women in the assemblies, to the Lord's Supper and the love-feasts, to the use and value of spiritual gifts, and with regard to the hope of the resurrection." All these problems are dealt with in this epistle.

Most Bible scholars are of the opinion that Paul wrote a total of three letters to the church and that the last one was lost. *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* writes: "Many scholars believe it has been attached to 2 Corinthians and preserved as chapters 10-13 of his epistle." This conclusion is based upon Paul's mention of another letter in the fifth chapter of this book: "I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people."⁴

D. Characteristics of First Corinthians

An important question to ask when beginning the study of any book in the Bible is, what does it contribute to the whole of God's revelation? Or, maybe more compelling, if we would remove First Corinthians from the New Testament, what would be lacking in our knowledge of God's will?

¹ Acts 18:1

² Acts 18:8

³ See Acts 18:9-11.

⁴ I Cor. 5:9

Since this epistle is written as a reaction to oral reports Paul had received about undesirable conditions in the church in Corinth,⁵ and also in answer written questions that had been sent to him,⁶ it reveals much about life in a local church. Some of the problems and answers are very relevant to modern times; others have lost some of their relevance because they related to local and cultural conditions, which no longer exist in our day.

What makes First Corinthians such a beautiful and important letter is the fact that Paul nowhere uses the strong language we find in his Epistle to the Galatians. The sins of Corinth were sins of carnality, sins that were covered by the blood of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Gospel. The sins of Galatia were spiritual sins, sins against the Gospel itself, sins against the Holy Spirit. Paul answers every problem in the church and in personal lives with a powerful presentation of the cross.

In no other of the apostle's epistles do we see so clearly what life in a local church ought to be as in this letter. Nothing in Paul's other letters compares to the exquisite poetry of Chapter Thirteen, the chapter on love; nowhere is the importance and the meaning of the resurrection of the body explained as in Chapter Fifteen. The Bible would, in fact, be poorer if we left First Corinthians out.

E. Outline of the Epistle

For an outline of First Corinthians we follow the one given by *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*.

Part One: In Answer to Chloe's Report of Divisions		(1:1--4:21)
I.	Introduction	1:1-9
II.	Report of Divisions	1:10-17
III.	Reasons for Division	1:18--4:21
	A. Misunderstanding of the Gospel Message	1:18--3:4
	B. Misunderstanding of the Gospel Messenger	3:5--4:5
	C. Misunderstanding of Paul's Ministry	4:6-21
Part Two: In Answer to Reports of Fornication		(5:1--6:20)
I.	On Incest	5
	A. Deliver the Fornicators for Discipline	5:1-8
	B. Separate Yourselves from Immoral Believers	5:9-13
II.	Concerning Litigation Between Believers	6:1-11
III.	Warning Against Sexual Immorality	6:12-20
Part Three: In Answer to the Letter of Questions		(7:1--16:24)
I.	Counsel Concerning Marriage	7
	A. Principles for Married Life	7:1-9
	B. Principles for the Married Believer	7:10-16
	C. Principle of Abiding in God's Call	7:17-24
	D. Principles for the Unmarried	7:25-38
	E. Principles for Remarriage	7:39-40
II.	Counsel Concerning Things Offered to Idols	8:1-11:1
	A. Principles of Liberty and the Weaker Brother	8
	B. Illustration of Paul and His Liberty	9
	C. Warning against Forfeiting Liberty	10:1-13
	D. Exhortation to Use Liberty to Glorify God	10:14-11:1
III.	Counsel Concerning Public Worship	11:2--14:40
	A. Principles of Public Prayer	11:2-16
	B. Rebuke of Disorders at the Lord's Supper	11:17-34
	C. Principles of Exercising Spiritual Gifts	12:1--14:40
	1. The Unity of the Body	12:1-31
	2. The Most Excellent Way	13:1-13
	3. The Proper Exercise of Gifts	14:1-40
IV.	Counsel Concerning the Resurrection	15

⁵ See I Cor. 1:11; 5:1.

⁶ See I Cor. 7:1.

A. Fact of Christ's Resurrection	15:1-11
B. Importance of Christ's Resurrection	15:12-19
C. Order of the Resurrections	15:20-28
D. Moral Implications of Christ's Resurrection	15:29-34
E. Bodies of the Resurrected Dead	15:35-50
F. Bodies of the Translated Living	15:51-58
V. Counsel Concerning the Collection for Jerusalem	16:1-4
VI. Conclusion	16:5-24

F. The Text

Part One: In Answer to Chloe's Report of Divisions

(1:1--4:21)

I. Introduction	1:1-9
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*1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,
2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together
with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ-their Lord and ours:
3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
4 I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.
5 For in him you have been enriched in every way-in all your speaking and in all your knowledge-
6 because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.
7 Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be
revealed.
8 He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*

The Greek reads literally: "Paul, called, an apostle of Jesus Christ and Sosthenes, the brother." Since the word apostle is derived from the Greek verb "to send," Paul refers in this greeting to his call and his ministry, thus establishing his authority over the church in Corinth. This authority is not emphasized here as strongly as it is in his Epistle to the Galatians, where he writes: "Paul, an apostle-sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead."⁷ As we saw above, the issues in Corinth were not of the same character and weight as in Galatia. But since some members of the Corinthian church, evidently, questioned Paul's apostleship, the mention of it in this address is important. From the first line of this letter, Paul wanted to make sure that the Corinthians understood his authority. At several places in this letter, Paul refers to this point.

Apart from his God-given authority as an apostle, Paul had the authority of a father, as he writes in a later chapter: "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord."⁸ *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* observes: "It was not pride in Paul, but faithfulness to his trust, in this juncture, to maintain his apostolical character and authority."

When Paul stayed in Corinth at his first extended visit of one-and-a-half year, the head of the synagogue was Sosthenes. He had replaced Crispus, of whom we read: "Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized."⁹ There is no record of this Sosthenes' conversion. But we read that, during a local riot of the Jews against the Christians in Corinth, the Jews "all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court."¹⁰ We conclude from this that Sosthenes must have shown at least some sympathy toward Christians at that time. How and why he joined Paul after the apostle left Corinth is not stated. Some Bible scholars, however, doubt that this Sosthenes is the same as the one mentioned in Acts. It seems very likely that he is, since Paul did not feel any need to introduce him further than to call him "our brother."

⁷ See Gal. 1:1.

⁸ I Cor. 9:1,2

⁹ Acts 18:8

¹⁰ Acts 18:17

The address in these opening verses follows the normal formula of letter writing at that time. A letter started with the name of the writer, followed by the addressee, and a greeting. In Acts we find an example of a business letter, written by a Roman military commander to the governor, with the same opening formula: "Claudius Lysias, To His Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings."¹¹ Paul more than embellishes this formula by packing a Gospel nugget in it. He tells the Corinthians that they are "sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy." The Greek word for "sanctified" is *hagiazō*, meaning, "to make holy"; it is derived from the word *hagios*, "holy." Paul uses both the verb and the noun form of the same word in this sentence.

The brief message in this greeting to the Corinthians, "together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ-their Lord and ours," is: Jesus Christ made you holy, now become what you are!

The words: "together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ-their Lord and ours" extend the content of this epistle to all believers worldwide. Almost unnoticeably, the lordship of Jesus Christ is highlighted. The addition "their Lord and ours" establishes the relationship between Jesus and us; we owe Him our obedience. It is easy to call Him: "Our Lord Jesus Christ." The confession "He is our Lord" demands obedience. Jesus emphasizes this: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."¹²

The greeting "Grace and peace," the Greek and Hebrew greetings *charis* and *shalom* combined, is the trademark of all Paul's epistles. We find it in the opening verses of Romans through Philemon.

Although the church in Corinth was plagued by several severe problems, Paul did not open this epistle on a negative note. His opening statement reveals that he believed that God is the one who builds His church. During his first visit to Corinth, when he witnessed the birth of this church, Paul saw clear signs of the work of the Holy Spirit in human hearts. He, therefore, expressed the conviction that God would see this church through and that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."¹³ When Jesus spoke the words that are in quotation marks here to Peter, He added: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."¹⁴ Paul's confidence that God would keep them strong to the end, so that they would be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, did not make him lean back and refrain from dealing with the problems. He took the keys that Jesus had given him as an apostle and began to tackle them.

The spiritual features that characterized the church in Corinth were the spiritual gifts with which the Holy Spirit had endowed them, the most outstanding ones being speaking and knowledge. This epistle deals with those gifts in the Chapters Twelve and Fourteen. Knowledge can be a dangerous gift if it is exercised without love. This is obvious from the apostle's introduction to the question of eating meat that was dedicated to idols. We read in Chapter Eight: "We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God."¹⁵

II. Reports of Divisions

1:10-17

10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

11 My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.

12 What I mean is this: one of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?

14 I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius,

15 so no one can say that you were baptized into my name.

16 (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.)

¹¹ Acts 23:26

¹² Matt. 7:21,22

¹³ Matt. 16:18 – KJV

¹⁴ Matt. 16:19

¹⁵ I Cor. 8:1-3

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel-not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

The NIV leaves out the word “now” with which Paul makes the transition from recommendation to reproof. The reason for the admonition was an oral report from “some from Chloe’s household” that there was disagreement among the church members to the point that a split in the church was threatening.

Paul appeals to the church “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” that they have a look at the divisions that are tearing the church apart. In doing so, he speaks authoritatively in the Name of Jesus, as His representative. Yet, the words “I appeal,”¹⁶ or “I beseech you,”¹⁷ or “I plead with you”¹⁸ have a compassionate ring.

The Greek word, rendered “perfectly united” is *katertismenoi*, which is the passive perfect participle of *katartizo*, “to repair or adjust.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* calls it: “A versatile Greek word, used of the adjustment of parts of an instrument, of the setting of bones by a physician, of the mending of nets (Mark 1:19), as well as of the outfitting of a ship for a voyage.” Particularly the implied meaning of the tuning of an instrument illustrates well what Paul had in mind when he said he wanted the church members to “agree with one another,” or “speak the same thing.”¹⁹ This does not mean using the same words but being in harmony with one another. There is actually a danger within a church or denomination to develop a “lingo” that expels outsiders. An instrument is in tune, not when all the chords are on the same pitch, but when they all agree with one another. Paul expressed the same thought, although with different words in his Epistle to the Philippians: “make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”²⁰

The harmony of a church consists, first of all in the common belief of its basic doctrines. But mere doctrinal agreement does not produce the unity Paul wanted to see. The realization of the members that they share the same experience of being saved by God’s grace, washed of their sins in the same blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and being filled with the same Holy Spirit is what produces the testimony of the harmony of love.

The church of Corinth, instead of evincing this harmony, was in the process of splitting up along party lines. Paul mentions four names of people who had influenced the church: Paul, Apollos, Peter (or Cephas), and Jesus Christ Himself.

The root of all contention is pride. The Book of Proverbs warns: “Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.”²¹ The lines of demarcation were probably drawn according to who had been instrumental in the conversion of certain individuals. Paul, being the founder of the church, obviously merited the loyalty of the charter members. It is not abnormal that young converts model their spiritual lives after those who were used by God in their conversion; it is not even unhealthy. But to keep on doing so is indicative of spiritual immaturity. Paul states as much, later on in this epistle: “Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly-mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere men?”²² The issue was not that people had preferences for one church leader over another; the trouble was that they used this as a means of confrontation and division between one another. The problem was carnality, the sin of pride.

Paul was the father of the church in Corinth. It was not bad that the members of the church modeled themselves after their founder. Paul even encouraged this. He writes: “Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me.”²³

Apparently, Apollos arrived in Corinth when Paul was still there. Luke records in Acts: “Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a

¹⁶ NIV

¹⁷ KJV

¹⁸ NKJV

¹⁹ KJV

²⁰ Phil. 2:2

²¹ Prov. 13:10

²² I Cor. 3:1-4

²³ I Cor. 4:15,16

thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.”²⁴ Luke also states that when Paul left, Priscilla and Aquila accompanied him.²⁵ We conclude, therefore, that Apollos’ arrival in Corinth occurred while Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla were all still there.

The Pulpit Commentary states about Apollos: “Apollos personally was absolutely loyal and honorable, but his visit to Corinth had done mischief. His impassioned oratory, his Alexandrian refinements, his allegorizing exegesis, the culture and polish of his style, had charmed the fickle Corinthians. The Apollonians were the party of culture. They had, as we see from later parts of the Epistle, exaggerated St. Paul’s views, as expounded by Apollos, into extravagance. Puffed up with the conceit of knowledge, they had fallen into moral inconsistency. The egotism of oratorical rivals, the contemptuous tone towards weaker brethren, the sophistical condonations of vice, were probably due to them. Apollos, as we see by his noble refusal to visit Corinth under present circumstances (...1 Corinthians 16:12), was as indignant as St. Paul himself at the perversion of his name into an engine of party warfare.”

The Peter party is often unjustly characterized as the legalistic one, mainly consisting of Jewish believers. Most Bible scholars, focusing on Paul’s disagreement with Peter in Antioch,²⁶ have a hard time forgiving Peter for his slip. We have no scriptural proof that Peter ever became or remained a hard-line Judaist. We have no record of Peter’s version of his disagreement with Paul either. It seems more logical to assume that some Jewish Corinthians heard Peter’s sermon in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Although Achaians are not specifically mentioned in the list of those present,²⁷ it is possible they were there. Some Corinthians, therefore, may have been Peter’s converts.

If it were not for the fact that Paul does whole-heartedly embrace those who proclaim: “I follow Christ,” we would tend to think that they were the only spiritually sound group in the church. The problem seems to be that those followers of Christ became a party to themselves, adding to the division instead of lessening the tensions in the church. They were as much driven by pride as the others, exuding a “holier than thou” attitude. In his second epistle to the church Paul addresses them with: “You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he.”²⁸ Jesus command to His followers is: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”²⁹ Paul’s emphasis on the cross in the second part of this chapter suggests that those who proclaimed to be Christ’s followers did not take up the cross. The “followers of Christ” were part of the problem instead of the solution.

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary laments: “So liable are the best things in the world to be corrupted, and the gospel and its institutions, which are at perfect harmony with themselves and one another, to be made the engines of variance, discord, and contention. This is no reproach to our religion, but a very melancholy evidence of the corruption and depravity of human nature. Note how far will pride carry Christians in opposition to one another! Even so far as to set Christ and his own apostles at variance, and make them rivals and competitors.”

The answer of each of Paul’s three questions in Verse 13 is “No.” Christ is not divided, nor is His body, the church. Those who practice divisions thus exclude themselves from the body of the Lord. Recognition of membership means acknowledgment of unity among the members.

The question: “Was Paul crucified for you?” not only requires a negative answer, it also guides our thoughts in the direction of the solution to all divisions. We belong to Christ, because He died for us on the cross. We ought to have died, but He took our place. Even if Paul ended his life on a cross, as Peter supposedly did, it would not have had the same value as a substitution as Jesus’ death in our behalf. It is Jesus’ death on the cross that reduces our life and our ego to nothing. Paul expresses the meaning of this in his second epistle: “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and

²⁴ Acts 18:24-26

²⁵ See Acts 18:18.

²⁶ See Gal. 2:11-15.

²⁷ See Acts 2:9-11.

²⁸ II Cor. 10:7

²⁹ Luke 9:23

therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”³⁰

When Paul mentions baptism, he speaks about the meaning of baptism as identification with the death and resurrection of Christ. Since Paul had not been crucified for them and had not risen from the dead, connecting the ritual with his person would have been absurd. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “This outburst of feeling is very important, as proving the immeasurable distance which, in Paul’s own view, separated him from his Lord. It is also instructive to see how St. Paul at once denounces the *spirit* of party without deigning to enter into the question as to *which* party of these wrangling “theologians” was most or least in the right. He did not choose to pander to their sectarian spirit by deciding between their various forms of aggressive orthodoxy.” Immediately following, though, the apostle does refer to the ritual when trying to remember whom he baptized in Corinth. He baptized Crispus and Gaius. Luke refers to this baptism of Crispus: “Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.”³¹ As an afterthought, the baptism of Stephanas and his family is mentioned. Paul calls them “the first converts in Achaia.”³² Stephanas is nowhere mentioned in the Book of Acts, so we know no details about this baptism. In the phrase “Christ did not send me to baptize” Paul uses the verb of which the noun “apostle” is formed. We could therefore read: “Christ did not make me an apostle to baptize.” This does not mean that he never baptized anyone, as we saw. Rather, the apostle distances himself from the ritual as opposed to the content of baptism. If baptism in water is detached from the baptism by the Holy Spirit, “the cross of Christ [becomes] emptied of its power.” The real baptism is the one Paul mentions in Chapter Twelve, where we read: “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”³³

III. Reasons for Division 1:18--4:21
A. Misunderstanding of the Gospel Message 1:18--3:4

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,

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

24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.

26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-and the things that are not-to nullify the things that are,

29 so that no one may boast before him.

30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

³⁰ II Cor. 5:14,15

³¹ Acts 18:8

³² See I Cor. 16:15.

³³ I Cor. 12:13

2:1 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.

4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,

5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

6 We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

9 However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"-

10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

15 The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment:

16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

3:1 Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly-mere infants in Christ.

2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.

3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?

4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?

Paul's answer to the spirit of division that ruled the church in Corinth was the preaching of the cross. The emphasis on the cross makes this section one of the superb ones in the whole epistle. The apostle penetrates to the core of the problem; he deflates the overblown issues and turns the pride of those who initiated them into rubble. The antithesis in these verses is wisdom and foolishness. The question is who is wise and who is foolish, God or man? Writing to an audience that was steeped in Greek civilization (whether Jews or Gentiles, they were all children of their time), all matters pertaining to wisdom were relevant. Every age develops its own criteria. In our time few people will be convinced on the basis of irrefutable arguments. We do no longer accept issues simply because they are true; they have to be "relevant" and, most importantly, they must make us feel good. In Paul's day the Greek criterion was whether a matter was philosophically defensible.

The Dutch lady, Corrie ten Boom, who survived a Nazi concentration camp, went to preach the Gospel to former camp guards. They refused to accept her simple Gospel because it did not appeal to them as being "deep theological and high philosophical." Miss ten Boom decided to bring some chocolate bars to her next meeting. Since chocolate had been unavailable during the years of World War II, the guards ate it eagerly and without asking questions. She used her chocolate as an object lesson, telling those hardhearted criminals that they ought to accept the message of God's love and forgiveness in the same way that had received the chocolate.

The fact that Jesus died on a cross made no sense to the Greek and to the Jews it was unacceptable that their Messiah would end His life on earth in such an atrocious way. We must remember that the Roman way of crucifixion was the most dehumanizing and cruel manner in which a person could be put to death. This form of punishment was reserved for the lowest of the low. For "the Lord of glory" to die on a cross was inconceivable and intolerable to all the inhabitants of the Roman world in the first century. Even

the prophet Mohammed could not come to terms with this; so he wrote in the Koran that Jesus' crucifixion was an optical illusion. God changed the face of Judas, commentaries to the Koran state, so that Judas was accidentally crucified instead of Jesus, who was taken up in heaven.

Yet, accepting the fact that Jesus died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins is essential to our salvation. Rejecting the message of the cross is tantamount to eternal perdition. "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Why does the cross seem foolish to the human mind? The key to understanding this is in the fact that Jesus' death was a substitution; He died in our place. That means we ought to have died on that cross, which qualifies us as the lowest of the low, the scum of God's creation. We have difficulty accepting the cross, because we refuse to accept ourselves in our true condition. We are not very different from Corrie ten Boom's camp guards who tortured and massacred and considered themselves, at the same time, to be deep theologians and high philosophers.

In Jesus' death on the cross, God does indeed treat us as fools. We could say that God followed Solomon's advice: "Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes."³⁴ Mankind does not differ from the tenants in Jesus' parable, who killed the son of the owner, thinking that this would give them rights to the inheritance.³⁵ It was not Jesus who was dehumanized and put to shame on the cross; it was those who crucified Him; it was we.

In the commentary *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, David Prior observes: "Paul uses the word 'wisdom' in four senses, two bad and two good. A bad example of wisdom referred to in 1:17 ('eloquent wisdom'), where it describes a particular way of speaking, *i.e.* in the skilled marshalling of human arguments. In 1:19 Paul is describing, not so much a way of speaking, as a way of thinking, *i.e.* an attitude to life which is based on what I *wish* to believe and to do. In contrast to these examples of human wisdom, Paul writes of God's wisdom, also in two senses. He describes (1:21 and 2:7) God's *plan of salvation* as determined by his wisdom; but he also sees Jesus Christ as the very wisdom of God and thus the actual *substance of salvation* (1:24 and 30). For Paul, therefore, any attempt to establish salvation except on the foundation of Jesus Christ and him crucified is complete foolishness."

God's choice of a cross as, an altar on which His Son would be sacrificed for the sins of the world, was meant to destroy any pretence to human wisdom. In doing so God proves that His foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and His weakness is stronger than human strength.

Paul's quotation "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate" is from Isaiah in the words of the Septuagint. The whole verse reads: "Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish."³⁶ The thought originated with Eliphaz the Temanite, the first of Job's friends to answer Job's complaint after double disaster had struck him down. He said: "He thwarts the plans of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. He catches the wise in their craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are swept away."³⁷

Paul's questions: "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" reflect the typical Jewish way of stating a point by way of questioning. The words "where is..." suggests the total collapse of the system. "The wise man" refers to Jewish wisdom; "the scholar" points to the Jewish Rabbi or theologian; "the philosopher" represents world-renown Greek philosophy.

Man's predicament in relation to knowledge and wisdom began in Paradise. When Adam and Eve chose to eat from the tree of knowledge instead of from the tree of life, they separated knowledge and wisdom from the fellowship of love with God. That is when the separation between the head and the heart was made; the separation between thinking and feeling. God intended the two to be one, but we try to keep them apart. Wisdom consists of the harmony between the head and the heart. That is why the Book of Proverbs states: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline."³⁸

Our problem is that we equate knowledge with wisdom. True wisdom is knowledge plus love. We ought to understand that something is lacking in our wisdom, since it does not bring us to the place where

³⁴ Prov. 26:5

³⁵ See Mark 12:7.

³⁶ Isa. 29:14

³⁷ Job 5:12,13

³⁸ Prov. 1:7

we know God. Our human wisdom has never been able to satisfy us in our search for meaning. Knowledge of God is essential to life. In the words of Jesus: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”³⁹ Paul draws the logical conclusion from this with the statement: “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.” We have turned the true values of life upside-down. We could say that the whole human race is standing on its head intellectually. The only way God can communicate with us, therefore, is for God turning His values upside-down also and to speak to us “standing on His head.” For those who can hear the voice of God calling them, this makes perfect sense. “To those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

We must not read into the words “those whom God has called” some kind of election, which excludes those whom God does not call. God’s call is universal since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. Those who do not hear God’s voice are not tuned in to the right frequency.

The turning upside-down of our values makes us miss the presence of God because He came in through the backdoor. When Jesus was born in a stable instead of in a royal palace and thus identified Himself with shepherds instead of with kings, His royal birth was only recognized by a few people on the lower echelons of life. And in dying on a cross, He identified Himself with the outcasts of this world, with slaves and criminals, people we do not like to associate with. We miss God’s glory because we are looking for the wrong thing in the wrong direction. Therefore, God chose to come from the wrong direction in order to meet us.

Those who are involved in church planting seem to have the greatest difficulty to reach the upper-middle class and upper class people in society. In modern society, we no longer face the problem of the Jewish craving for miracles and the Greek love of philosophy. There are other reasons that make it difficult to reach those who have climbed up the social ladder. People who are high up have no desire to come down and since our salvation is based on the fact that God came down, they miss out. Paul asks us to remember where we were and who we were when we responded to the Gospel and experienced salvation. Very few people in *The Who’s Who? Book* can hear the call of God. God’s call seems to reach mainly, not the successful, but the failures of this world. Paul’s warning: “Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth” contains a warning against pursuing a career that would give us status and influence. There is, of course, nothing we can do against “noble birth.” We conclude, therefore, that status and influence in itself are not necessary hindrances for salvation; it is our boasting about them that presents the real danger. We must always ask ourselves, “status in whose eyes, influence for whom?” Not in the eyes of God!

The words “Not many of you were wise by human standards” seem to imply that there were some in the church in Corinth who were from the upper class. Jesus compared the salvation of a rich person to a camel going through the eye of a needle. To the disciples’ question: “Who then can be saved?” Jesus answered: “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”⁴⁰

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary comments here: “This seems to have been said in opposition to the high and worldly notions of the Jews, who assert that the divine Spirit never rests upon any man, unless he be wise, powerful, and rich. Now this divine Spirit did rest upon the Christians at Corinth, and yet these were, in the sense of the world, neither wise, rich, nor noble. We spoil, if not corrupt the apostle’s meaning, by adding ‘are called’ as if God did not send his Gospel to the wise, the powerful, and the noble, or did not will their salvation. The truth is, the Gospel has an equal call to all classes of men; but the wise, the mighty, and the noble, are too busy, or too sensual, to pay any attention to an invitation so spiritual and so divine; and therefore there are few of these in the church of Christ in general.”

As stated above, it is not our genealogy, or possessions, our status in society that obstructs our salvation, but it is our boasting. It is our pride that makes us miss God’s humility in Jesus Christ.

If we acknowledge God’s wisdom and our own foolishness, God places us in Christ Jesus. This means that Jesus becomes our representative before the throne of the Father. As human beings born into this world, we are the offspring of Adam, the one who rebelled against God. As such we inherit the curse

³⁹ John 17:3

⁴⁰ See Matt. 19:23-26.

and condemnation Adam incurred. In confessing our sin and accepting God's grace, we are born again and inherit that which comes to us through the death of Christ.

Making Christ our wisdom is a matter of choice. If we identify ourselves with Jesus Christ, we become part of God's choice. That is what God's predestination is all about. "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."⁴¹

Christ is our wisdom because He is "our righteousness, holiness and redemption." Wisdom consists of a relationship. Without Jesus we are unrighteous, unholy, and lost; with Him we are wise. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* explains: "Wisdom here, then, is not practical wisdom, but positional wisdom, God's wise plan for our complete salvation."

God placed us in this relationship with Christ when we turned to Him and asked Him to save us. There is an immediate transition from being represented before God by Adam to being represented by Jesus Christ; but there is a lifetime of application of this principle. As we persevere in fellowship with Jesus, redemption will work itself out in our life in an application of righteousness and holiness. The fruit of the Holy Spirit does not ripen overnight. God's wisdom in our life will show itself in the breakdown of our pride. "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" is a free quotation from Jeremiah. The full text reads: "This is what the LORD says: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the LORD."⁴²

Paul refers to his own method of preaching the Gospel in Corinth by way of illustration. The Book of Acts reports that Paul began his ministry in the city as a tentmaker and turned to fulltime ministry after the arrival of Silas and Timothy.⁴³ Initially Paul preached mainly to the Jews, but after they opposed him and evicted him from the synagogue, he concentrated on the Gentile section of the population. The Jewish opposition must have been very violent, and the apostle did not exaggerate when he wrote that he came in "weakness and fear, and with much trembling." The situation became so bad that the Lord decided to give His apostle some extra encouragement. We read: "One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: 'Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.'⁴⁴

But Paul's conduct in Corinth and his approach in preaching were not dictated by circumstances. His weakness, fear and trembling may have been caused by what he saw and experienced but his mode of preaching had been a matter of choice: "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." Paul decided that the Jewish opposition to the Gospel message was caused by demonic influences as much as by the carnality of the people. Since Satan had been defeated by Jesus' death on the cross, the preaching of that message was the best method for the defeat of his power in Corinth.

Preaching the message of the cross can only be done by those who have applied that message to their own lives. Paul wrote to the Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."⁴⁵ God honored Paul's decision "with a demonstration of the Spirit's power." In Luke's report about Paul's visit to Corinth, we do not read anything about supernatural manifestations such as are were reported about his ministry in Ephesus,⁴⁶ but we may assume that similar demonstrations did occur in Corinth also. Those who believed Paul's message experienced the power of God in their lives.

Evidently, Paul never gained a reputation for brilliance and eloquence in Corinth. Maybe the subsequent appearance of Apollos, who was a gifted speaker, made Paul look less in comparison. In his Second Epistle to the church Paul wrote: "For some say, 'His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person

⁴¹ Eph. 1:4-9

⁴² Jer. 9:24,25

⁴³ See Acts 18:1-5.

⁴⁴ Acts 18:9-11

⁴⁵ Gal. 2:20

⁴⁶ See Acts 19:11,12.

he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.’⁴⁷ We don’t know how much meaning we can attach to Paul’s name, which means “little.” Whether it was a nickname or a given name after his conversion cannot be established. Luke only refers casually to the name change, when he reports Paul’s confrontation with a sorcerer: “Saul, who was also called Paul...”⁴⁸ We may assume that Paul’s appearance in public, being short and unimpressive, did not make him a favorite orator. The fact that Paul possessed a brilliant mind may have been well disguised by his outward appearance.

It must be noted that Paul switches personal pronouns between the Verses 1 and 6, from “I” to “we.” Whether the “we” stands for the apostles in general, or the true preachers of the Gospel message, cannot be determined from the context. The Greek text puts the full emphasis on the word “wisdom.” The Greek reads literally: “Wisdom, albeit, we speak...” The wisdom of the Gospel, in contrast to what is called the wisdom of those who consider themselves wise, is the real wisdom. The emphasis thus placed on the word “wisdom” makes it the real wisdom as opposed to what passes for wisdom in the world. The wisdom of the world is the wisdom that prevented men from knowing God. The real wisdom is what the apostle James defines as: “The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”⁴⁹ Those who are spiritually mature understand this wisdom. “Mature” is the translation of the Greek word *teleios*, which means: “complete, particularly in mental and moral character.” The KJV renders it: “perfect.” The same word is used in *the Sermon on the Mount*: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”⁵⁰

Paul calls this wisdom “God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.” The NKJV refers to it as “the wisdom of God in a mystery.” *Barnes’ Notes* remarks about this: “There is, perhaps, here an allusion to the pagan MYSTERIES, where those who had been fully initiated were said to be PERFECT-fully instructed in those rites and doctrines. And if so, then this passage means, that those only who have been fully instructed in the knowledge of the Christian religion, will be qualified to see its beauty and its wisdom. The gross and sensual do not see it, and those only who are enlightened by the Holy Spirit are qualified to appreciate its beauty and its excellency.”

In speaking about God’s wisdom, Paul states that it is “not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age.” The KJV states: “not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world.” The Greek word used is *aion*, which speaks of “the moral and intellectual aspect of the world.”⁵¹ When the material sphere of the world is meant, the word *kosmos* is usually used. The question is whom is Paul speaking about when he refers to “the rulers of this age?” Normally, the term would refer to Satan and demonic powers. But “they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” seems to rule out this application. Yet, when we look at the wisdom of this world that led people in authority to crucify the Lord of glory, we can clearly see Satan, who blinded human eyes, standing in the background.

What Paul says about God’s wisdom is very profound. We understand that he refers to God’s plan with mankind from before creation. God had a plan of glory for man “before time began.” This plan involved the creation of man, his authority over Satan, his fall into sin, his salvation, and his rehabilitation. It involved the Incarnation in which God became man in order for man to share in the divine nature. Those who object to the mention of man’s fall into sin in this context ought to remember Augustine’s exclamation: “O blessed fall of Adam!”

The Book of Proverbs states about this wisdom: “The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began. When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world. I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.”⁵²

⁴⁷ II Cor. 10:10

⁴⁸ See Acts 13:9.

⁴⁹ James 3:17

⁵⁰ Matt. 5:47

⁵¹ *The Pulpit Commentary*

⁵² Prov. 8:22-31

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the words “The Lord of glory”: “This is not a mere equivalent of ‘the glorious Lord,’ in ... Psalm 24:10. It is ‘the Lord of the glory,’ *i.e.* ‘the Lord of the Shechinah’ (comp. ... Ephesians 1:17, ‘the Father of the glory’). The Shechinah was the name given by the Jews to the cloud of light which symbolized God’s presence. The cherubim are called, in ... Hebrews 9:5, ‘cherubim of glory,’ because the Shechinah was borne on their outspread wings... There would have been to ancient ears a startling and awful paradox in the words ‘*crucified the Lord of glory.*’ The words brought into juxtaposition the lowest ignominy and the most splendid exaltation.”

The bitter irony of this world, this age, and its mentality is that man is searching for meaning and glory. Our experimentation with all kinds of substitutes proves the emptiness of the human soul. It was this very search that caused the crucifixion of Jesus. Pilate’s statement: “What is truth?”⁵³ was a cry of despair.

The depth of God’s wisdom is appropriately described in Paul’s quotation: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” Bible scholars have puzzled over these words, since they are not found in the form Paul quotes them in any Old Testament prophet. Isaiah’s words, “Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him”⁵⁴ come close to it, but not close enough to make it a literal quotation.

Paul’s explanation of the essence of God’s wisdom is the most baffling revelation we can imagine. This is what gives meaning to life and to creation as a whole. It places man at the core of the universe in a way that supersedes our wildest imagination. In creating the farthest galaxy, God had in mind our glorification! The very fall of Satan may have to do with that archangel’s understanding of the plan of God to create man. The key to the realization of God’s plan for us is in our love for Him; “what God has prepared for those who love him.” Our love for God is a response to His love for us. “We love because he first loved us.”⁵⁵ Our maturity is definitely related to our love for God.

In the last section of this chapter, Verses 10-16, Paul tries to dig into the mystery of God’s heart in such a way that we almost lose ourselves in wonder. The way the apostle describes this makes it sound as if, even to the Holy Spirit Himself, God’s eternal plan for man is almost too deep to understand. It is as if the Holy Spirit has to enter into the subconsciousness of the Father to bring to the surface that which is hidden deep down. It seems as if the Spirit submits the Father to a psychoanalysis.

We may assume that Paul uses anthropomorphic language to make us understand the incomprehensible. Paul describes the way our human spirit works within us in a way that would make a psychologist or psychiatrist jealous. We hardly know ourselves consciously; there are many hidden corners and niches in our heart that we are barely aware of. But our human spirit can be prompted to bring to the surface that which is dormant within. Paul explains that this part of our being also belongs to “the image of God” according to which we have been created. One of the differences between the image of God and the original, that is between ourselves and God, is that God is omniscient; there are no hidden recesses in the mind of God that have to be brought to the surface by special manipulation. The point is that the same Holy Spirit that knows all about the Father has entered our life in order to communicate to us, on a level that is beyond our understanding, what God has in mind for us as human beings.

David Prior in *The Message of 1 Corinthians* states: “The inspiration of the Holy Spirit is necessary not only for the instruction, illumination and enabling of apostolic messengers, but for those who hear them. The man who has not received the Spirit (14, *the unspiritual man*) does not have the resources to recognize, appreciate or welcome what the Spirit wants to impart through his messengers. In verses 12-14 Paul thus uses six important verbs to describe the ministry of the Spirit in those who teach and those who hear the gospel: the former he enables to know, to declare and to explain; the latter he enables to receive, to understand and to appreciate. Without such ministry from the Spirit there can be no communication and no growth into maturity: the truth is incomprehensible and the things of the Spirit are even regarded as foolishness (14).”

The Holy Spirit is the divine agent who both reveals and makes understand spiritual truths to those who have invited Him into their lives. Paul calls the Spirit’s communication with us “the mind of Christ.” This answers Isaiah’s question “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?”⁵⁶ which before required the answer: “Nobody!”

⁵³ John 18:38

⁵⁴ Isa. 64:4

⁵⁵ I John 4:19

⁵⁶ Isa. 40:13

What Paul has explained thus far describes our position before God, not our practical experience. God has placed us in a position where we may avail ourselves of the opportunity to know Him better and on a more intimate level. The Corinthians had not availed themselves of this opportunity. The reason for this was not God's unwillingness to reveal Himself, but their preoccupation with one another to the point of jealousy. Paul hoped to draw them out of this condition of bickering by holding before them the breathtaking view of God's plan of revelation of Himself. The best and most effective way to draw Christians out of their carnal condition is by showing them the wide horizon of God's plan. Catching a glimpse of God's wisdom "that God destined for our glory before time began" ought to be sufficient to draw everyone up to life on the highest plane.

There is nothing wrong with babies and infants drinking milk. When Paul reproaches the Corinthians that they are not eating solid food, he tells them that they are stunted in their spiritual growth. Considering the time since they had experienced conversion and regeneration, they ought to have been mature Christians. The time factor is important in this respect. The author of Hebrews writes the same to his readers: "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."⁵⁷ The apostle uses three Greek words *sarkikos*, "carnal," *sarkinos*, meaning "weak," and *anthropos*, which simply means "man," but is used in the derogatory sense of "mere man."

The members of the church in Corinth probably considered themselves to be spiritual. Paul had complimented them on their possession of speaking and knowledge and on the vast array of spiritual gifts and their expectation of Christ's soon return.⁵⁸ What was lacking was the fruit of the Spirit, particularly love, as is obvious from Paul's emphasis on it in a later chapter. The Corinthians' spiritual immaturity was due to the fact that they had not sufficiently drunk of the milk of God's Word that would have made them grow. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* makes the astute observation: "It is but too common for persons of very moderate knowledge and understanding to have a great measure of self-conceit."

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary explains Paul's philosophy of spiritual growth: "Paul has described four types of men. The first, the natural man, is the man without the Spirit, who needs the new birth (cf. John 3:1-8). The second is the carnal-weak man (1 Cor 3:1), the babe in Christ, who needs growth through reception of the milk of the Word. The third type is the carnal-willful man, the older, yet immature, Christian, who needs restoration to fellowship, or the healthy condition conducive to the taking of nourishment, by confession of his willfulness, or sin (cf. 1 John 1:9). The fourth is the spiritual or mature man, who has responded to the milk and grown into spiritual adulthood, so that he is strong and able to take the meat of the Word (1 Cor 2:15; 3:2). This is the man God would have every Christian to be. That Paul equates the mature man with the spiritual man is evident from a comparison of 2:6 with 2:15 (cf. 3:1; he contrasts babes with the spiritual). He also states that the wisdom of God is for the perfect, but he never uses the term again in the section. Instead, he writes of the spiritual man (2:15; 3:1), who has unlimited capacity to judge all things. The analogy of the physical life with all of this is its best illustration." *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* adds: "Fleshy... implies men wholly of flesh. Carnal... implies not that they were wholly unregenerate (1 Cor 2:14), but that they had a carnal tendency... notwithstanding their conversion (1 Cor 1:4-9)." The tendency to judge between preacher and preacher is an obvious sign of spiritual immaturity.

B. Misunderstanding of the Gospel Messenger 3:5--4:5

5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe-as the Lord has assigned to each his task.

6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.

7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.

9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

⁵⁷ Heb. 5:12-14

⁵⁸ See I Cor. 1:4-7.

10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds.

11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,

13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.

15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

18 Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise.

19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness";

20 and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."

21 So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours,

22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours,

23 and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

4:1 So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.

2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself.

4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.

5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

In this section Paul uses two illustrations for the church in order to emphasize the role he and Apollos had played in its birth and growth. The first illustration compares the church to a field in which the believers are the harvest; the second compares the church to a building. The church is in fact the fruit of the Word of God that is sown on the field of this world, as Jesus stated in some of His parables.⁵⁹ The church is also the building in which the Holy Spirit makes His abode. In the first image Paul did the planting; he had planted the church, Apollos had come in later after Paul's departure and nurtured the church to maturity. We are not told how those two ministries differed from one another. Paul had preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ through which the people who responded had become new creatures. Apollos had preached the same Gospel in order to stimulate their growth in the Lord. We do not know in what way Apollos' preaching would have differed from Paul's. If it is true, as some Bible scholars suppose that Apollos was the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we find an illustration in the sixth chapter of Hebrews, which is similar to the one Paul uses here: "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment."⁶⁰

Actually, Apollos is not mentioned in the second illustration of the building. But Paul had already made his point by saying that he and Apollos were mere servants, hired hands contracted to do the job. The members of the church ought not to give them any undue attention as if they were the ones who were the givers of life. God's hired hand can do the sowing and planting without even understanding the process of growth. Jesus makes this clear in the parable in Mark's Gospel where He says about the farmer who planted the seed: "Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Matt. 13:3-9,18-23; 13:18-29; Mark 4:26-29

⁶⁰ Heb. 6:1,2

⁶¹ Mark 4:26-29

In the second illustration, Paul explains that the fact that growth is God's work doesn't mean that the laborer has no responsibility in it at all. The most important part of any building is its foundation. Jesus' short parable at the close of the Sermon on the Mount proves this. We read: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."⁶² Without the Word of God as it comes to us in Jesus Christ, there is no foundation upon which any human life can be built and last through eternity. The storms of life will ruin us unless we are built upon this rock.

It is no great jump from Jesus' parable to Paul's. Jesus spoke of individuals who had based their lives upon Him; Paul speaks about individuals who have made that vital choice in their lives and are being built together as a church. The first illustration touches upon the private, the second upon the corporate. The one cannot exist without the other.

Paul saw himself as God's architect in the planting of the church in Corinth. Actually, he uses the Greek word *architekton* from which our word "architect" is derived. He received this gift of church planting "by the grace of God." In writing to Timothy, Paul mentioned this grace that transformed his life: "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life."⁶³ This man who had made it his life goal to destroy the church of Jesus Christ, was gloriously transformed into a builder of the church, God's architect. That is grace!

God's gift to Paul, which made him into a spiritual architect, is also called "grace." It means that God gave Paul the skills to do the job. His expertise was the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. The church planter has no choice as far as the foundation is concerned. Isaiah prophesied about this foundation: "So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed.'⁶⁴ A church without the foundation of the Word of God as it became flesh and blood in Jesus Christ is not a church regardless what it calls itself.

There is a sense in which apostles and pastors do not build churches. Jesus said in His conversation with Peter: "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."⁶⁵ This is not the place to delve into the controversy of interpretations regarding Peter's role. Suffice to point out that Jesus declares Himself to be the builder of the church.

On the words "If any man builds on this foundation" *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: "There are three types of builders-the wise man (vv. 12,14), the unwise (v. 15), and the foolish, who injures the building (v. 17). Three different results follow. Even among God's laborers two types of labor may be expended, the one solid and enduring, the other perishable and passing (the foolish laborer does not belong to God; v. 17)."

Evidently it is possible for a church to have a solid foundation and a bad superstructure. Paul does not elaborate on the meaning of the superior and the inferior material used to build upon the foundation. Some commentators believe that the inferior building material pertains to false doctrines. Although this may be partly true, we believe that Paul differentiates between that which is of the Holy Spirit and that which is of the flesh. The point he wants to make is that the work of building a church that is transforming human lives according the God's pattern of holiness must have value for eternity.

Bible scholars have debated the question whether Paul speaks of one building in which a mixture of material is used, or two different building. *Barnes' Notes* states: "Grotius renders it, 'Paul feigns to himself an edifice, partly regal, and partly rustic. He presents the image of a house whose walls are of

⁶² Matt. 7:24-27

⁶³ I Tim. 1:12-16

⁶⁴ Isa. 28:16

⁶⁵ Matt. 16:18

marble, whose columns are made partly of gold and partly of silver, whose beams are of wood, and whose roof thatched with straw.’ ”

In describing the precious material Paul must have had in mind the temple in Jerusalem as the place of God’s revelation on earth. Although the edifice in Paul’s day could not compare to the one built by Solomon, it was still a magnificent structure. In Mark’s Gospel we read: “As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!’ ”⁶⁶

It is obvious that Paul is not speaking of a physical edifice but of the body of believers. This is clear from Verses 16 and 17: “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.”

The apostle does not explain what is meant by the Day that will reveal the quality of each man’s work by testing it through fire. Bible scholars have voiced multiple opinions on this subject. Some, holding to the theory that Paul referred to Judaist teaching under the symbols of wood, hay or straw, believe that he envisioned the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D., which marked the end of Judaism. But there does not seem to be any such note of prophecy in this section. It seems more logical that the fire will reveal what part of everyone’s testimony has been prompted by the Holy Spirit and what part by our own carnality. The fire can hardly be taken to be a literal fire. It is the fire of God’s scrutiny. In Revelation, Jesus reveals Himself to the church in Thyatira with: “These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire.”⁶⁷

Leon Morris in his commentary *1 Corinthians*, a volume in the series of *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, observes: “Many commentators restrict the application of this passage to the work of teachers, and it surely has special reference to their work. But the words seem capable of more general application and vv. 16-17 certainly refer to a wider circle. It is true of every believer that he is building on the one foundation. Let him be *careful* how he builds. Exactly what is being built? Some, impressed by the emphasis on right teaching, think it is sound doctrine. Others see a reference to building the church, or building up Christian character. Probably none is completely out of mind, and it is best to see the reference is quite general.”

The whole context of this section suggests that Paul is not merely addressing the preachers and teachers of the church. Some of the spiritual immaturity of the members that caused division in the church is clearly covered by the images of wood, hay and straw. It is also clear that the church as a whole is not condemned and written of. There are elements of gold, silver and costly stones. The fire brings out reward as well as reproof.

Paul may have thought also of the Old Testament law for soldiers who returned from battle, carrying with them booty obtained from the enemy. Some of the loot may have been dedicated to enemy’s idols and must to be rededicated to the Lord before it could be brought into the camp. We read: “Then Eleazar the priest said to the soldiers who had gone into battle, ‘This is the requirement of the law that the LORD gave Moses: Gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, lead and anything else that can withstand fire must be put through the fire, and then it will be clean. But it must also be purified with the water of cleansing. And whatever cannot withstand fire must be put through that water.’ ”⁶⁸ Most of the converts in Corinth had grown up in the spiritual pollution of idolatry. Their lives had been dedicated to idols. In turning to the Lord they changed allegiance. This did not mean that every act they ever performed had to be abandoned; it had to be rededicated to the Lord. This application goes well beyond preaching the right doctrine. Building a church involves more than following the right line; it is about giving to the Lord what previously was used against Him. Church building is done through the building up of personal lives and families. It is done by bringing cultures and practices under the scrutiny of the eyes of Jesus Christ, “whose eyes are like blazing fire.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “The fire is *probatory*, not *purgatorial*, and it is not in itself a fire of wrath, for it tests the gold and silver as well as the inferior elements of the structure. It is the fire of the refiner, not of the avenger.”

This section does not deal with salvation but with being saved and spiritual growth. Those who build the church build on the only possible foundation, Jesus Christ. The point of comparison is the quality of the work, either in the life of the individual or in the life of the church as a fellowship of believers. Those

⁶⁶ Mark 13:1

⁶⁷ Rev. 2:18

⁶⁸ Num. 31:21-23

who produce high quality work will be rewarded; those who see their work go up in flames will lose their crown, not their salvation. The picture is of a person who escapes from a burning house, unable to bring anything with him.

In Verses 16 and 17, however, Paul reverts to the original problem of division in the church, that which threatened to tear the church apart. When he says: “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” he doesn’t speak to individuals but to the church as a whole. Whether “God will destroy him” refers to salvation is not clear. Paul may have had in mind the picture of the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. The difference between Nebuchadnezzar’s act of destruction and destruction of the church of God by those who cause division is that the Babylonian king did not know what he was doing; the offenders in Corinth knew. God got back to Nebuchadnezzar by making him understand whom he had maltreated. “The king said to Daniel, ‘Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.’”⁶⁹ This statement was followed by several other ones in which the monarch exalted God as the King of Heaven.⁷⁰

The Greek uses two words for “temple,” *hieron* and *naos*. The first denotes the temple as a whole, the second the shrine where the presence of God is revealed, the Holy of Holies. Paul uses *naos* in Verses 16 and 17.

In Verses 18 and 19 Paul returns to what he began in the first chapter of this epistle. In Chapter One, Verses 18-31 the apostle contrasted the message of the cross with human philosophy. That which seems foolishness to the human eye turns out to be God’s supreme wisdom, making human wisdom look foolish. Paul argued that wisdom that does not lead to God, who is the source of wisdom, cannot be called wisdom at all. As we have seen, the problem was not human wisdom, but human pride, as is included in the word “boast.” Boasting is evidence of rebellion which is fueled by the Evil One. Our rebellion dead-ends at the cross.

In quoting from the Book of Job, Paul lifts the words out of the negative context they have there. The speech of Eliphaz the Temanite, the first of Job’s friends to answer his complaint, sounds good, but the spirit in which it was given was not the spirit of compassion. Job’s friends all added to his burden of suffering. Eliphaz said literally: “He thwarts the plans of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. He catches the wise in their craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are swept away.”⁷¹ Paul only uses the words “He catches the wise in their craftiness.” The second quotation is from the Book of Psalms: “The LORD knows the thoughts of man; he knows that they are futile.”⁷² Both are rather free quotations.

With the word “therefore” the apostle returns to his conclusion at the end of the first chapter, where he stated that Christ became for wisdom from God. And he said: “Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’” The reason Paul gives here not to put human beings on a pedestal is even more amazing than in Chapter One. “All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.” Paul, Peter, and Apollos are merely servants of the church and servants rank lower than masters. By boasting in his slaves the master lowers himself, which makes him a fool. We must honor those who serve us but we must not boast in them by giving them the glory that belongs to God alone.

In a rather complicated but profound way Paul points out what makes us master and slave at the same time: “You are of Christ.” It is the fact that we are the slaves of Christ that makes us master of everything else.

The subject is continued in the next chapter. Having explained to the church what their position is toward himself and toward Christ, Paul takes another look at himself in order to come to some kind of self-evaluation. Paul uses two interesting Greek words to describe himself, *huperetes* and *oikonomos*. The first is derived from the verb *eresso*, meaning: “to row”; the additive *huper* makes it “an under-oarsman,” or “galley slave of the lowest order.” About the second word *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* explains: “The steward, or *oikonomos*, was the master’s deputy in regulating the concerns of the family, providing food for the household, seeing it served out at the proper times and seasons, and in proper quantities. He received all the cash, expended what was necessary for the support of the family, and kept exact accounts, which he was obliged at certain times to lay before the master. The mysteries, the doctrines of God, relative to the salvation of the world by the passion and death of Christ; and the inspiration, illumination, and purification

⁶⁹ Dan. 2:47

⁷⁰ See Dan. 3:28,29; 4:2,37.

⁷¹ Job 5:12,13

⁷² Ps. 94:11

of the soul by the Spirit of Christ, constituted a principal part of the divine treasure entrusted to the hands of the stewards by their heavenly Master; as the food that was to be dispensed at proper times, seasons, and in proper proportions to the children and domestics of the church, which is the house of God.” Joseph in Potiphar’s house gives a good illustration of what is meant here.⁷³

Paul’s qualifications of himself disqualified him and the others in the same position from becoming a leader of a section of the church. Paul could have quoted the proverb “It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury--how much worse for a slave to rule over princes!”⁷⁴ The words “I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself” should be seen in the context of the comparison between Paul and the other servants of the church. Those who preferred Peter or Apollos to Paul had their reasons for doing so, but Paul does not care what those reasons are. The only reason Paul could be criticized was if Paul were unfaithful in the carrying out of his duty to the church as a steward of the secrets of God, and Paul knew that he had been faithful in that respect.

Preference for one preacher over another means that one is put on a pedestal and the other is put down. The party spirit in the church of Corinth existed not only of a tendency to glorify some people but also in passing judgment on the other ones.

Paul states: “My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent.” David Prior in *The Message of 1 Corinthians* states: “Greek and Roman philosophers (e.g. Plato and Seneca) regarded conscience as passing final judgment on a man. For Paul, only God can do this. The essential ground for Paul’s clear conscience is the fact that God ‘justifies the *ungodly*’ by virtue of the cross of Christ. So, when Paul says in verse 4 that, because there is nothing on his conscience, he is not thereby justified, he is actually pointing to the only ground of justification and the only source of a clear conscience—Jesus Christ and him crucified. No wonder he made that the kernel of his preaching.”

Paul’s words are important in regard to the modern fad of evaluation. The way businesses are run in the world is by constant evaluation of how the business is doing, how the employees are doing and how they think themselves to be doing. This business mentality has spilled over into the church even to the point where we are not only supposed to constantly evaluate ourselves but also others. If I understand Paul’s words correctly, the principle is not scriptural. The danger is that self-evaluation becomes a substitute for being evaluated by the Lord. If we have the mind of Christ, as Paul states in Chapter Two, it does in fact matter little if and how others judge us. There must, of course, be a balance and although we do not depend upon the judgment of others, there is value in receiving counsel from others who belong to the body of Christ.

Paul’s words about judgment pertain to the motives of our acts, not only to the acts themselves. God judges us both on our acts and our motives. The motives make the material in the building of the church into “gold, silver, costly stones,” or “wood, hay or straw.” If our deeds are done out of love for Christ, our conscience testifies positively in our behalf. We condemn ourselves by doing things, even good things, for the purpose of self-glorification.

The Greek in Verse 5 – “Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes” is more emphatic than the English can render. It reads: “Therefore nothing before the time nothing judge until come the Lord.” The coming of the Lord is given as certain but the time is not. What Paul is saying that judging others is none of our business. As Jesus says: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”⁷⁵ Christians are supposed to evince not a spirit of criticism but a spirit of love, of which Paul says: “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”⁷⁶ Most Bible scholars read the word “praise” in this context to mean the reward that God will give to those who are faithful, as Jesus put it in the Parable of the Talents: “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”⁷⁷

⁷³ See Gen. 39:4-6.

⁷⁴ Prov. 19:10

⁷⁵ Matt. 7:1,2

⁷⁶ I Cor. 13:6,7

⁷⁷ Matt. 25:21

6 Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.

7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings-and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!

9 For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.

10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!

11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless.

12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it;

13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

14 I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children.

15 Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me.

17 For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

18 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you.

19 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have.

20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

21 What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?

There is a good deal of irony or sarcasm in this section, but Paul's motivation in scolding the Corinthians is love. He presents himself to them as the one who fathered that church and as such he comes to them with love, as well as with authority to discipline them.

Paul addresses the church as "brothers," that is brothers in Christ. Both he and the members of the church are members of the body of Christ. The words "I have applied these things to myself and Apollos" are quite unique in the Greek. The Greek word, rendered "applied" is *metaschematizo*, which means literally, "to transfigure or disguise." The same word is used in the verse "Satan himself *masquerades* as an angel of light."⁷⁸ And also in the verses: "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will *transform* our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."⁷⁹ J. B. Phillips renders the verse: "I have used myself and Apollos above as an illustration." And Eugene Peterson's *The Message* reads: "All I'm doing right now, friends, is showing how these things pertain to Apollos and me."

Bible scholars agree that the meaning of Paul's words is not very clear. What does he mean by making Apollos and himself as an example? Some think that Paul refers to his own and Apollos' humility in regard to the partisanship in the church. *Adam Clarke's Commentary* probably gives the clearest interpretation of this text: "I have written as if myself and Apollos were the authors of the sects which now prevail among you; although others, without either our consent or knowledge, have proclaimed us heads of parties. Dr. Pearce paraphrases the verse thus: 'I have made use of my own and Apollos' name in my arguments against your divisions, because I would spare to name those teachers among you who are guilty of making and heading parties; and because I would have you, by our example, not to value them above what I have said of teachers in general in this epistle; so that none of you ought to be puffed up for one

⁷⁸ II Cor. 11:14

⁷⁹ Phil.3:20,21

against another' Doubtless there were persons at Corinth who, taking advantage of this spirit of innovation among that people, set themselves up also for teachers, and endeavored to draw disciples after them. And perhaps some even of these were more valued by the fickle multitude than the very apostles by whom they had been brought out of pagan darkness into the marvelous light of the Gospel."

Also "the meaning of the saying, 'Do not go beyond what is written' " is not obvious. Some Bible scholars think that Paul may be referring to what he has written himself, but that can hardly be called a "saying." Others believe that this may be a reference to Scripture as a whole, as in "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."⁸⁰ Leon Morris in his commentary *1 Corinthians*, states: "The article points to the following words as a well-known saying, possible one used by the Corinthians or by Paul when he was at Corinth. Either way, it was a catch-cry familiar to both Paul and his readers. 'What is written' employs the formula Paul generally uses when quoting holy Scripture. The problem is that there is no passage in the Old Testament that runs exactly like this. Accordingly some have suggested a reference to some other writing. On the basis of the papyri Parry argues for the sense, 'not to go beyond the terms' ' i.e. of the commission as teacher'; cf. GNB, 'Observe the proper rules'. This is possible, but it is more likely that Paul is referring to scripture, even though he does not cite a particular passage.

We must also remember that the Corinthians were under the rules and regulations of the Roman Empire in which the *Lex Romana* (Roman law) was rigorously enforced. Paul may simply have been saying, "play according to the rules."

The intent of Paul's words, however, is clearly to emphasize the importance of humility, both of himself and Apollos as well as of the members of the church.

In verses 8-13 Paul proceeds to poke fun at the attitude of some members of the church, or maybe even of the church as a whole. In the first chapter of this epistle Paul had expressed his delight over the gifts that were manifested in the church of Corinth. We read: "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way-in all your speaking and in all your knowledge- because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed."⁸¹ When he switches here to sarcasm it is not because the gifts were not real but because those who had received them acted as if these were the product of their own zeal and intelligence. Paul wanted them to realize that they had not merited their gifts; these were the evidence of God's grace poured out upon them.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on these verses: "There is a strong but healing irony in these expressions, and in the entire contrast between the comfortable, full fed, regal self satisfaction of the Corinthians, and the depression and scorn in the midst of which the apostles lived. The loving delicate irony is, in a different way, as effective as the stern denunciation of St. John: 'Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked' (...Revelation 3:17). St. Paul's satire is always akin to charity; it is never satire with no pity in it."

It is of course true that the Gospel rehabilitates us and restores to us the dignity and glory God originally intended man to possess. Paul calls the fact that Christ enters into our lives "the hope of glory."⁸² In Revelation John states: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."⁸³ But we live in this world that is still under the dominion of Satan as kings in exile. The glory bestowed upon us belongs to heaven not to this earth. Christ's kingdom is not of this world.⁸⁴

We may be seated positionally with Jesus Christ, but the full effect of this will not be demonstrated until Christ's return. Paul expresses this beautifully in his Epistle to the Ephesians, where we read: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Deut. 29:29

⁸¹ I Cor. 1:4-7

⁸² See Col 1:27^b.

⁸³ Rev. 1:5,6 (KJV)

⁸⁴ See John 18:36.

⁸⁵ Eph. 2:4-7

Paul pokes fun at the Corinthians as someone, looking for a friend he cannot find, would say jokingly: “Maybe ‘the Rapture’ has taken place and I am left behind.” In saying “How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!” Paul actually says: “I would wish that Jesus Christ had already returned and that the Rapture would have occurred so that we were in heaven together with you!” It could be that the Christians in Corinth had begun to believe in a “health and wealth Gospel,” such as some modern television evangelists propagate: “God wants you healthy and rich!”

To illustrate his point, the apostle refers to the horrors of public entertainment of that time, which are difficult for us to appreciate. The reference is to a Roman theater in which humans fought wild animals. There were, evidently, two performances, one in the morning where the combatants were allowed to use weapons and one in the afternoon where men came naked and defenseless to face the lion. In that presentation the human had no chance of survival. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* quotes the Roman statesman Seneca who wrote: “In the morning men are exposed to lions and bears; at mid-day to their spectators; those that kill are exposed to one another; the victor is detained for another slaughter; the conclusion of the fight is death. The former fighting compared to this was mercy; now it is mere butchery: they have nothing to cover them; their whole body is exposed to every blow, and every stroke produces a wound.” Those who fought in the arena were meant to die. Paul expresses a similar thought later in this epistle: “If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained?”⁸⁶

The whole picture Paul paints is of a person who literally carries his cross. In taking these words out of context and making a saying out of them, we have robbed them of their original meaning. When Jesus carried His cross on the way to Golgotha, He was considered by the Roman government to be the scum of society. Only slaves who had committed a crime we put to death in that manner. When Jesus said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me,”⁸⁷ He meant us to identify with the lowest of the low.

In Verses 10-13 Paul compares himself to the members of the church in greater detail. *Barnes’ Notes* comments here: “Paul here drops the irony, and begins a serious recapitulation of his actual sufferings and trials. The phrase used here ‘unto this present hour’ denotes that these things had been incessant through all their ministry. They were not merely at the commencement of their work, but they had continued and attended them everywhere. And even then they were experiencing the same thing. These privations and trials were still continued, and were to be regarded as a part of the apostolic condition.”

Being citizens of Corinth, a thriving harbor city, many of them were probably quite affluent. They had never renounced the worldly wisdom of which the Greek prided themselves because of the heritage of their philosophers. Referring to the foolishness of the cross in the first chapter, Paul calls himself “a fool for Christ.” The weakness and strength may refer to physical weakness and strength or to political power or the lack of it. Honor and dishonor speak of a status in society.

Then Paul merely describes his own condition without putting himself next to the Corinthians. Writing from Ephesus, Paul evidently had little or no support and the manual labor he performed was insufficient to meet most of his personal needs. The words “To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty” obviously depict a condition of present and dire need. “We are in rags” is probably a true picture of Paul’s shabby clothing, but there is again an indirect reference to the Roman games in which the fighters faced the wild animals in the nude. The Greek word used *gumniteuo* means “to strip,” or “to go poorly clad.” The verb is derived from *gumnos*, which means “nude.”

We do not read in Acts that Paul was physically abused in Ephesus, but that doesn’t mean that this didn’t happen. Paul spent over two years in that city and faced strong and vicious opposition from the side of the Jews as well as from the merchants. He had to leave the synagogue and faced the riot caused by the complaint of Demetrius, the silversmith.⁸⁸

Paul qualifies his status as an itinerant evangelist as being homeless. This corresponds to Jesus’ statement: “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”⁸⁹ It is a well-known fact that Paul exercised the trade of tentmaker. We read in Acts: “After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome.

⁸⁶ See I Cor. 15:32.

⁸⁷ Matt. 16:24

⁸⁸ See Eph. 19:8-10, 23-41.

⁸⁹ Matt. 8:20

Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.”⁹⁰ Although this is not specifically mentioned, Paul must have continued his work in Ephesus also. This can be deducted from his admonition to the elders of the Ephesian church to whom he said in his farewell speech: “You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”⁹¹

The reward of Paul’s willingness to serve the Lord sacrificially with such humility had been curse, persecution, and slander. Paul had reacted to these attacks with blessing and kindness. All this is summed up in the words: “Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.” The Greek words translated “scum” and “refuse” are *perikatharma* and *peripsema*. These are very strong expressions, referring to the process of cleaning and scraping something and throwing away what is filthy. It is what we call “garbage.”

Comparing ourselves in our relative ease in this world with the price Paul paid as a slave of Christ would make us feel embarrassed and ashamed. We can be sure that the Corinthians must have felt the same sting when this letter was read to them in church. Foreseeing this reaction makes Paul assure them of his deep love for them.

Affluence in itself is not sin; it is the seeking of it that will detract us from what is really important in life. As Paul wrote to Timothy: “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”⁹² If God provides us with an abundance of wealth, we must be very careful how to deal with that. In the same letter to Timothy, Paul writes: “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”⁹³

As the founder of the church, Paul calls himself their father in Christ. With words of exaggeration: “Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ” he pokes fun at the multitude of people who were trying to tell the believers in Corinth how to live. Paul was not only their father in that he founded the church; he was also their role model.

Timothy, who as we saw, had been instructed how to handle those who wanted to be rich and who were rich, was sent to Corinth as Paul’s emissary. Some in Corinth may have taken this as an indication that Paul himself was reluctant to come because of the strong opposition against him in the church.

A lot can be said about governing boards and elder boards in churches and about individual board members who bully the congregation. There are, unfortunately many examples of confrontation between carnal power and spiritual authority. In the Seven Letters to the churches in Asia in Revelation, we see that Christ compares the churches to Himself and pronounces judgment according to how well that comparison turns out. Whatever the laws and bylaws of a particular church may be, the ultimate authority for running a church belongs to the Lord and to those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Leon Morris, in his commentary *1 Corinthians*, quotes Calvin who calls this Spirit filled authority: “That spiritual efficacy, with which those are endowed who dispense the word of the Lord with earnestness.”

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.” In Romans Paul made a similar statement: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.”⁹⁴ “Eating and drinking” in this context refers to stipulations about what is permissible and what is not. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with talk. God has given the gift of speech to human beings to use for His glory. In using words we imitate our Creator who spoke things into being and who is the Word who became flesh. It is when we substitute our talk for the creative Word of God that we stand condemned.

Paul gives the Christians in Corinth a choice between a whip and a gentle spirit. As it turned out they must have chosen the latter. In Second Corinthians Paul mentions the church’s reaction to his warning

⁹⁰ Acts 18:1-3

⁹¹ Acts 20:34,35

⁹² I Tim. 6:9,10

⁹³ I Tim 6:17-19

⁹⁴ Rom. 14:17,18

and probably to the visit he paid them.⁹⁵ What was the actual issue that caused Paul so much concern is explained in the following chapter.

Part Two: In Answer to Reports of Fornication

(5:1--6:20)

- I. On Incest 5
 A. Deliver the Fornicators for Discipline 5:1-8

1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife.

2 And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?

3 Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present.

4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,

5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

6 Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?

7 Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

8 Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

The transition from Chapter Four to the next is rather abrupt, causing some Bible scholars to assume that the text has been edited or that part of the epistle may have been lost. *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests that: “The abruptness with which the subject is introduced shows the intensity of St. Paul’s feelings, and his indignation that he should have been left to hear of this crime by common report.”

Paul does not mention the source of his information, which may also have been “some from Chloe’s household.”⁹⁶ Evidently, the case was so well known that Paul felt it unnecessary to mention how he received the news.

The Greek word rendered sexual immorality is *porneia* from which the English word “pornography” is derived. The KJV renders it “fornication,” but since it involves a married woman, the wider meaning of “sexual immorality” is clearly preferable.

Much has been speculated about the details of the affair, which cannot be deduced from the context. It seems unlikely that the woman was the mother of the man, because she would not have been identified merely as “his father’s wife.” Some Bible scholars assume that the father of the man was still alive. They base their assumption on Paul’s remark in Second Corinthians: “So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are.”⁹⁷ But “the injured party” could also have been the woman if she were forced into the relationship against her will.

The kind of affair Paul describes here was evidently considered gross immorality even in Corinth where the standards of morality were proverbially lower than anywhere else in the Roman Empire. The Mosaic Law clearly forbade this. We read: “Do not have sexual relations with your father’s wife; that would dishonor your father.”⁹⁸ Adultery as such was a capital offence in Israel: “If a man is found sleeping with another man’s wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel.”⁹⁹ But even in the Roman world the case Paul mentions here was not tolerated. That is why Paul calls it “a kind that does not occur even among pagans.” *The Pulpit Commentary* notes: “Is not so much as named. The true reading is, *does not even exist*. This form of incest was, indeed, ‘named’ among the Gentiles, for it forms the basis of the story of Hippolytus, the scene of which was in the neighborhood of Corinth; but the feelings even of pagans were so shocked by it that Cicero alludes to such a crime in the

⁹⁵ See II Cor. 2:1-11.

⁹⁶ See I Cor. 1:11.

⁹⁷ See II Cor. 7:12.

⁹⁸ Lev. 18:8

⁹⁹ Deut. 22:22

words, ‘Oh, incredible wickedness, and except in this woman’s case — unheard of in all experience!’ ... At this very epoch Nero deepened the general execration against himself by the generally accepted suspicion that he had been guilty of a yet more flagrant crime.”

The word “proud” is the translation of the Greek word *phusioo*, which means literally “to inflate.” The KJV’s rendering “puffed up” is, therefore, closer to the original. Paul uses the word six times in this epistle. It is not necessary to assume, as some Bible scholars do, that the Corinthians were proud of this particular case of incest. They probably entertained such high and unrealistic notions of their own spirituality that they overlooked this “flaw.” Had they paid attention to their real condition, they would have been grieved and would have taken action. But although they must have been aware of this person’s immoral lifestyle, they treated him as a member of the church in good standing and full fellowship. We can be sure that Paul must have taught the leadership of the church how to proceed in cases that needed church discipline. This instance had gone beyond the stage in which one or two persons in the church confronted the offender about his sin. It was, obviously, a matter that had to be dealt with by the whole church, as Jesus prescribes in Matthew’s Gospel.¹⁰⁰

What Paul suggests seems to go beyond the rules of church discipline Jesus laid down. But Jesus did point in the direction of a spiritual authority that seems to have been lost in the churches that bear His Name in our day. We read in Matthew: “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”¹⁰¹ It may be good to observe here that the Greek text reads: “Amen, I say unto you...”

Grammatically, the Greek in verses 3-5 is difficult to analyze. *Young’s Literal Translation* renders the text: “for I indeed, as being absent as to the body, and present as to the spirit, have already judged, as being present, him who so wrought this thing: in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ -- ye being gathered together, also my spirit -- with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver up such a one to the Adversary for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

Leon Morris in *1 Corinthians* states: “Verses 3-5 are one long and difficult sentence in the Greek. The biggest problems arise from the fact that we can take *in the name of our Lord Jesus* and ‘with’ (which NIV omits) *the power of our Lord Jesus* with more than one part of the sentence. Conzelmann lists six possibilities and there are others. Here are seven possible views.

1. We could take ‘in the name’ with ‘when you are assembled’, and ‘with the power’ with ‘hand over’ (‘assembled in the name ... and hand over with the power ...’).
2. Both could go with ‘are assembled’ (‘assembled in the name and with the power’).
3. Both could go with ‘hand over’ (‘hand over in the name and with the power’).
4. Both could go with both.
5. ‘In the name’ could go with ‘hand over’ and ‘with the power’ with the participial clause ‘when you are assembled’ (‘when you are assembled with the power ... to hand over in the name ...’).
6. ‘In the name’ could go with ‘passed judgment’ and ‘with the power’ with ‘you are assembled’ (‘I have passed judgment in the name ... when you are assembled with the power ...’).
7. ‘In the name’ could go with ‘passed judgment’ and ‘with the power’ with ‘hand over’ (‘I have passed judgment in the name ... with the power you are to hand over ...’).

It is not possible to rule out any of these absolutely and we can only assume that with the knowledge the Corinthians had of Paul and of the situation they knew which to choose. We do not. On the whole I favor no. 5 on the grounds that the solemn formula *in the name* is more likely to go with the main verb to *hand over* than with the subordinate participle (‘being gathered together’), and that the reference to the power brings out the solemn nature of the assembly. It is not only a gathering of a few obscure Corinthians. The apostle is there in spirit and the Lord Jesus is there in power.”

Returning to Jesus’ words about the church’s power to bind and loosen, we observe that it is not God’s will that any person be lost for eternity. Peter writes: “[God] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”¹⁰² We conclude from this that the church does not have the power to send people to hell. The church’s power is to bind Satan and to loosen the human soul for salvation. We are not to engage in any form of black magic. To “hand this man over to Satan,” therefore, was for the purpose of having “his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” The Book of Job illustrates what is meant. Although in Job’s case God used Satan for Job’s sanctification, the real issue there was the eternal

¹⁰⁰ See Matt. 18:15-17.

¹⁰¹ Matt. 18:18

¹⁰² II Peter 3:9

controversy between God and Satan, more than the experience of Job, who served as a pawn in a cosmic chess game.

The NIV's rendering "so that the sinful nature may be destroyed" raises some questions. The Greek word in the New Testament *sarx* often has the meaning of sinful human nature, but it is also used for the human body as such. For instance, in the statement "The Word became 'flesh' and made his dwelling among us," it would be very inappropriate to give *sarx* the meaning of "sinful nature." We may safely assume that Paul's intent was that the offender would suffer physical affliction which would bring him to repent and call upon the Lord for forgiveness.

The question has been debated among Bible scholars whether the church at present has the kind of power Paul advocates here. Some think that since apostolic authority is obviously a thing of the past, the church cannot go beyond mere excommunication, which is cutting someone off from the fellowship and sacraments of the church. The incidents may be rare, but I believe that there are cases in which we may ask the Lord to allow sickness and bereavement in a person's life as a wakeup call for spiritual revival. It is still better to go to heaven with one eye only or one hand only than to go to hell in perfect physical condition.¹⁰³ In a similar case Paul mentions to Timothy, the effect was also meant to be positive, not negative. We read: "Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme."¹⁰⁴ If the object were perdition, Satan would teach the person to blaspheme, not to make him stop.

Paul's reference to the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread suggests that there was a segment of Jewish believers in the church of Corinth or that the church had adopted at least some of the Jewish celebrations. We may assume that there was more than familiarity with the Jewish calendar and that some of these rituals were actually practiced in the early church.

In using the image of baking bread Paul does more than borrow an illustration from the kitchen. Everyone who eats bread knows what yeast does to dough. But the removal of yeast at the time of Passover was a typical Jewish tradition. Sin resembles yeast in that it tends to penetrate everything and spreads. If corruption is not isolated, it infects what is healthy. The ritual removal of yeast at the eve of a Passover celebration is seen here as a symbol of church discipline.

Passover was a commemoration of Israel's exodus from Egypt. A lamb was slain and the blood of the lamb was applied to the doorposts of the house, protecting the family inside from the angel of death. This ceremony was fulfilled in the death of Jesus on the cross. But the Passover also signaled the beginning of a weeklong celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.¹⁰⁵

We note that, without any further explanation, Paul demonstrates that the Jewish Passover had been fulfilled in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. This elevates the Old Testament celebration to a level of significance it did not have before in its original setting. If Christ is the Passover lamb, then Egypt is symbolic of the slavery of sin and the exodus becomes a symbol of redemption for the whole human race. The blood of Jesus saves us from eternal death when it is applied to our lives. The death of Christ marked a once-for-all event, but the weeklong celebration symbolized a lifetime of purity on the basis of that sacrifice.

Without the killing of the lamb the removal of yeast would not make any sense; it is the death of Christ that makes the putting away of sin possible. This is true both in a private and in a corporate setting.

It is amazing to see how Paul, starting out from a terrible situation in the church comes to the celebration of a feast. By allowing sin to persist in their fellowship, the Corinthians had ceased to celebrate. The Christian life is meant to be a celebration. The Bible compares fellowship with Jesus Christ to a wedding. The bread we eat is "the bread of life,"¹⁰⁶ it is "every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."¹⁰⁷

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "Leaven is the type of hypocrisy (...Luke 12:1) in its secret workings, but more generally it is a type of every corrupting influence. **Of sincerity and truth.** 'All that corresponds to an unsullied, uncontaminated, and genuine Christian character.' The beautiful Greek word for 'sincerity' means freedom from all admixture. It is, perhaps, derived from "testing in the sunshine," and is used by St. Paul in ... 2 Corinthians 1:12; 2:17. 'Truth' means 'reality.' "

¹⁰³ See Matt. 5:29,30.

¹⁰⁴ I Tim. 1:19,20

¹⁰⁵ See Ex. 12:15-20.

¹⁰⁶ John 6:36

¹⁰⁷ Deut. 8:3

B. Separate Yourselves from Immoral Believers 5:9-13

**9 I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-
10 not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.**

11 But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

12 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?

13 God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

The words "I have written you in my letter" have evoked different interpretations among Bible scholars. *Barnes' Notes* comments: "There has been considerable diversity of opinion in regard to this expression. A large number of commentators as Chrysostom, Theodoret, Oecumenius, most of the Latin commentators, and nearly all the Dutch commentators suppose that this refers to the same Epistle (our 1 Corinthians), and that the apostle means to say that in the former part of this Epistle (1 Cor 5:2) he had given them this direction. ... Many others-as Grotius, Doddridge, Rosenmuller, etc. -suppose it to refer to some other epistle which is now lost, and which had been sent to them before their messengers had reached him. This Epistle might have been very brief, and might have contained little more than this direction."

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary adds: "That Paul does not refer to the present letter is clear, as no direction 'not to company with fornicators' occurs in the previous part; also the words, 'in the letter,' could not have been added if he meant, 'I have just written' (2 Cor 10:10). 'His letters' (plural) confirm this. 2 Cor 7:8 uses the same phrase, in referring to our first letter, as here is used in referring to a former one. It probably was a brief reply to inquiries of the Corinthians. Our first letter, as it enters more fully into the same subject, has superseded the former, which the Holy Spirit did not design for the Church in general."

In the admonition "not to associate with sexually immoral people" the Greek verb used is *sunanamignumi*, meaning literally: "to mix up together." This verb is only found in the New Testament in this epistle and in II Thessalonians, where we read: "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother."¹⁰⁸ *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on this: "The thought is that of familiar fellowship. The apostle knew that some fellowship with the world must take place in the daily pursuits of life. However, the brother under discipline was to be denied fellowship, and particularly were the believers not to eat with such an one, the most obvious act of fellowship."

The words "Are you not to judge those inside?" are meant to be a statement, not a question. To put statements in the form of a question was a typical Jewish style of speech. Paul does not advocate a judgmental spirit among Christians but a watchful mentality to preserve the purity of Christian fellowship.

Christians tend to spend a lot of time complaining about the corruption of the world outside. It is a waste of time and energy to do this. If Satan is the prince of this world, what do we expect the world to be like? It is more important, in James' words "to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."¹⁰⁹ *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "The phrase 'them that are without' was originally a Jewish phrase. To the Jews all men were outsiders (*chitsonin*) except themselves. The phrase was adopted by Christians, but in a less contemptuous sense (... 1 Thessalonians 4:12; ... Colossians 4:5). We find a description of 'those that were without'—'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise'—in ... Ephesians 2:12."

The words "Expel the wicked man from among you" are between quotation marks because they are a literal quotation from the Pentateuch: "You must purge the evil from among you."¹¹⁰ Evidently, Paul considered the church in Corinth to be sufficiently familiar with the Law of Moses to quote from it without any further explanation.

II. Concerning Litigation Between Believers

6:1-11

¹⁰⁸ II Thess. 3:14,15

¹⁰⁹ James 1:27

¹¹⁰ See Deut. 17:7; 24:7.

1 If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?

2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?

3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!

4 Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church!

5 I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?

6 But instead, one brother goes to law against another-and this in front of unbelievers!

7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?

8 Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.

9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders

10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Paul had probably received report about disputes among church members from the same source as the other information; the members of Chloe's household must have told him.¹¹¹ No specifics are given here as in the matter of the party spirit or the case of sexual immorality. The church of Corinth was not a fellowship of believers as the one David sang about: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"¹¹² This lack of mutual love in the church must not have been unusual in churches that mainly consisted of converts from paganism. Paul had to write to the church in Galatia also: "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."¹¹³

The first damaging side effect of internal strife in the church is in the church's testimony to the outside world. If the church fails to demonstrate the love of Christ in the love the members have for one another, she defeats the purpose of being a church. Jesus expressed this in His prayer for His disciples: "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."¹¹⁴ The church should never hang its dirty laundry on the line for the world to see.

The first conclusion that can be drawn from Paul's remarks is that the church is not a fellowship of perfect people, people who are always in agreement with each other and who do everything out of pure and unselfish motives. Disputes are always fought between people who have a sinful nature.

The second conclusion is that people who fight with each other have lost the vision of who they are in Jesus Christ. It is on this point that Paul tackles the problem and shows the way out of the predicament. Paul introduces the solution with a series of the question "Do you not know?" which we find six times in this chapter alone.¹¹⁵ The first question is: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?"; the second: "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" People, who allow themselves to get involved in disputes with fellow believers about things that belong in a courtroom, have forgotten their position before God. This amazing conclusion deserves a closer look. We find the first suggestion of this truth in the Book of Psalms. "Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous."¹¹⁶ Another instance is in one of Asaph's Psalms, where God addresses judges on earth with "gods." We read: "I said, 'You are 'gods'; you are all sons of the Most High.' But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other ruler."¹¹⁷

Paul's words have caused an avalanche of interpretations throughout the ages in which Bible commentaries have been written. The only point of agreement among Bible scholars so far has been that

¹¹¹ See I Cor. 1:11.

¹¹² Ps. 133:1

¹¹³ Gal. 5:15

¹¹⁴ John 17:23

¹¹⁵ See verses 2,3, 9,15,16,19.

¹¹⁶ Ps. 1:5

¹¹⁷ Ps. 82:6,7

Paul uses some rather strong language in these verses. The words “dare you” are the translation of the Greek verb *tolmao*, meaning “boldness” and referring to an extreme conduct. Stephen used the word in his defense, describing Moses’ reaction at the burning bush, when God said: “ ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not *dare* to look.’ ”¹¹⁸

The common Greek term for “judge” is *dikastes*, a word derived from *dikè*, meaning “just.” Paul calls them *adikos*, meaning “unjust.” This does not speak well of the judicial system in Corinth, or maybe in the Roman world in general. Corruption among judges must have been widespread in spite of the famous Rex Romana.

The question that divides the Bible scholars, however, is what Paul means with “you are to judge the world” and “we will judge angels.” Some believe it means that Christians will take their places on the benches and infiltrate the judicial system of this present world. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, for instance states: “A time shall come when Christianity shall so far prevail that the civil government of the world shall be administered by Christians, which, at that time, was administered by heathens. And this is even now true of all those parts of the earth which may be considered of the greatest political consequence. They profess Christianity, and the kings and other governors are Christians in this general sense of the term.” If Adam Clarke were alive today, he would probably change his mind on the subject.

To limit the application of Paul’s words to the present dispensation does not lead to any satisfactory solutions, especially since in the same breath the apostle speaks about judging angels. Jesus said to His disciples: “I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”¹¹⁹ That speaks obviously to more than anything the apostles experienced during their life on earth, and it does not have to be restricted to the physical nation of Israel.

The most amazing part of Paul’s words turns out to be the question “Do you not know?” The apostle seems to assume that what he says ought to be common knowledge. If it was to the Corinthians, it surely is not to us today! The general conclusion seems to be that God will involve us on the Day of Judgment and that we will be involved in the formulation of the final sentence. John may have seen some of this principle in his visions in Revelation, when he recorded: “After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.’ ”¹²⁰ The great multitude in heaven seems to cast their vote with God’s sentence.

The general conclusion we may draw from all this is that God has in store for us tasks and responsibilities in comparison with which what we have done on earth must seem like child’s play. Jesus seems to imply that there will be more important responsibilities awaiting us in the hereafter than we handled on earth. In His remarks at the conclusion of the parable of the crooked administrator, we read: “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?”¹²¹

Our being involved in judgment over angels will probably mainly involve the fallen ones. We assume that this means that we will be called upon to pronounce a judgment over Satan himself, the cause of all suffering in the universe. An image of what this will be like is the case of the Nazi war criminal, Eichman, Hitler’s hatchet man for the carrying out of the “Final Solution,” the extermination of the Jews in Europe. After the Second World War, the Israeli Secret Service hunted down this man in Argentina and brought him to justice in Jerusalem, where he was tried and executed. The trial of Satan will be the greatest “Eichman Process” this universe will ever have known and we, as God’s children, will be the prosecutor, the judge, and the jury in it.

Paul’s remarks about judging the world and judging angels lead to the point that Christians should be qualified to mediate in internal disputes in the church. The matter was not merely that taking quarrels to a heathen court would be a poor testimony for the Gospel, but that taking a brother in Christ to court evinced a lack of brotherly love. Leon Morris, in his *1 Corinthians Commentary*, comments on this: “To go

¹¹⁸ Acts 7:32

¹¹⁹ Luke 22:29,30

¹²⁰ Rev. 19:1,2

¹²¹ Luke 16:10-12

to law with a brother is a defeat in itself, whatever the outcome of the legal process. ... The gaining of the verdict matters little. The cause is already lost when a Christian institutes a lawsuit. The injurious effects are implied in the expression 'among yourselves'; the injury is to the body of Christ, not to outsiders. More biting questions drive home the point that a real victory might be obtained rather by choosing to *be wronged*, to *be cheated*. Jesus taught his followers to turn the other cheek, and, when sued at law for their tunic, to yield up their cloak as well (Mt. 5:39-40), and he set them an example (1 Pet. 2:23). But the Corinthians were far from basic Christian principles. Indeed, they were far behind the best Greek thought, for Plato can say that it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong." Trying to settle arguments with fellow believers outside the church or inside, evinces a spirit of self-vindication, which is contrary to the Spirit of Christ.

It seems that Paul takes a major leap from this subject of litigations to sexual immorality, idolatry, and other forms of sin. We tend to differentiate between major moral failures and smaller sins. The apostle seems to suggest that smaller sins will lead to bigger ones. What does someone who, for instance, wants to retrieve money loaned to a brother, have in common with a prostitute, a homosexual, or an alcoholic? We feel that Paul commits an injustice in lumping them all together. The common factor is that all fall under the heading of "the wicked." And wickedness, whether it demonstrates itself in the form of greed or sexual immorality, forms a major obstacle to the entrance into the Kingdom of God. Self-vindication is, after all, a form of greed.

The point, however, is not the sins committed before conversion, but the fact that the application of the death of Christ to our life marks a watershed. Gross sexual immorality, dishonesty, and self-vindication belong to the life before the blood of Christ was applied. Whatever we may have been before our encounter with Jesus, we have been washed, we have been sanctified, we have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. As in the other instances in which Paul put his finger on the problems that were tearing the church in Corinth apart, he makes a clear presentation of the victory in Jesus Christ. The solution to every problem in the church and in our individual life is in the realization of what we are in Jesus Christ.

III. Warning Against Sexual Immorality

6:12-20

12 "Everything is permissible for me"-but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"-but I will not be mastered by anything.

13 "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"-but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

14 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!

16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh."

17 But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;

20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

In this section, as in the previous one, Paul repeats the question "Do you not know?" We find it three times in these verses.¹²² The academic question implies that the answer ought to be positive; we do know that our bodies are members of Christ, we do know that prostitution is sin, and we do know that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, or do we?

The way the NIV puts the three statements between quotation marks suggests that they are not Paul's own words, or that they are Paul's words, quoted back to him. In a sense, Paul may have been reaping here the fruits of his own teaching about Christian liberty. This does not mean that Paul had been wrong in what he taught the new believers in Corinth, but they, evidently, applied it in a wrong way.

¹²² See I Cor. 6:15,16,19.

Liberty is an integral part of human dignity. But liberty can easily turn back into slavery if it doesn't obey the rules. A fish is free in the water; outside of it, it dies. The human soul is free if it stays within the boundaries God has set for it; outside of those it is enslaved by sin. As the human body cannot stay alive on another planet, so the human soul cannot live outside God. That is the reason democracy only works when people have been made good by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If this is not the case, democracy always turns into abuse of power. In the words of George Orwell: "All animals are created equal, but some are more equal than others."¹²³

Paul uses two important Greek words to mark the boundaries of Christian liberty: *exestin* and *sumphero*. "Permissible" seems to be a rather weak translation of the first. The rendering "lawful," which the KJV uses, is better. We find it in the story of the disciples' picking ears of grain on the Sabbath. "At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, 'Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.'"¹²⁴ "Beneficial" is a good word for the Greek *sumphero*. It appears in Jesus' words: "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell."¹²⁵

The Corinthians had grown up in a world in which sexual immorality was part of religion. Prostitution was an element of pagan temple worship. Now, it is true that sexuality is a physical expression of a spiritual reality. Paul explains this in his Epistle to the Ephesians, where speaking about sexual relations between husband and wife, he states: " 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery-but I am talking about Christ and the church."¹²⁶ In idol worship Satan had turned this "profound mystery" into a caricature of God's plan for human relations. We can, however, understand why it was so difficult for the Corinthian converts to rid themselves of this wrong image. Since the synagogue and the Christian worship service did not provide the services that the idol temple provided, the Corinthian thought nothing of it to go outside the church to prostitutes.

The statement " 'Food for the stomach and the stomach for food' -but God will destroy them both" leads to the discussion about eating food sacrificed to idols in Chapter Eight. In the rest of this chapter Paul concentrates on the subject of sexual immorality.

The reference to food and the stomach, however, also turns the focus to other bodily functions. When Paul states that God will destroy both, he doesn't downplay the role of the human body in God's plan of salvation; as a matter of fact, he highlights it. In Paul's theology the body plays a much more important role than in the thinking of most Christians of our time. In his Epistle to the Romans he makes the amazing statement: "We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved."¹²⁷ The finalization of our salvation will depend on the condition of our body. God's plan for us is not only to save our souls but to save us as whole human beings. It is the fact that our bodies will pass through the resurrection that ought to determine what we do with them in the mortal stage of our life. Since our sexuality is designed to express the spiritual reality of our union with Christ, we must not defile it by using it for self-gratification.

The essence of sin is the enjoyment of something outside fellowship with God. Moses depicts this perfectly in the way Eve reacted to Satan's suggestion: "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it."¹²⁸ God was not in the picture she saw.

Paul commands us to "Flee from sexual immorality." He doesn't suggest that we resist sexual temptations. Knowing the strength of that kind of lure, Jesus says: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than

¹²³ From George Orwell, *Animal Farm*.

¹²⁴ Matt. 12:1,2

¹²⁵ Matt. 5:29

¹²⁶ Eph. 5:31,32

¹²⁷ Rom. 8:23,24

¹²⁸ Gen. 3:6

for your whole body to go into hell.”¹²⁹ *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on the words “Flee from sexual immorality”: “In the battle against sensual sins, there is no victory except in absolute flight, for the reason which immediately follows, namely, that these sins have their dwelling in that body which is part of our being, and which yet they tend to destroy. They make a man his own deadliest enemy.”

The apostle brings again a glorious solution to an ugly problem by reminding us of the fact what the purpose of our physical bodies is to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. Temples are supposed to glorify God. The last “Do you not know” in this chapter serves to remind us that the only way we can know is if we have made a clear act of surrender of our body for the purpose for which God has created us. In Romans Paul showed us how to do this. We read: “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”¹³⁰

Part Three: In Answer to the Letter of Questions

(7:1--16:24)

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|-------|
| I. | Counsel Concerning Marriage | 7 |
| A. | Principles for Married Life | 7:1-9 |

1 Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry.

2 But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

3 The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.

4 The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.

5 Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

6 I say this as a concession, not as a command.

7 I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

8 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am.

9 But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

This chapter begins the second part of this epistle in which Paul answers questions that had been asked him in a letter some of the members of the church in Corinth had sent him. Thus far the apostle had reacted upon information he had received orally, mainly from members of Chloe's household.¹³¹ There seem to have been six questions to which Paul responds with the introductory words “Now for the matters...” The first question is about marriage (7:1), the second about virginity (7:25), the third about food offered to idols (8:1), the fourth about spiritual gifts (12:1), the fifth about an offering taken up for the church in Jerusalem (16:1), and the sixth about Apollos (16:12).

Particularly in regard to the matters of marriage and virginity, it is important to place the questions and answers in the context of the Corinthian church, the moral conditions prevalent in the Roman Empire, and the widespread expectation of Christ's imminent return.

The Greek text rendered in the NIV “It is good for a man not to marry” reads literally: “[It is] good for a man not to touch a woman.” The Greek word for “good” here is *kalos*, which is not the word that expresses “good” as opposite to “bad.” Paul doesn't use the expected word *agathon*. *Kalos* is “good in the sense of virtuous.”

In looking at this passage, we must bear in mind that the Corinthian converts had come from a religious background where prostitution was part of pagan worship. Their association with idol worship had tainted their sexual experience. Very few of the adult men came to Christ as virgins.

We must remember, when looking at his Scripture portion, that Paul limits his observations to the sexual aspect of marriage. To treat the apostle's words as if they were an exhaustive treatise of the

¹²⁹ Matt. 5:27-30

¹³⁰ Rom. 6:13,14

¹³¹ See I Cor. 1:11.

relationship between husband and wife would do grave injustice to the overall biblical teaching on the subject. A most obvious fact of creation is that God created the sexes and then said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”¹³² Sexual relations are an essential part of marriage but they are not the only part. A marriage relation that is exclusively built on sex is like a house built on sand.

In his Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul expresses more fully the true meaning of marriage: “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”¹³³

The fact that most married couples are probably unaware of the “profound mystery” they express in the totality of their relationship doesn’t invalidate the truth that marriage is an emotional and physical expression of a spiritual reality. In stating: “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral,” the Bible declares marriage to be a “holy matrimony.” The Song of Songs is proof of the fact that *eros* is just as much part of God’s creation as is *agape*.

Throughout the ages, the fact that there is in human sexuality an “animal instinct” that makes lust difficult to control has led many to the wrong conclusion that sex is at best “a necessary evil.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments on this: “The question concerning the expediency or in expediency of marriage was often agitated among the ancient philosophers; and many, though inclined to decide against it, because of the troubles and cares connected with it, tolerated it in their opinions; because, though an evil, it was judged to be a necessary evil. The words of Menander¹³⁴ are full to this effect: ... ‘If a man consider marriage in a proper point of view, it is an evil; but then it is a necessary evil.’ Metellus Numidicus¹³⁵ spoke of it nearly in the same way. ... ‘If, O ye Romans, we could live unmarried, we should be saved from a great deal of trouble; but, seeing that nature has so ordered it that we cannot live very comfortably with wives, and without them cannot live at all, marriage should be adopted, not for the sake of the short-lived pleasure, but rather for perpetual safety.’ But this was not the common opinion; the Jews absolutely required that every man should marry, and reputed those as murderers who did not. ... By the laws of Lycurgus¹³⁶ unmarried persons were prohibited from seeing the public games. By the laws of the Spartans bachelors were punished. And Plato declares all such unworthy of any honor. And to this the commentator says, Amen.”

It is true that Jesus allows a place for celibacy. In answer to the disciples’ remark that it might be better not to marry, Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”¹³⁷ The Roman Catholic view on sex, marriage, and celibacy is, in my opinion, based on a wrong interpretation of these verses.

Returning to the opening words of this chapter, we observe that the Greek text doesn’t state literally that celibacy is preferable to marriage. We saw that the literal meaning of Paul’s words is: “[It is] good for a man not to touch a woman.” This could be interpreted to mean that abstinence from sexual relations in a marriage is not in itself a bad thing. Mahatma Gandhi decided to abstain from sex in his marriage as a means of self-discipline. The great Russian writer, Leo Tolstoy, propagated abstinence in

¹³² Gen. 2:18

¹³³ Eph. 5:22-33

¹³⁴ Greek poet, 342-291 B.C.

¹³⁵ Roman consul, 63 B.C.

¹³⁶ Spartan lawgiver 9th century B.C.

¹³⁷ See Matt. 19:10-12.

marriage. His conclusions were based on the wrong concept that sex lowers a human being to the level of an animal. This theory comes through in several of the great man's writings, particularly in his book *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

If our assumption is correct, we may assume that the Corinthians wrote Paul that there were people in their fellowship who took "Gandhi's position" (to use an anachronism) and Paul cautions them against the consequences, saying that it is not bad, but people who do so must be sure that they have the gift to persevere.

The following sentence then would be a warning not to underestimate the strength of sexual desire, which could easily lead to sexual immorality. The Book of Proverbs issues a similar warning in beautiful poetical language: "Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth."¹³⁸

Paul's advice is for married couples to have regular sexual intercourse, with only limited periods of abstinence for the fulfillment of special vows or prayers. Luther endorsed Paul's statement by saying that the only way to lead a sexually pure life is by being happily married.

Paul's statement in vs. 7 that God had given him the gift of abstinence does not mean that the apostle was never married. It is obvious from his statement later on in this epistle, that Paul was not married when he wrote this epistle.¹³⁹ But Bible scholars agree in general that it would have been very unusual, if not impossible for Paul to have been a member of the Sanhedrin without being married. Paul, therefore, must have been either a widower or his wife may have left him after his conversion.

Paul's previous marital status also seems implied in the advice he gives in vs. 8 "to the unmarried and the widows." It is logical to assume that "the unmarried" refers to widowers, as they are set next to "the widows." This would give to the words "as I am" the meaning of Paul himself being a widower.

The NIV's rendering of vs. 9: "it is better to marry than to burn with passion" goes actually beyond what the Greek text literally says. Paul uses the Greek word *purōo*, which has a wider meaning than "to be inflamed with lust." In Second Corinthians, for instance, we find the same word in the sentence: "Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?"¹⁴⁰ *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments: "Dr. Pearce translates the original thus: For it is better to marry than to be made uneasy. *Purousthai* ... says he, 'signifies primarily to burn, but in a metaphorical sense, to be troubled, vexed, or made uneasy.'"

All of what Paul says in this chapter must be seen against the background of the position of Christians in the Roman Empire. Persecution may not have flamed up in full force yet when Paul wrote this epistle, but the apostle recognized the beginnings of the horror that would drive the church underground for centuries and claim the lives of thousands of martyrs. Also the vivid expectation of Christ's imminent return gave an urgency to Paul's advice that may be difficult for us to understand, living two millennia later. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes correctly: "Theoretically, St. Paul inclines to the ascetic view, not in the abstract, but in view of the near advent of Christ, and of the cares, distractions, and even trials which marriage involved in days of struggle and persecution."

B. Principles for the Married Believer

7:10-16

10 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband.

11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

12 To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her.

13 And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.

¹³⁸ Prov. 5:15-18

¹³⁹ See I Cor. 9:5.

¹⁴⁰ II Cor. 11:29

14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.

16 How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

There is a clear biblical injunction against divorce. In answer to the Pharisees' question about the legality of a divorce, Jesus stated: "Haven't you read ... that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."¹⁴¹ And in Malachi we read: "'I hate divorce,' says the LORD God of Israel, 'and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,' says the LORD Almighty."¹⁴² The obvious general implication is that divorce ought not to be an option for married couples. It is against God's intention and against His will.

Paul uses two different Greek words to describe the action of the two married partners: for the wife he uses the verb *chorizo*, which means literally "to place room between," or "to go away." For the husband's action he uses the verb *aphiemi*, meaning, "to send away." The difference between the two verbs reveals the status either had before the law.

From the following verses, which deal with marriage in which the spouses do not share the same faith in Christ, we deduct that Paul in the Verses 10 and 11 addresses Christian couples. For those couples the only legal ground for a divorce would be marital infidelity.¹⁴³

In Verses 10-16 Paul addresses couples of which one of the spouses had become a Christian and the other not. We may assume that both spouses were unbelievers when they married. In Second Corinthians Paul writes: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?"¹⁴⁴ This is usually interpreted as pertaining to a marriage relationship. The conversion of one of the partners, therefore, supposedly took place after the marriage had been engaged upon. Paul voices as his personal opinion "(I, not the Lord)" that the lack of a shared faith in Christ could provide a reason for divorce.

It is good again to remember the cultural and spiritual background of the people to whom the apostle wrote these words. Being an unbeliever in Corinth at that time meant participation in the idol temple ceremonies, which included immoral sexual rites. We can imagine the hardship such a kind of practice would impose upon the Christian partner of the married couple. But, as in the case of marital infidelity not related to pagan worship, divorce is not an obligation but an option. Continuation of the marital relationship depends on the consent of both partners.

The main reason Paul gives for such a continuation is one that causes a problem in our understanding. He states that the unbelieving partner is "sanctified" by the relationship to Christ of the other one. The Greek word used is *hagiazō*, "to make holy," or "to consecrate." The obvious meaning is not that the unbelieving spouse becomes holy in the moral sense of the word. "Holy" has the original meaning of "being set apart" which is the way in which it must be taken here.

There are at least half a dozen interpretations given by Bible scholars regarding the meaning of Paul's *hagiazō*. *Barnes' Notes* helpfully observes: "It is a good rule of interpretation, that the words which are used in any place are to be limited in their signification by the connection; and all that we are required to understand here is, that the unbelieving husband was sanctified 'in regard to the subject under discussion;' that is, in regard to the question whether it was proper for them to live together, or whether they should be separated or not. And the sense may be, 'They are by the marriage tie one flesh. They are indissolubly united by the ordinance of God. As they are one by his appointment, as they have received his sanction to the marriage union, and as one of them is holy, so the other is to be regarded as sanctified, or made so holy by the divine sanction to the union, that it is proper for them to live together in the marriage

¹⁴¹ Matt. 19:4-6

¹⁴² Mal. 2:16

¹⁴³ See Matt. 9:9.

¹⁴⁴ II Cor. 6:14,15

relation.’ And in proof of this, Paul says if it were NOT so, if the connection was to be regarded as impure and abominable, then their children were to be esteemed as illegitimate and unclean. But now they were NOT so regarded, and COULD not so be; and hence, it followed that they might lawfully continue together.”

The Jewish Christian had grown up with the Old Testament injunction not to marry a pagan. That was part of the Jewish heritage, dating from the time of the conquest of Canaan. God had warned them against fraternizing with the Canaanites and told them: “Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.”¹⁴⁵ But that command only partly applied to the conditions of the church in Corinth. If Jews had married pagan partners before turning to Christ, they had obviously transgressed this command. And marriage between two pagans did not fall under these restrictions.

A quotation in *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* throws an interesting light upon the question about the children being “unclean” or “holy.” We copy: “If we consider the apostle as speaking of the children of pagans, we shall get a remarkable comment on this passage from Tertullian, who, in his treatise *De Carne Christi*, chapters 37,39, gives us a melancholy account of the height to which superstition and idolatry had arrived in his time among the Romans. ‘A child,’ says he, ‘from its very conception, was dedicated to the idols and demons they worshipped. While pregnant, the mother had her body swathed round with bandages, prepared with idolatrous rites. The embryo they conceived to be under the inspection of the goddess Alemona, who nourished it in the womb. Nona and Decima took care that it should be born in the ninth or tenth month. Partula adjusted everything relative to the labor; and Lucina ushered it into the light. During the week preceding the birth a table was spread for Juno; and on the last day certain persons were called together to mark the moment on which the Parcae, or Fates, had fixed its destiny. The first step the child set on the earth was consecrated to the goddess Statina; and, finally, some of the hair was cut off, or the whole head shaven, and the hair offered to some god or goddess through some public or private motive of devotion.’ He adds that ‘no child among the pagans was born in a state of purity; and it is not to be wondered at,’ says he, ‘that demons possess them from their youth, seeing they were thus early dedicated to their service.’ In reference to this, he thinks, Paul speaks in the verse before us: The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife—else were your children unclean; but now are they holy; i.e. ‘As the parents were converted to the Christian faith, the child comes into the world without these impure and unhallowed rites; and is from its infancy consecrated to the true God.’ ”

From Paul’s question, “How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?” we conclude that in mentioning this subject in the letter sent to the apostle, the writers had stated the reason some of “unequally yoked” partners gave for staying together with their unbelieving spouse.

These words are preceded by “if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.” The verb “leaves” here is *chorizo*, which is the verb Paul used earlier for the wife’s leaving or “making room.” The suggestion, therefore, is that when the unbelieving partner left, the Christian would make persistent efforts to bring him or her back into the relationship, in an effort to cause a conversion. What Paul seems to suggest is that if these efforts do not bring about peace in the family but turn into a constant condition of upheaval, it would be better to make the separation permanent. “God has called us to live in peace.”

This seems to go against Peter’s advice to women who have unbelieving husbands: “Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.”¹⁴⁶ We may say that Peter refers to the first effort that any woman ought to make, who found the Lord after having been married. To separate from an unbelieving husband without making any efforts to win him to Christ, would be a blatant sin. But Paul speaks about a condition where this effort had been made, where the wife’s efforts had ended in marital discord and upheaval, which caused the other unbelieving party to leave. His advice is, that if he or she leaves, let them leave. Only God knows the consequences.

The NIV’s rendering of vs. 16: “How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?” seems to fit better into the whole argument, meaning that separation should not be opposed indefinitely because salvation is uncertain. The

¹⁴⁵ Deut. 7:3,4

¹⁴⁶ I Pet. 3:1,2

Greek text, however, is more ambiguous. Instead of “How do you know?” it reads: “What do you know?” In modern English this would suggest the likelihood of conversion. It is difficult to determine what Paul actually had in mind, whether separation should be allowed or opposed.

C. Principle of Abiding in God’s Call

7:17-24

17 Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.

18 Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised.

19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts.

20 Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him.

21 Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so.

22 For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ’s slave.

23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

24 Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.

Although this is not specifically mentioned, we may assume that Paul’s advice in these verses is also in response to questions asked in the letter the Corinthians had sent.

Though we find in this section a transition to a new subject, some of the principles evinced here must still be applied to the previous topic. Both in the matter of marriage to an unbelieving partner as well as in being circumcised or not, being a slave or being a freeman, it is a given that God is involved in the timing of the call as well as in the call itself.

David Prior, in *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, states: “Circumcision and slavery represented the two most divisive phenomena in the world of the New Testament. Circumcision constituted the greatest religious barrier, slavery the biggest social barrier. In each case, Paul is bold enough to assert, the salvation of God in Christ has rendered them null and void.”

We must first take a closer look at the word “call.” Paul uses it here in the context of salvation. Our response to the call must be taken into consideration. God’s call is a general call for volunteers as is exemplified in Isaiah’s call. It was after the prophet’s conviction of sin in the confrontation with God’s holiness, and after his experience of being made pure by the touch of the coal of the altar upon his lips that we read: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”¹⁴⁷ It is true that Isaiah’s call was for service, not for salvation but the principle remains that we all have the power to resist. Obedience is never forced upon us.

Leon Morris in *1 Corinthians*, writes: “Barrett points out that throughout this paragraph Paul ‘is not thinking primarily of a vocation *to* which a man is called, but of the condition *in* which a man is when the converting call of God comes to him’.”

Paul does of course not suggest that no changes will take place our lives when we are saved. Becoming a new creation always means that “the old has gone, the new has come.”¹⁴⁸ There are changes we will make ourselves and there are some that God will make for us. A person who used to make a living of immoral or illegal activities will certainly want to change his or her lifestyle after having experienced the grace of God. When Paul speaks about “the place in life that the Lord assigned to him” he has certain specific conditions in mind. Most of these conditions pertain to the circumstances in which we are born in this world. The first one Paul refers to as being circumcised or uncircumcised stands for being born as a Jew or as a Gentile. No one has any choice in these matters.

What makes Paul bring up the matter of circumcision first is the controversy that threatened the unity of the church at that time. The Judaists insisted, “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”¹⁴⁹ This meant that in order to be saved Gentiles first would have to become Jews by submitting to the rite of circumcision. The council of Jerusalem vetoed this. That may have led some Messianic Jews to have their circumcision reversed. For them Paul states that it would be as

¹⁴⁷ Isa. 6:8

¹⁴⁸ See II Cor. 5:17.

¹⁴⁹ Acts 15:1

legalistic to try to become uncircumcised for a Jew as it would for a Gentile to submit to circumcision. Our salvation does not hinge on our performance of rites.

Some Jewish believers had taken the statement by the Jerusalem Council so seriously that they considered undoing their circumcision. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: “The Hellenist Jews in the days of the priest Menelaus (1 Macc. 1:15; Josephus, ‘Ant.,’ 12:5, 1) had discovered a process for obliterating the appearance of circumcision; such persons were known as *masochim*. St. Paul does not permit the adoption of this course.”

“Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing” must have sounded like the most revolutionary statement any Jew could make. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant God had made with Abraham and the people of Israel. God Himself had said to Abraham: “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner--those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”¹⁵⁰ For a Jew, not to be circumcised meant not to be a Jew.

Paul’s statement here and also in his Epistle to the Galatians indicates how radical was the change that conversion to the Gospel of Christ produced. In Galatians, we read: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love,” and “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.”¹⁵¹

The matter of slavery belongs, of course, to a completely different category. Satan invented slavery. Although Paul does not state this openly, there is a strong suggestion in his words that slavery and the Gospel message are incompatible. About circumcision he had said not to do anything about it, but to the slaves he says: “if you can gain your freedom, do so.”

The indignity of slavery is implied in the words “he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman.” It is testimony to the hardness of heart of the human race in general and of the white race in particular that it took eighteen centuries of Gospel influence before abolition became a fact. The fact that slave owners and slave handlers often based their philosophy about slavery upon the Bible testifies to the corruption of the human heart.

Not all slavery was the same. Slavery among the Jews often was a means of solving financial problems. A person could sell himself as a way to get out of bankruptcy. It was often voluntary. Most slavery among Jews consisted in the use of foreigners or war captives. Among other nations, as in the Roman Empire in Paul’s days, slavery was a widespread and often very cruel institution. Writing to Christians in Corinth it was, obviously, the slavery as practiced in the Roman Empire that Paul had in mind.

In the early Christian church, the only kind of slavery that was taken into consideration was the slavery to Christ. In the New Testament everyone who had received forgiveness of sin through the death of Jesus Christ was considered to be a slave of Christ. This still ought to be the case at present. By His death Christ has freed us from the ultimate slavery, which is slavery to sin. In the words of the author of Hebrews: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”¹⁵² God does not keep slaves but we do well to consider ourselves His slaves in the practice of perfect obedience.

The main reason Paul does not propagate abolition of slavery was the matter of the testimony of the Gospel. Preaching against slavery in the days of the early church would have closed the door to the preaching of the message of salvation throughout the whole Roman Empire. Paul states that a slave ought to have a better understanding of what it means to serve God than a freeman does. He can apply simply the limitations of slavery to his relationship with God. For a free person surrender to the will of God takes a deeper and more conscious act of surrender than it would for a slave who is used to unquestioning obedience in everyday life.

The beautiful statement: “he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ’s slave” compasses both the freedom and the bondage of the Gospel. The Gospel message meant spiritual liberation to those who were in physical slavery. The plight of

¹⁵⁰ Gen. 17:11-14

¹⁵¹ See Gal. 5:6; 6:15.

¹⁵² Heb. 2:14,15

the imported African slaves in the Americas gives a striking example of this. The fact that such a large number of slaves accepted the Christian religion of their masters is, at the same time, a severe indictment to the slave owners and a demonstration of the supernatural qualities of the message. Many slaves understood better what the Gospel of Jesus Christ was about than the ones who preached it to them.

The greatest danger of slavery is the inner emotional bondage it produces. In saying: “You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men,” Paul warns against the slave mentality that slavery might induce. We can be slaves as far as our social status in life is concerned and liberated by our relationship with Jesus Christ. It is also possible to be socially free and yet enslaved to the will of others. The price of Jesus’ blood makes us all into slaves and sets us all free!

D. Principles for the Unmarried

7:25-38

25 *Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy.*

26 *Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are.*

27 *Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife.*

28 *But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.*

29 *What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none;*

30 *those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep;*

31 *those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.*

32 *I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs-how he can please the Lord.*

33 *But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world-how he can please his wife-*

34 *and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world-how she can please her husband.*

35 *I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.*

36 *If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married.*

37 *But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin-this man also does the right thing.*

38 *So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better.*

This section obviously contains another answer to a question the Corinthians had brought up in their letter to Paul. The apostle introduces his answer with the words “Now about...” The Greek word *parthenos*, “virgin,” applies usually to the female sex; only in Revelation, the word is obviously used for both sexes: “These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins.”¹⁵³

For a clear understanding of this passage, we must keep it within the framework of Paul’s two statements “because of the present crisis” in Verse 26 and “the time is short” in verse 29. *Barnes’ Notes* comments: “If the Epistle was written about 59 A.D. ... it was in the time of Nero; and probably he had already begun to oppress and persecute Christians. At all events, it is evident that the Christians at Corinth were subject to some trials which rendered the cares of the marriage life undesirable.” Persecution may already have begun to threaten the very fiber of family life.

Having lived, as a young man, through Nazi occupation during the Second World War, many scenes come to mind of suffering that affected family relations. I think of the young man who was going to marry the daughter of our pastor. He had been in hiding from the German police to avoid being dragged to Germany to work in ammunition factories. The Nazi police came to search the house where he was hiding.

¹⁵³ See Rev. 14:4 – NKJV.

He tried to escape by jumping from the attic window to the balcony and from there into the back garden to make his escape. Landing on the balcony railing, he slipped and fell to the ground floor to his death. His fiancée never married. My own father spent six weeks in prison for being implicated in an operation for helping Dutch Jews stay out of Nazi extermination camps. A pregnant Jewish lady knew that she was heading for such a camp where she would end up in the gas chambers and her baby would not survive. Before she was captured, she gave her baby-buggy away to a neighbor, saying that she would never need it. In the little town of Putten in the Netherlands, the Nazis dragged away the whole male population of whom no one returned, leaving behind a town of widows.

The Corinthians were living in such a world where engaged couples might never make it to their wedding day and children would lose their parents. Paul's statement to Timothy: "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"¹⁵⁴ may not apply to our day, but it certainly did to his. Christians in the first centuries thought that they lived in the last days of which Jesus had prophesied: "How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people."¹⁵⁵

The problem in understanding Paul's thoughts in Verses 29-31 is that the truth they contain seems to be packed together too tightly. Paul speaks in the same breath about marriage, grief and joy, and material possessions. The subjects are framed in by the words "the time is short" and "this world in its present form is passing away." The obvious intent is to put all earthly possessions, whether of a spouse, of an emotional condition, of material things in the light of Christ's soon return. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "The very object of the hastened end is that Christians should sit loose to earthly interests."

This does not mean that we should neglect our marriage partners, or not mourn the loss of a loved one, or not rejoice over the birth of a baby, or not buy what we need for daily life. But we should look at all of these in the light of eternity. C. S. Lewis once used the illustration of a woman who wants to buy a piece of material in a store and takes it outside to see what the color looks like in the daylight. We should be married with the thought in mind that marriage is for life on earth; we will not be married in eternity. We must therefore not invest that love and devotion in our marriage partner that we owe to God alone. Conjugal love ought to be subjected to our love for God. The same with our losses and gains; we may weep, as long as it is in the knowledge that God will wipe away all tears and that fullness of joy can only be found in the presence of God. For all other possessions, we may owe what we want and can afford as long as it is in the knowledge that we cannot take it with us. Paul uses the Greek words *chraomai*, "use" and *katachraomai*, "overuse." The NIV's "engrossed" seems an excellent rendering.

Verses 32-35 speak about "undivided devotion to the Lord" and about what can distract from it. This does not mean that all marriages constitute a distraction from the service of the Lord. Sometimes celibacy can be more of a distraction than marriage. In these verses, maybe more than in any of the others, Paul gives "a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy." His advice is strongly colored by his own single-mindedness. Although Paul does make a strong plea for celibacy in these verses, we may assume that he was not so naïve as to think that only single people could serve the Lord.

Leon Morris in *1 Corinthians* comments on the words: "*An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs-how he can please the Lord*" by stating: "Paul may see this as desirable (as most commentators hold). But he has just said that he wants his readers to be *free from concern*; he may thus mean that he wants their service of the Lord to be a relaxed acceptance of God's will for their lives rather than a worried preoccupation with personal holiness and the like." It is true that concern about family matters can in some instances present a burden that hinders the carrying on of the work of the Lord. The sickness of a spouse or a child may take priority over the work. Most people, however, would prefer to carry the extra burden than to have no spouse or child to worry about.

There are several difficulties in the sentence in v. 36: "If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married." The Greek text reads literally: "But if any man think that he behave himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and so need require, let him do what he will, he sins not, let them marry." "Acting improperly" is the translation of the Greek verb *aschemoneo*, meaning "unbecoming." In Chapter Thirteen it is translated: "[Love] is not *rude*."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ II Tim. 3:12

¹⁵⁵ Luke 21:23

¹⁵⁶ See I Cor. 13:5.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary states: "Different meanings have been assigned to this verse. I shall mention three of the principal:

1. 'In those early times, both among the Hebrews and Christians, the daughters were wholly in the power of the father, so that he might give or not give them in marriage as he chose; and might bind them to perpetual celibacy if he thought proper; and to this case the apostle alludes. If the father had devoted his daughter to perpetual virginity, and he afterward found that she had fixed her affections upon a person whom she was strongly inclined to marry, and was now getting past the prime of life; he, seeing from his daughter's circumstances that it would be wrong to force her to continue in her state of celibacy, though he had determined before to keep her single, yet he might in this case alter his purpose without sin, and let her and her suitor marry.'

2. 'The whole verse and its context speaks of young women dedicated to the service of God, who were called *parthenoi* ... virgins, in the primitive church. And a case is put here, 'that circumstances might occur to render the breach of even a vow of this kind necessary, and so no sin be committed.'

3. 'The apostle by *parthenos* ... does not mean a virgin, but the state of virginity or celibacy, whether in man or woman.' Both Mr. Locke and Dr. Whitby are of this opinion, and the latter reasons on it thus: It is generally supposed that these three verses relate to virgins under the power of parents and guardians, and the usual inference is, that children are to be disposed of in marriage by the parents, guardians, etc. Now this may be true, but it has no foundation in the text, for *teerein* ... *teen* ... *heautou* ... *parthenon* ... is not to keep his daughter's, but his own virginity, or rather his purpose of virginity; for, as Phavorinus says, He is called a virgin who freely gives himself up to the Lord, renouncing matrimony, and preferring a life spent in continence. And that this must be the true import of these words appears from this consideration, that this depends upon the purpose of his own heart, and the power he has over his own will, and the no necessity arising from himself to change this purpose.

Whereas the keeping a daughter unmarried depends not on these conditions on her father's part but on her own; for, let her have a necessity, and surely the apostle would not advise the father to keep her a virgin, because he had determined so to do; nor could there be any doubt whether the father had power over his own will or not, when no necessity lay upon him to betroth his virgin. The Greek runs to this sense: if he had stood already firm in his heart, finding no necessity, namely to change his purpose; and hath power over his own will, not to marry; finding himself able to persist in the resolution he had made to keep his virginity, he does well to continue a virgin: and then the phrase, if any man think he behaves himself unseemly toward his virgin, if it be over-aged, and thinks he ought rather to join in marriage, refers to the opinions both of Jews and Gentiles that all ought to marry. The Jews say that the time of marriage is from 16 or 17 to 20; while some of the Gentiles specify from 30 to 35. If any think thus, says the apostle, let them do what they will, they sin not: let them marry. And then he concludes with those words applied to both cases: so then, both he that marries doeth well, and he that marries not, doeth better."

Leon Morris, in *1 Corinthians* gives some rather lengthy comments on vs. 36, which I will condense and paraphrase. Like Adam Clarke, he also proposes three interpretations, which have won support. The word *anyone*, he says, can refer to the parents or guardians of a girl, and *acting improperly* means, "not providing for her marriage." The second approach is that *anyone* refers to a young man and *the virgin* to his fiancée; the two have agreed to remain celibate. The third understanding is that Paul is referring to a 'spiritual marriage,' whereby people went through the form of marriage, but lived together as brother and sister. In all of these cases it is understood that Paul tells them not to blame themselves if they feel that the strain is too great. Morris concludes by stating: "None of the explanations is without substantial objection. But the first view should probably be accepted because the objections to it do not seem as forceful as those urged against the other two."

We must not see a contradiction in Paul's statement that "a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives" and the allowance for separation in verses 15 and 16 if one of the partners has become a Christian and the other not. Paul simply states the fact, as he does in his Epistle to the Romans, "By law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man."¹⁵⁷ What pertains to a widow is of course also valid for a widower that he is free to remarry as long as it is on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ. The Christian who marries a non-Christian

¹⁵⁷ See Rom. 7:2,3.

shows that he or she has lost the sense of priority. If Christ is not the foundation of one's life, one should not call oneself a Christian.

We must also see in Paul's statement, "she is happier if she stays as she is" in the light of the present crisis and the shortness of time, mentioned earlier. Marriage under the cloud of persecution could turn marital bliss into agony. Most commentators interpret "I think that I too have the Spirit of God" as an expression of confidence, not as a means of leaving open a door of doubt.

II. Counsel Concerning Things Offered to Idols 8:1-11:1
 A. Principles of Liberty and the Weaker Brother 8

1 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

2 The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.

3 But the man who loves God is known by God.

4 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.

5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"),

6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

7 But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

8 But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

10 For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?

11 So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

12 When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

From the introductory words "Now about food sacrificed to idols" we gather that Paul proceeds here to the next question the Corinthians had asked him in their letter. Bible scholars generally agree that the words "We know that we all possess knowledge" are a quotation from that letter, that they are not Paul's words, but theirs. The NIV states in a footnote: " 'We all possess knowledge,' as you say." Evidently, the Corinthians had stated their opinion about the matter to Paul and merely asked him to agree with them. From the gist of Paul's answer we understand that the majority of believers thought that it was all right to eat sacrificial meat. As in some of the previous matters, they may have based their opinion on Paul's own teaching, or their understanding thereof.

Paul returns to the same subject in Chapter Ten of this epistle.¹⁵⁸

In order to understand the problem, which finds no parallel in our modern society, we must know that most of the meat sold in the meat market came from ceremonies in an idol temple. As was the case with some sacrifices in Jewish rites, certain parts of the animal were put on the altar, the rest of the carcass was for the priest and the person who made the sacrifice. The priest would usually sell the meat that he could not consume himself. The person who made the sacrifice could do the same or use the meat for a feast to which he invited guests. In most cases it was difficult or impossible to determine at a meat market if meat came from an animal that had been sacrificed in an idol temple or not. The same was true about a feast to which a person was invited in a private home.

The argument the Corinthians presented to Paul was that their conversion had brought them to the understanding that idol worship was a sham because an idol was nothing more than a manmade entity. Since idolatry was an exercise in futility, it made no difference whether meat belonged to an animal that had been sacrificed in a temple or not; "meat is meat, let's eat!"

¹⁵⁸ See I Cor. 10:14-33.

Paul does not disagree with this “knowledge” but he issues a warning against knowledge that is not linked to love. Sin entered this world when the first human couple tried to separate knowledge from the love of God. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge instead of from the tree of life, they made the statement that a human being could acquire knowledge apart from fellowship with God. One look at the world in which we live at present shows us that this philosophy leads to death.

Paul warns them that “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” J. B. Phillips paraphrases this beautifully in *The New Testament in Modern English*: “We should remember that while knowledge may make a man look big, it is only love that can make him grow to his full stature.”

Paul could have easily solved the controversy by appealing to the letter the apostles had written to the churches, conveying the decision of the first Church Synod in Jerusalem. We read: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: *You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols*, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.”¹⁵⁹ The fact that he did not do this does not imply that he disagreed with the apostles’ epistle. He and Barnabas actually helped to make its content known at the church in Antioch. The reason Paul did not want to rigorously apply this decision to the Corinthian church may have been the argument James had given during the Synod meeting: “For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”¹⁶⁰ The main reason for the Synod’s restrictions was the testimony of the Gospel among the Jewish believers.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “It will be seen that St. Paul treats it with consummate wisdom and tenderness. His liberality of thought shows itself in this — that he sides with those who took the strong, the broad, the common sense view, that sin is not a mechanical matter, and that sin is not committed where no sin is intended. He neither adopts the ascetic view nor does he taunt the inquirers with the fact that the whole weight of their personal desires and interests would lead them to decide the question in their own favor. On the other hand, he has too deep a sympathy with the weak to permit their scruples to be overruled with a violence which would wound their consciences. While he accepts the right principle of Christian freedom, he carefully guards against its abuse.”

David Prior, in *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, writes: “Bruce makes the important observation that Paul is the only authoritative personality in the apostolic or sub-apostolic church who does not solve the ‘food offered to idols’ controversy by any absolute ban. This serves to underline his determination not to let the legalists win the day on this absolutely central issue. This matter dealt with everyday habits of behavior and it would have been fatal to yield one iota to the rigorists.”

The most important lesson we can draw from Paul’s approach to this problem is that it must be dealt with in an attitude of love. We must look at every question in the light of God’s character. God does not want us to become automatons that obey without thinking; He wants us to be both thinking and loving in everything we decide and do.

It is interesting to see how Paul uses the words “knowledge” and “know” in a virtuoso way in the first three verses. It occurs seven times in one form or another, ending with the marvelous statement: “But the man who loves God is known by God.” The ultimate knowledge is the knowledge of God, and we participate in that knowledge if we love Him. This sets the stage for Paul’s further discussion of the subject. What determines whether I can eat meat is whether I love God. Because if I love God, I will love my neighbor and I will be guided by principles that bless my neighbor instead of harming him.

“The man who loves God is known by God” is a profound statement that deserves a closer look. Some Bible scholars interpret this to mean that God takes note of the fact that we take the welfare of our neighbor into account in the decisions we make, or that God teaches us and shows us the way when we love Him, or that He will pour out His blessings upon us if we show love to our fellowmen. But none of these interpretations seem to cover all.

In a way, Paul’s statement is anthropomorphic. It is obvious that God knows everybody. The fact that He created all and that He is omniscient accounts for this. We would expect that Paul had used the active form and would have said, “the man who loves God knows God,” as John does in his First Epistle: “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.”¹⁶¹ Paul makes a similar statement in Galatians: “But now that you know God — or rather

¹⁵⁹ Acts 15:28,29

¹⁶⁰ Acts 15:21

¹⁶¹ I John 4:7

are known by God — how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?”¹⁶²

The key is in the content of the verb “to know.” There are different levels of knowledge: superficial, profound, and intimate. We read, for instance, “Adam lay with his wife Eve,”¹⁶³ which the KJV renders, “And Adam knew Eve his wife.” In the way God knows us, absolute knowledge and absolute love are fused together.

When Paul says that an idol is nothing, he makes a distinction between the statue and what it represents. The representation of a god in the form of a wooden, stone, or metal sculpture is purely the work of human hands. These idol figures drew the ire of Isaiah.¹⁶⁴ Paul acknowledges that there are spiritual powers behind the representations. He does not go as far as to say that evil spirits inhabit certain objects, as animists believe. Returning to the same object in Chapter Ten, he states: “Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.”¹⁶⁵

Even if a person has come to the conclusion that idol worship is valueless and that demons are subject to the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, those who once participated in idol worship have scars on their conscience that remain tender. The old fear that ruled in the practice of idolatry can easily return and overpower the person who does not make a clear break with his past.

Paul’s conclusion is that idols have no intrinsic power over humans, and food has no spiritual significance, but both can become powerful weapons for the destruction of the human soul if they are not put within the framework of the knowledge and love of God.

When Paul says, “for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ,” he does not make the existence of God subject to our faith in Him as modern philosophy tends to do. In modern thought moral standards and faith in God are private matters, unrelated to an objective reality. Francis Schaeffer used the expression “upper story experience,” as if there is no relationship between what we believe to be true and the reality of daily life “on the ground floor.” Paul speaks of our recognition of God as the Creator and origin of life and Jesus Christ as the One to whom we surrender the control of our life. The words “But not everyone knows this” ought then to be interpreted as “not everyone has made this act of complete surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ; not everyone has completely freed himself of the hold of idol power over him.” We could compare this condition to that of a converted alcoholic, who could easily fall back into his old addiction if he would not stringently abstain from any kind of alcoholic beverage.

There is no intrinsic or spiritual value in food, Paul says. That is a revolutionary statement for a converted Pharisee. In Judaism, the consumption of kosher food was considered part of the religious exercise. In Romans Paul makes the statement, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶⁶ In that chapter the apostle also restates in greater detail what he explains here.¹⁶⁷

The mention of eating in an idol’s temple suggests that some Corinthians went so far in their liberal practices that they not only bought meat that had been sacrificed to idols but would actually join the ceremonies in an idol temple. Amazingly, Paul does not condemn that act in itself, only the repercussions it could have as a testimony to others. The phrase “So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge” tends to open a theological can of worms. Some may see in these words Paul’s endorsement of Armenianism, which states that there is no eternal security in salvation. Others interpret the word “destroy” in the sense of physical death. The Greek word used is *apollumi*, which means “to perish,” or “to lose.” It can also have the meaning of physical death as in the verse: “an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up,’ he said, ‘take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.’”¹⁶⁸

This is not the place to argue on either side of the controversy regarding eternal security. The point Paul makes in these verses is not about whether those who are once saved will always be saved, but what to

¹⁶² Gal. 4:9

¹⁶³ Gen. 4:1

¹⁶⁴ See Isa. 44:12-20.

¹⁶⁵ I Cor. 10:19,20

¹⁶⁶ Rom. 14:17

¹⁶⁷ See Rom. 14:15-23.

¹⁶⁸ Matt. 2:13

do with our liberty in Jesus Christ. The Greek text reads literally: “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak.” The Greek word rendered “liberty” is *exousia*, which has a wide gamut of meaning, such as “authority,” “jurisdiction,” “liberty,” “power,” “right,” or “strength.” Paul does not argue our freedom to eat meat, but he places our authority within the framework of brotherly love. If we fail our brother by exercising our rights, we are no longer free ourselves. The fact that Christ died for our neighbor should determine our relationship to him. The apostle John states: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”¹⁶⁹

B. Illustration of Paul and His Liberty

9:1-27

1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?

2 Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

3 This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me.

4 Don't we have the right to food and drink?

5 Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?

6 Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?

7 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk?

8 Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing?

9 For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned?

10 Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest.

11 If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?

12 If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

13 Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar?

14 In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

15 But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast.

16 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

17 If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.

18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.

19 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.

21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.

22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

¹⁶⁹ I John 3:16

25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

26 Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air.

27 No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Paul does more in this chapter than merely illustrating the point he made in the previous one about Christian liberty and the exercise of one's right. He models for us the servant of Jesus Christ. He does this by asking four questions: "Am I not free?" "Am I not an apostle?" "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" "Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?" The questions are not rhetorical and they all require a positive answer.

The answer to the first question, "Am I not free?" is given mainly toward the end of this chapter where Paul demonstrates that real freedom consists in the willingness to give up one's rights. We will have a closer look at the matter when we get to that point. It is interesting to see how Paul cleverly leads us to the understanding that renouncing of freedom is the greatest exercise of freedom a person has.

The second question about Paul's apostleship indicates that there must have been a rather strong movement in the church of Corinth that opposed him. The party spirit that reigned in the church probably hinged on this conviction that if Paul were a real apostle, he would behave like one and accept financial support. The question "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" is linked to the point of being an apostle. When the disciples of Jesus, together with a group of other believers, gathered in Jerusalem between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost to choose a replacement for Judas, who had committed suicide, Peter said: "It is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."¹⁷⁰ Paul did not fully meet these requirements since he had not been a follower of Christ from the time of John the Baptist. Peter's conditions for the office of apostle may not have been met by all of the inner circle. Not all of Jesus' disciples had been disciples of John before Jesus called them. Paul only met Jesus after His resurrection when the Lord stopped him on the road to Damascus. The opposition party in Corinth may have used this as an argument against him.

The Pulpit Commentary observes interestingly that: "St. Paul practically 'goes off' at the word 'apostle.' It was so essential for him to vindicate, against the subterranean malignity of hostile partisans, his dignity as an apostle, that in asserting that authority he almost loses sight for the time of the main object for which he had alluded to the fact. Hence much that he says is of the nature of a digression — though an important one — until he resumes the main thread of his subject at ...1 Corinthians 11:15."

But no one could argue that Paul had not planted the church in Corinth. Before Paul visited the city there was no church in Corinth. Paul, therefore, had a unique relationship with the church.

In the statement "Don't we have the right to food and drink?" Paul obviously does not refer to the eating of meat that was the subject of the previous chapter, but to getting food and drink at the expense of the church.

One of the objections to Paul's ministry in Corinth may have been that he was not married. Paul defends himself against this charge in the same manner as he does with the other charges, by stating that he had a right to be married and take his wife with him on his journeys at the expense of the church. We deduct from Paul's words that Barnabas was not married either, or at least that if he was, his wife did not accompany him. It is also clear that the other apostles, as well as Jesus' brothers who were traveling evangelists, took their wives with them.

In the centuries following the writing of this epistle, when celibacy was placed on a pedestal, some church fathers tried to reinterpret the obvious meaning of Paul's words. They suggested that the female companion of the apostles was either a deaconess who had dedicated her life to the Lord to minister to the apostles or, if she was the apostle's wife, the two lived together as brother and sister.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "They endeavored, by putting the word in the plural or by omitting 'wife,' to suggest that the women whom the apostles traveled with were 'deaconesses.' Augustine, Tertullian, Ambrose, and others explain the verse of 'ministering women' (...Luke 8:2, 3). The false interpretation avenged itself on the bias which led to it. Valla adopts the willful invention that the apostles, though married, traveled with their wives only as sisters. Such subterfuges have eaten away the heart of

¹⁷⁰ Acts 1:21,22

honest exegesis from many passages of Scripture, and originated the taunt that it is a ‘nose of wax,’ which readers can twist as they like. It was the cause of such shameful abuses and misrepresentations that at last the practice of traveling about with unmarried women, who went under the name of ‘sisters,’ ‘beloved,’ ‘companions,’ was distinctly forbidden by the third canon of the first Council of Nice.”

The bulk of Paul’s defense pertains to his refusal to accept money from churches. Evidently, Barnabas agreed with this and both supported themselves by doing manual labor for their own support. We know that Paul practiced the trade of tentmaker;¹⁷¹ whether Barnabas did the same or had another trade is not known.

In verses 7-14 Paul uses five (or seven) illustrations to prove that he was a Maverick among the apostles as far as his refusal to accept support was concerned. The first three examples are drawn from daily life: a soldier receives pay for his military service. The owner of a vineyard has the first right to the grapes he grows. A shepherd has a right to drink of the milk the herd produces. The next two examples are drawn from the Scriptures. The law ordered, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.”¹⁷² Paul’s humorous observation, “Is it about oxen that God is concerned?” requires both a positive and a negative answer. *The Pulpit Commentary* quotes Luther, who commented: “God cares for all things; but he does not care that anything should be *written* for oxen, because they cannot *read*!” That God is concerned about oxen is obvious from the Sabbath command that reads: “Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed.”¹⁷³ God’s tender concern for animals is also clear from the command: “Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk.”¹⁷⁴

But Paul’s eye goes from the ox to the man who holds the plough and to the thresher. The suggestion is that the ox will do a better job when it is allowed to eat of the grain it threshes. The plowman and the thresher anticipate that they will receive their pay. Even if they are not hired hands but own the ground they work, they will receive their share of the crop.

Transferring the principle to the Old Testament temple service, Paul cites the proof that the priests and Levites who brought the sacrifices received part of the meat in payment for their work.

In writing to the Romans, the apostle endorses the principle in an even wider application. He states that, since the Gentiles heard the Gospel which began with the Jews, they owe it to the Jews to help them financially when the latter are in need. We read: “Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.”¹⁷⁵

It is not only the preacher’s right that he receive financial support for his spiritual ministry, Paul says that it is the Lord’s command. Having said all this, Paul emphatically states that, although he has a right to material support, he refuses to take it because it could be construed that he preaches for the money. The main reason for this refusal, however, seems to be the sense of guilt for his past Paul carried with him. Paul’s apostleship is not a response to God’s call for volunteers; Paul was drafted into the Lord’s service. When Jesus Christ arrested Paul on his way to Damascus, He told him that he would have to pay for the damage he had done to the church. The Lord told Ananias to go and pray for Paul and He said: “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”¹⁷⁶ Later in this epistle Paul writes: “I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”¹⁷⁷ Paul had the deep conviction that part of his ministry for the Lord was a payback for the suffering he had caused his Master. To receive payment for this kind of “community service” would defeat the purpose. “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” was the motto of Paul’s life as an apostle. This set Paul apart from all other servants of the Lord. No one else was ever conscripted in the Lord’s service as Paul

¹⁷¹ See Acts 18:3.

¹⁷² Deut. 25:4

¹⁷³ Ex. 23:12

¹⁷⁴ Ex. 23:19

¹⁷⁵ Rom. 15:25-27

¹⁷⁶ Acts 9:15,16

¹⁷⁷ I Cor. 15:9

was. All the others preach because, like Isaiah, they heard “the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ ” and they responded: “Here am I. Send me!”¹⁷⁸

Paul states that his reward is “that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.” This can only be understood to mean that Paul had the spiritual and emotional satisfaction that he was allowed to make up for his past and thus experience relief from his sense of guilt.

Most commentators point out that Paul’s attitude ought not to be a basis on which churches decide whether to support their pastor or not. Except for some rare exceptions, mostly enhanced by TV exploitation, very few Gospel ministers do it for the money. Preaching the Gospel is generally not the best-paid job. *Barnes’ Notes* comments here: “It is best in general that those who hear the gospel should contribute to its support. It is not only equal and right, but it is best for them. We generally set very little value on that which costs us nothing; and the very way to make the gospel contemptible is, to have it preached by those who are supported by the state, or by their own labor in some other department; or by people who neither by their talents, their learning, nor their industry have any claim to a support. All ministers are not like Paul. They have neither been called as he was; nor have they his talent, his zeal, or his eloquence. Paul’s example then should not be urged as an authority for a people to withhold from their pastor what is his due; nor, because Paul *chose* to forego his rights, should people now demand that a minister should devote his time, and health, and life to their welfare for nothing.”

Although being financially independent of the people Paul had come to serve, he served them with complete dedication as a slave was supposed to obey his master. This kind of relationship with the people he ministered to was derived from his relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul’s bondage was in principle a voluntary one. He considered himself to be Christ’s slave as the Hebrew bond slave who had the right to be free but chose to remain a slave. The Law of Moses stated: “But if the servant declares, ‘I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,’ then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.”¹⁷⁹

Paul’s statement here does not contradict what he wrote in an earlier chapter that “he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ’s slave.” Adding to it: “You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.”¹⁸⁰ The sole purpose of Paul’s service to people was to win them for Christ and set them free from their own bondage to sin. Within that framework the apostle was willing to compromise everything that was not essential or contrary to the truth. We read for instance that “Paul wanted to take [Timothy] along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.”¹⁸¹ And at the request of the apostle in Jerusalem “Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.”¹⁸² In none of this he compromised the Gospel message. Timothy’s circumcision was performed as an outward rite without any reference to the salvation of his soul. The temple purification ceremony merely signified the confirmation of a religious vow. These two points serve to illustrate what Paul meant by “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* clarifies this: “[I became as a Jew]-in things not defined by the law, but by Jewish usage. Not Judaizing in essentials, but in matters where there was no compromise of principle...an undesigned coincidence between the history and the letter: a proof of genuineness.”

When Paul states that he himself is not “under the law,” we must understand what law he is speaking about. It is not always immediately clear whether Paul refers to the moral law, as expressed in the Ten Commandments, or to the ceremonial law that regulates the various kinds of sacrifices and rituals of purification. In some instances the reference is to both. In Romans he primarily refers to the latter when he states: “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ See Isa. 6:8,9.

¹⁷⁹ Ex. 21:5,6

¹⁸⁰ See I Cor. 7:22,23.

¹⁸¹ Acts 16:3

¹⁸² Acts 21:26

¹⁸³ Rom. 10:4

Not being under the law is not the same as being lawless. To put it simply, Paul emphatically denies that we can become acceptable to God by “being good,” that is by trying to obey all the commandments. The very fact that there is a ceremonial law, which provides for atonement, proves that our obedience is insufficient for our justification. He explains this in Romans: “For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”¹⁸⁴

The application of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ creates a new condition in us. As God said to Jeremiah: “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”¹⁸⁵ And to Ezekiel He said: “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.”¹⁸⁶ And again: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”¹⁸⁷ It is to this miracle of transformation that Paul refers to when he says: “I myself am not under the law” and “I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law.”

“Those not having the law” are the non-Jews, the nations and races that do not have the ceremonial law that governed the daily life of the Jews. Strictly speaking there are no peoples who do not have a law. A Yale anthropologist, Leopold Pospisil, studied the legal system of a Stone Age tribe in New Guinea and wrote a book *Kapauku Papuans and Their Law*, proving that even primitive tribes have a code of moral behavior. Working among that same tribe ourselves, we found that their moral code was an almost exact copy of the second tablet of The Ten Commandments. When Paul states that he “became like one not having the law” he obviously does not mean that he would steal, commit adultery, kill or lie, but that he laid aside his Judaist lifestyle while living among those people. According to Paul’s own definition, “the weak” are those who abstain from eating meat sacrificed to idols.

All this he did, not only for the testimony of the Gospel and in order not to be a hindrance to the salvation of others, but also for his own benefit: to share in the blessings of the Gospel. Older Versions, such as KJV read, “that I might be partaker thereof with you.” The Greek word used is *sugkoinonos*, which literally means “a co-participant.” *The Living Bible* paraphrases this: “I do this to get the Gospel to them and also for the blessing I myself receive when I see them come to Christ.” That reading seems to go well beyond what the original text allows.

In the last three verses of this chapter Paul elaborates what he means by sharing in the blessings of the Gospel. He places the blessings in the context of a competition. The illustration cannot be applied literally, because it would limit the benefits of salvation to only one person, the winner of the first prize. What Paul refers to is not the championship but the mentality of the participants. We all ought to take the Gospel message as seriously as the participants in the Olympics take their sport. None of the Olympic contestants participates without dreaming about a gold medal. The Greek text uses the word *stadion*, which is the same as the English “stadium,” for the place where the race is run instead of the race itself. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “They as Corinthians would well know the full bearing of every illustration derived from the triennial Isthmian games, which were the chief glory of their city, and which at this period had even thrown the Olympic games into the shade.

The main point of Paul’s illustration, which applies in full to everyone who accepts the Gospel, is the training that prepares for the competition. No one enrolls in sports events of such magnitude without proper preparation. The contestants go through years of daily training before the actual event occurs. Paul compares the restrictions the trainees put upon themselves to his own way of preparation for receiving the crown. The obvious intent is that every Christian ought to demonstrate such a champion mentality.

Paul uses some very interesting Greek words in these verses, which merit a closer look. The verb rendered “compete” is *agonizomai*, from which the English “agonize” is derived. The Greek may not have the death-like connotation the word has in English but it does express the intensity of the effort. We find the same word in the verse “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you,

¹⁸⁴ Rom. 8:3,4

¹⁸⁵ Jer. 31:33

¹⁸⁶ Ezek. 11:18-20

¹⁸⁷ Ezek. 36:26, 27

will try to enter and will not be able to.”¹⁸⁸ Paul also uses it in his final letter to Timothy where he writes: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”¹⁸⁹

The NIV’s rendering “I beat my body” is the translation of the Greek *hupopiazō*, which means literally “to hit under the eye,” referring to a boxing match. Leon Morris, in *1 Corinthians*, refers to it as “give a black eye to.” We understand why some people have drawn the conclusion from this verse that self-flagellation, such as mediaeval monks indulged in, would be pleasing to God. “I keep my passions under control” might be a better rendering. “I make it my slave” is the translation of the Greek verb *doulagōgeō*, which literally means, “to lead around like a slave.” The intent is that Paul brought his body under the control of his spirit instead of allowing his body to dictate his actions. In Romans Paul elaborates on the same subject by saying: “Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation — but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”¹⁹⁰

It would be erroneous to think that Paul is speaking here about his own salvation as if that would depend on his performance as a minister of the Gospel. His words here must be put within the framework of what he wrote in Chapter Three: “If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

The purpose of these illustrations is to impress upon the readers that the way Paul endeavored to bring his life in line with the Gospel message ought to be the normal way of life for all who follow Jesus. If we have experienced salvation in Jesus Christ, God expects us to give it our all in order to be a testimony to others.

C. Warning against Forfeiting Liberty

10:1-13

1 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.

2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

3 They all ate the same spiritual food

4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

6 Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.

7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry."

8 We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did— and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.

9 We should not test the Lord, as some of them did — and were killed by snakes.

10 And do not grumble, as some of them did — and were killed by the destroying angel.

11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.

12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

From the example of himself, Paul turns to the Old Testament in order to illustrate the dangers of not taking the Christian life seriously. Jesus called this “the narrow path that leads to life.”¹⁹¹ It seems as if the apostle is addressing particularly the Jewish believers in the church, since he speaks about the people who left Egypt on their way to Canaan, “our forefathers.” It would, however, not make any sense to exclude the other converts. The intent, therefore, must be to emphasize that believers in Jesus Christ have the same spiritual relationship to those who received God’s promises in the Old Testament as the Jews did

¹⁸⁸ Luke 13:24

¹⁸⁹ II Tim. 4:7

¹⁹⁰ Rom. 8:12-14

¹⁹¹ See Matt. 7:14.

physically. *As The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “He says, ‘our fathers,’ not only because he was himself a Jew, but also because the patriarchs and the Israelites were spiritually the fathers of the Christian Church.”

The forefathers are not the only ones whom Paul spiritualizes; he gives a spiritual connotation to the whole exodus experience and subsequent desert crossing of Israel. Paul enumerates five particular blessings that encompassed all who were delivered from slavery in Egypt: They were 1. “all under the cloud,” 2. “they all passed through the sea,” 3. “they were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,” 4. “they all ate the same spiritual food,” 5. and they “drank the same spiritual drink.” This does not mean that the apostle denied the historical reality of the event, but he wants to drive home the fact that we must see in what happened to them a lesson that ought to be applied to our lives as Christians.

If Paul’s spiritual applications of historical facts seem to us to be somewhat crude, we must remember that God used the same methods with the Israelites as Paul does here. Commenting on the manna, Moses said: “He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”¹⁹² And Jesus makes this even more specific with: “I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

There are two points of comparison between Israel’s desert crossing and the Christian life: One is that both can only be explained in terms of God’s supernatural intervention, and the second that Moses’ experiences with God were meant, not for him alone, but for the whole nation, just as Christ’s death and resurrection is meant for all of us. As Moses represented the whole nation of Israel before God, so Christ is our mediator before the Father; we are included in Him as they were in Moses. When we said that Paul enumerated five blessings, there were actually only three. Their being under the cloud and passing through the Red Sea meant “they were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” What happened to Moses, happened to them in the same manner as what happened to Christ, happened to us. We died when He died and we rose from the dead when He did. This is all included in the words “they were all baptized into...” As the Israelites were immersed into Moses, so the Holy Spirit immerses us into the body of Christ in order to receive all the blessings and benefits of His death and resurrection.

There are some lines of comparison between Israel in the desert and our Christian life that Paul does not draw. The desert crossing was not a sinecure. Moses called it “that vast and dreadful desert.”¹⁹³ The desert is a place where it is impossible for a human being to stay alive for an extended period of time, let alone for several million people for a period of forty years! In the same way it is impossible for us to live a life that is pleasing and acceptable to God in a fallen world apart from the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Most of the Israelites did not make it, not because of the desert but because of their own sinful nature that resisted the grace of God. That is the main lesson Paul wants us to draw from the example of the Israelites.

The question remains; what is the danger Paul warns us of? Is Paul saying that we can lose our salvation if we are not careful? Or is he referring to the person of whom he said, “He will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”¹⁹⁴ Without entering into the controversy of Calvinists and Armenians, it may be good to adopt the attitude of believing that we are eternally secure in Jesus Christ, and yet live as though we could lose our salvation by being careless.

We must keep in view the context in which Paul places this whole section. The question is still whether a Christian has the liberty to buy meat that had been sacrificed to idols and participate in rituals in pagan temples and eat the meat that is served there.

The ultimate reason for Israel’s refusal to enter the Holy Land was that the enemy was stronger than they were and there was no guarantee of victory. When the twelve spies who had gone to survey the land returned, “they gave Moses this account: ‘We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.’ ” Only Caleb objected that, with God’s help, the attack would be successful. “But the men who had gone up with him said, ‘We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are. And they spread

¹⁹² Deut. 8:3

¹⁹³ See Deut. 1:19.

¹⁹⁴ I Cor. 3:15

among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, ‘The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.’¹⁹⁵ In their conclusion the spies had completely left God out of the picture. This was not an event that came about suddenly without any preparation; their lenient attitude toward the pagan nations they met on their way and their participation in the pagan worship of those people, which involved sexual immorality, conditioned them to fail at the time of crisis.

Paul draws the line between Israel’s experience of failure and what led up to it and the broadmindedness of some Corinthians who had no qualms about how and where they got their meat, as long as they got it. He predicts that when the real test comes they would fail because of their lack of moral preparation.

It will be helpful to look back from this point to Paul’s description of Israel’s desert crossing. Speaking about the Israelites as being baptized in Moses, eating spiritual food and drinking spiritual drink, from the rock which is Christ, the apostle uses some anachronistic glue to superimpose New Testament pictures upon Old Testament events. This not only takes away from Israel any excuse for failing to reach God’s goal, but it also expresses that we are spiritually on a similar journey, from slavery to freedom in God’s Promised Land, as they were physically. We will pass through the same types of crises and have the same options of success or failure, according to the reality of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Paul quotes four incidents of Israel’s failure in the desert that serve as a warning for New Testament Christians. The first one is about the making of the golden calf when Moses was with God on Mount Sinai.¹⁹⁶ It seems incomprehensible that people who had witnessed God’s punishment of the Egyptians with the ten plagues, who had seen the destruction of the Egyptian army at the crossing of the Red Sea, and who had seen the miraculous appearance of water when Moses struck the rock in the desert, had no concept of the power of God. They thought it was Moses who had done the miracles and that, since he appeared to be dead, they were on their own. They said: “As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.”¹⁹⁷ The moral of the story is that, however great the miracles are that we see, they will not generate faith in God in us without an experience of spiritual regeneration. We will not see the hand of God in anything as long as we are not born again.

The second event that illustrates Israel’s moral breakdown occurred after Balaam’s failed effort to curse Israel.¹⁹⁸ When that false prophet saw the fee for his prophetic ministry go up in smoke, he advised the king of Moab to seduce the Israelites by inviting them to their pagan rituals in which the women offered themselves for prostitution.¹⁹⁹ Twenty-four thousand men perished in this exercise of sexual immorality. Paul put the number at twenty-three thousand, which has caused some debate among Bible scholar in which we will not enter at this point. In using this example Paul hits much closer to home than in the first one. The pagan worship in Corinth was very similar to the practices of the Midianites and the temptation to participate in ritual prostitution must have been very great for men living in Corinth. It must have been a relatively small step for a Corinthian male from going to a pagan temple to buy meat, or accepting an invitation to eat a meal with a friend at such a place, to get drawn into the immoral rituals that went on there.

The third instant refers to Israel’s grumbling about the monotony of the daily diet. We read that at one point “the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!’ ”²⁰⁰ God sent poisonous snakes as a punishment. Paul does not mention God’s remedy. We read that “the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live. So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.’ ”²⁰¹ Jesus told Nicodemus that the lifting up of the snake symbolized His death on the cross. “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son

¹⁹⁵ Num. 13: 27-29, 31-33

¹⁹⁶ See Ex. 32:1-6.

¹⁹⁷ Ex. 32:1

¹⁹⁸ Deut. 23:4,5

¹⁹⁹ See Num. 31:15,16.

²⁰⁰ Num. 21:4,5

²⁰¹ Num. 21:8,9

of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”²⁰² Evidently, the Israelites kept that bronze snake and made it into an icon to be worshipped, thus degrading the miracle of God. King Hezekiah understood how wrong this was and we read that he “He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)”²⁰³

The last incident is described merely as “grumbling” which the Israelites did on many occasions. Paul does not mention any particular incident, but the reference is probably to the rebellion of Korah and his band, followed by a more general revolt in which 14,700 people were killed by a plague.²⁰⁴ The Jews believed that there was “an angel of death,” which they called Sammael to whom all non-violent deaths were ascribed.

Paul states that the record of Israel’s history serves as an example for those who live after the coming of Christ. In this epistle Paul emphasizes the warnings; in Romans he uses the same words by way of encouragement. We read: “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”²⁰⁵

The words “the fulfillment of the ages” are the translation of the Greek “the ends of *the world*.” The word *aion* can mean either, “an age,” “the world,” or “a Messianic period.” Leon Morris in *1 Corinthians* comments, “It appears to mean that the culmination of all past ages has arrived. The coming of Christ has decisive significance. All previous ages come to their appointed end in him. Those ages are now completed and the lessons they teach are open to us. We should then reap the fruits of the experience of those ages.”

The haunting question in the illustrations Paul uses as a warning is how is it possible that people who saw with their own eyes the most astounding miracles and who had physical proof of God’s presence, and who saw His glory, could fail so miserably to reach the goal that God had set for them. The answer is obviously that they believed to have enough moral strength in themselves to be able to make it. They went through a long line of failures without ever learning anything from them. They never came to the point where they were thoroughly convinced that they could do nothing without God. They felt that they did not need fellowship with God in order to maintain a high moral standard of living. Solomon’s advice “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight”²⁰⁶ would have been completely lost on them.

The Corinthians must have believed that they possessed enough moral character to be able to go to a pagan temple, buy meat that had been sacrificed to idols, eat at the tables in the temple, and not be tempted to participate in the ritual prostitution that went on around them. They may have adopted Job’s resolve, who said, “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl,”²⁰⁷ thinking that this would protect them. Paul warns them “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” Every child of Adam and Eve has moral blind spots that must be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit in order to safeguard from falling into sin. The only security in temptation is the faithfulness of God. Paul, therefore, states: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* quotes Chrysostom who wrote about the Greek word *anthropinos* (human), “that is, small, short, moderate, your temptations or trials have been but trifling in comparison of those endured by the Israelites; they might have been easily resisted and overcome. Besides, God will not suffer you to be tried above the strength he gives you; but as the trial comes, he will provide you with sufficient strength to resist it; as the trial comes in, he will make your way out. The words are very remarkable ... He will, with the temptation, make the deliverance, or way out.” Clarke continues: “Satan is never permitted to block up our way, without the providence of God making a way through the wall. God ever makes a breach in his otherwise impregnable fortification. Should an upright soul get into difficulties and straits, he may rest assured that there is a way out, as there was a way in; and that the trial shall never be above the strength that God shall give him to bear it.”

²⁰² John 3:14,15

²⁰³ II Kings 18:4

²⁰⁴ See Num. 16:1-50.

²⁰⁵ Rom. 15:4

²⁰⁶ Prov. 3:5,6

²⁰⁷ Job 31:1

The Greek word for “temptation” is *peirasmos*, which has different meanings according to the context in which it appears. It may mean a satanic effort to make one fall into sin, but it is also used for God’s way of purifying our faith by putting it to the test. We find the word in the context of Jesus being tempted by Satan: “When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.”²⁰⁸ It appears in the Lord’s Prayer: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”²⁰⁹ But in Paul’s statement: “I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews”²¹⁰ it has obviously a different meaning. James uses the word in different context, thus giving it diverse meanings. In stating, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,”²¹¹ the connotation is obviously positive, as it is in the verse “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”²¹² But in “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death”²¹³ where the same word is used in its verb-form, the content is clearly pejorative. Peter uses it in a positive sense: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”²¹⁴ And also in “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.”²¹⁵

D. Exhortation to Use Liberty to Glorify God 10:14-11:1

14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.

15 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.

16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

18 Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?

19 Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything?

20 No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.

21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.

22 Are we trying to arouse the Lord’s jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

23 "Everything is permissible"-but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"-but not everything is constructive.

24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience,

26 for, "The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it."

27 If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.

28 But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience’ sake—

29 the other man’s conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another’s conscience?

30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

²⁰⁸ Luke 4:13

²⁰⁹ Matt. 6:13

²¹⁰ Acts 20:19

²¹¹ James 1:2

²¹² James 1:12

²¹³ James 1:13-15

²¹⁴ I Peter 1:6,7

²¹⁵ I Peter 4:12

**31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
 32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—
 33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.
 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.**

The Corinthians had asked Paul's opinion regarding eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Thus far his advice had been to consider the effect their actions would have upon fellow believers. Now he turns to the ones who asked the question so they would consider the effect it would have upon themselves when they frequent idol temples. The Corinthian Christians who went to a pagan temple to buy meat did not contemplate committing idolatry. Paul advises them to "flee from idolatry" because he wants them to not underestimate the danger of becoming polluted. No person is in greater danger than he who believes himself to be strong enough to stand up to temptation. He who flees admits that what confronts him is stronger than he is. The first step to victory is to recognize one's weakness. The downfall of King Solomon was in his liberal attitude toward idols. We read: "As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done."²¹⁶ Solomon probably did not intend to commit idolatry; he may have considered himself above it. But he underestimated the power of his adversary and allowed himself to be caught in a snare from which he was unable to escape. When we flee it is important to flee in time. Flight that is done too late offers no escape.

As Paul had done in the other cases of problems that were presented to him, he answers by leading his readers to the simplicity of the sublime. In the first chapter, he answered the church's tendency to split up in different parties by showing them a picture of the cross. In the case of gross immorality, he invited them to celebrate the Passover in which they feasted on the Lamb. Here he leads them from the temple orgies to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Appealing to them as intelligent people, he says, "Look at yourselves! You partake in the Lord's Supper and participate in rites of pagan idolatry at the same time! What do you think you are doing?" But Paul does more than compare one rite with another. Participation in the Lord's Supper is after all a remembrance of His death in our behalf. What idol or demon ever died in order to save the one who worships it!

It seems as if Paul abandons the chronological order of the celebration by mentioning the cup first. According to Matthew's Gospel Jesus first broke the bread and afterwards passed around the cup.²¹⁷ Luke states that two cups were passed around, one before the breaking of the bread and one afterward. A blessing was pronounced over the first cup. The reference is probably to "the cup of salvation" mentioned in Psalm One Hundred Sixteen.²¹⁸ Interestingly, the Hebrew name for that cup is *kowc yeshuw'ah*, which could be rendered "the cup of Yeshuwah," or "the cup of Jesus." The words "the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks" read literally in Greek, "the cup of blessing which we bless." Some Bible scholars interpret these words as a Hebrew idiom, meaning, "the blessed cup." *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* explains about the Passover: "The paschal supper commenced by the head of the 'company' pronouncing a benediction over the first cup of wine, which had been filled for each person. It was then drunk, and a basin of water and a towel were handed around or the guests got up to wash their hands (John 13:4,5,12), after which the appropriate blessing was pronounced." Jesus' last supper with His disciples was a celebration of the Passover.

The point Paul wants to make here is that participation in the Lord's Supper demonstrates that we have become part of the body of Christ. It establishes a relationship, first of all with the head and then with the other members of the body. This image is worked out in greater detail in Chapter Twelve. In an earlier chapter Paul had pointed out the consequences for the individual of participating in pagan rites of prostitution. We read: "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?"

²¹⁶ I Kings 11:4-6

²¹⁷ See Matt. 26:26-28.

²¹⁸ Ps. 116:13

For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”²¹⁹ In involving oneself in pagan worship one sins against his own body and against the body of Christ, that is against Christ Himself and against those who belong to Him.

There are two sides to “becoming one flesh.” In First Corinthians Paul uses it negatively in the context of prostitution, and he contrasts it to becoming one spirit with the Lord. In Ephesians he uses it positively and puts it in the context of marriage. We read: “‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church.”²²⁰ If sex in marriage is a physical image of a spiritual relationship with God, sex outside marriage is an image of a spiritual relationship with demons. Few people contemplate these consequences of their infidelity.

Paul then links the celebration of the Lord’s Supper to the Old Testament sacrifices, some of which could be eaten in part by the person who brought the sacrifice. The law stipulated that the priests could eat the meat of animals sacrificed as sin offering or guilt offering. Of the fellowship offerings the priest received part and the one who brought the sacrifice ate the rest. The same was true with the grain offering.²²¹ Speaking about all freewill offerings, Moses said: “Present your burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD your God, both the meat and the blood. The blood of your sacrifices must be poured beside the altar of the LORD your God, but you may eat the meat.”²²²

Some older versions add the words “after the flesh” after “Israel.” That caused some Bible scholars to believe that Paul was referring to unconverted Jews, which muddles the text. The reference is clearly to the Old Testament rites of sacrifice in which the bringing of a sacrifice linked the person to the altar. In New Testament terms the celebration of the Lord’s Supper links us to the cross. Transferring this to participation in pagan rites, Paul states that eating meat sacrificed to idols links one to the idol. The idol is not seen as a god but as a symbol of a demon. And, whether consciously or unconsciously, participation in a pagan rite endangers the person because it brings him into direct contact with demons. Paul speaks particularly to Christians who sat down in pagan temples to eat, that their participation in two kinds of rituals constituted an offense to God. Those who think that God doesn’t mind because idols are not gods evince a glaring lack of understanding of God’s character. Our dedication to God does not allow for any rivalry.

The words, “‘Everything is permissible’-but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible’-but not everything is constructive” are a repeat of what Paul said in Chapter Six.²²³ As in Chapter Six, the words are probably a quotation of what the Corinthians wrote Paul in their letter. The apostle repeats them here to answer their question.

The problem with freedom in Christ, as with all freedom is, “how far can one go?” In the context of our fellowship with God, the question acquires a different meaning. If we say, “how far can we go and still maintain intimacy with God?” we indicate that something is wrong with our fellowship with God. If we have spiritual fellowship with our Creator, we will make it a point to get as close to Him as we can, not as far away as possible. If communion with God is a reality, we will share His passion for souls and our concern will be the welfare of our fellowmen. Real unity with God will always cause a diminishing of our own interests. We will identify with the testimony of John the Baptist, “He must become greater; I must become less.”²²⁴ In his second epistle to the church in Corinth, Paul puts it this way: “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”²²⁵

We repeat that the problem with freedom is always “how far can one go and still be free?” The constitutional right to freedom of speech, for instance, can lead to an avalanche of pornography, as we see

²¹⁹ I Cor. 6:13-20

²²⁰ Eph. 5:3,32

²²¹ See Lev. 7.

²²² Deut. 12:27

²²³ See I Cor. 6:12.

²²⁴ John 3:30

²²⁵ II Cor. 5:14,15

it has. If our freedom is not balanced in some way or another by a spiritual law of gravity, we will float into a space of nihilism to our own perdition. The hymn writer²²⁶ who wrote, “Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free” captured well the essence of real freedom. If our exercise of freedom does not promote the freedom of others we are not as free as we may think we are. If in the physical realm one part of our body begins to exercise its freedom, it means that we are affected by a cancerous growth which can be life threatening. As members of the body of Christ, our freedom consists in building up one another.

After having taken a strong stand about the matter of participating in anything that goes on in a pagan temple, Paul takes an amazingly lenient attitude toward buying meat at the market. Leon Morris in *I Corinthians* observes: “This is in sharp contrast to the Jewish approach. Jews were very scrupulous and made searching inquiries before they would eat meat. Paul’s attitude was revolutionary. He took seriously the truth that an idol is nothing. This refusal to ask questions shows it did not matter to him whether a piece of meat had been offered to an idol or not. He discouraged over-scrupulousness.”

In order to prove his point, Paul quotes the first verse of Psalm Twenty-four: “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it.” In reality, anything that is sacrificed to an idol constitutes a robbery of things that belong to God. As Christians we have the right to reclaim what belongs to God.

Paul indicates that our behavior ought to be governed by the certainty that everything belongs to God, whoever may have appropriated it. Accepting an invitation for a meal by an unbeliever presents an opportunity for witness. Whether this witness consists in eating food that is served, or not eating depends on the circumstances. Most commentators believe that the words “But if anyone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice’ ” would be spoken by another guest rather than by the host. It could be, however, that the host wants to put the Christian to the tests. If another guest is the speaker, Paul advises to abstain. There is no indication as to what ought to be done if it is the host who speaks.

It seems strange that Paul makes a difference between “the man who told you” and “the other man’s conscience.” The next sentence, “why should my freedom be judged by another’s conscience” seems to answer that question. The person who tells you that the meat that is served is sacrificial meat could be tempted to misjudge you. The whole point of the matter is, of course, that Paul speaks about gray areas in the realm of moral decisions. He could easily have invoked the apostolic verdict of the Council of Jerusalem, which stated, “You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols.”²²⁷ The fact that Paul refrained from applying this command indiscriminately does not mean that he did not believe in absolute standards. He did not propagate “situational ethics,” but he emphasized that moral decisions must be made in consultation with the Holy Spirit. This means that there are cases in which what is wrong for one person may not be wrong for someone else. The essence of Christian liberty is in the fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

The words “For why should my freedom be judged by another’s conscience?” have been the subject of a good deal of controversy among Bible scholars. It seems that Paul contradicts himself, having stated first that a Christian should consider someone else’s conscience and then telling the Corinthians that others have no business judging their conscience. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* points out that Paul uses two different Greek words to designate “the other,” *heterou* and “another,” *allees*. The commentary states: “ ‘The other’ is the one with whom Paul’s and his convert’s concern is: ‘another’ is any other with whom he and they have no concern.” Another possible explanation, which seems to be the better one, is that Paul repeats a phrase from the letter the Corinthians had sent him. In that case they were the ones to protest that their liberty was no one else’s business. While in Corinth, Paul had probably preached against those who propagated strict adherence to the law of kosher food. To Timothy he wrote about those people, “They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.”²²⁸ But this doesn’t answer the question to complete satisfaction either.

What Paul seems to emphasize is that Christian freedom often consists in the freedom to abstain, the freedom to not insist upon our rights. That is the kind of freedom the apostle applied to himself in an earlier chapter. In connection to his right for support by the churches he wrote: “But I have not used any of

²²⁶ George Matheson

²²⁷ Acts 15:29

²²⁸ I Tim. 4:3,4

these rights” and “What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.”²²⁹

The end of the chapter gives us the guideline that ought to determine all of our choices and actions, whether they glorify God or not. After all, the essence of sin is that it falls short of the glory of God.²³⁰ The words, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” constitute one of the spiritual summits of the New Testament. If sin, as we have seen, is defined as “falling short of the glory of God,” holiness can be expressed in terms of glorifying God in our acts and attitudes. God will be glorified in what we do or choose not to do when our motives are to do good to other people, whether they share our race or faith, and when we earnestly desire their salvation.

Our outline includes the first verse of the next chapter in this section. Paul has been consistent in presenting himself as a model to be followed. Earlier in this epistle he wrote, “Therefore I urge you to imitate me.”²³¹ To the Philippians he wrote, “Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.”²³² And both letters to the Thessalonians we read, “You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit,”²³³ and “We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.”²³⁴ Paul made sure that he could never be accused of not practicing what he preached.

III. Counsel Concerning Public Worship
A. Principles of Public Prayer

11:2--14:40

11:2-16

2 I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.

3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.

5 And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head — it is just as though her head were shaved.

6 If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.

7 A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.

8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man;

9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

10 For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.

11 In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.

12 For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

13 Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

14 Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him,

15 but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering.

16 If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice — nor do the churches of God.

The topics of this section are still causing controversy among evangelical churches and Bible-believing individuals. Study of the subject must be done from a standpoint of open-mindedness and a desire to obey the Holy Spirit.

Matthew Henry's Commentary preambles this chapter with the remark: “The first verse of the chapter is put, by those who divided the epistle into chapters, as a preface to the rest of the epistle, but seems to have been a more proper close to the last, in which he had enforced the cautions he had given

²²⁹ See I Cor 9:15-18.

²³⁰ See Rom. 3:23.

²³¹ I Cor. 4:16

²³² Phil. 3:17

²³³ I Thess. 1:6

²³⁴ II Thess. 3:9

against the abuse of liberty, by his own example: Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ (v. 1), fitly closes his argument; and the way of speaking in the next verse looks like a transition to another. But, whether it more properly belongs to this or the last chapter, it is plain from it that Paul not only preached such doctrine as they ought to believe, but led such a life as they ought to imitate.”

It may be that the opening words contain a grain of irony. If it is true that the Corinthians quoted the apostle’s own words back to him in their letter, it may be that the apostle’s compliment is rather left-handed, since in some cases Paul’s words were taken out of context and used to prove points that he had not intended to make.

More problematic is the defining of the role of women in this chapter. We must ask ourselves the question whether Paul’s words meant to outline an absolute definition of the role or whether prevailing customs and fashions were taken into account. The latter would mean that what applied to Corinth is not necessarily applicable to Chicago or China.

Another problem consists in the correct interpretation of certain Greek words. The Greek word *kephale*, for instance, is translated “head,” which causes no problems when taken as part of a physical body. Paul, however, uses it figuratively and we must be careful not to jump to the conclusion that the figure in Greek means the same as it does in English. David Prior, in *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, explains, “The word for *head* is *kephale*, which on rare occasions means the ruler of a community, but normally carries the sense of source or origin. It is used of the source of a river. So God is the source of Christ, Christ (as creator) is the source of man, and man (‘out of his side’—Gn. 2:21ff.) is the source of woman (so 11:8). A third sense of *kephale* (apart from its literal meaning) is the determinative and directive sense, which is far closer to what we mean now by headship or leadership.”

In any discussion of this difficult chapter, some basic considerations must be given priority in order to draw the right conclusions. First of all, gender discrimination does not enter the discussion. There is no question of inferiority based on sex. Paul makes this clear in his statement in Galatians, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”²³⁵ Discrimination is the result of sin. It was after their fall in sin that God said to Eve, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”²³⁶ That is why Paul, in establishing the order of priority in relationships, goes back to creation, to the time before sin enter the world. The relationship of a man to Christ is as Christ’s relationship to the Father. This is what determines the relationship of a man to a woman and of a wife to her husband. It is obvious that this cannot mean that a woman could not have a personal and intimate relationship with God; her spiritual life does not flow through the husband but connects her directly to God. There is no inferiority on the basis of principle.

The question whether Paul establishes here a rule that must be applied categorically in all circumstances, or whether the particulars of place, time, and culture must be taken into account is still argued with equal vehemence for either position by Bible scholars.

There are two other Scripture portions in which Paul comments upon the role women ought to play or not to play in church services. In chapter fourteen of this epistle we read, “As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.”²³⁷ And to Timothy he writes, “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.”²³⁸ Commenting on the verse in I Corinthians 14, *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes: “But does not what the apostle says here contradict that statement, and show that the words in 1 Cor 11 should be understood in another sense? For, here it is expressly said that they should keep silence in the church; for it was not permitted to a woman to speak. Both places seem perfectly consistent. It is evident from the context that the apostle refers here to asking questions, and what we call dictating in the assemblies. It was permitted to any man to ask questions, to object, altercate, attempt to refute, etc., in the synagogue; but this liberty was not allowed to any woman. Paul confirms this in reference also to the Christian church; he orders them to keep silence; and, if they wished to learn anything, let them inquire of their husbands at home; because it was perfectly indecorous for women to be

²³⁵ Gal. 3:26-28

²³⁶ Gen. 3:16

²³⁷ I Cor. 14:34,35

²³⁸ I Tim. 2:11,12

contending with men in public assemblies, on points of doctrine, cases of conscience, etc. But this by no means intimated that when a woman received any particular influence from God to enable her to teach, that she was not to obey that influence; on the contrary, she was to obey it, and the apostle lays down directions in 1 Cor 11 for regulating her personal appearance when thus employed. All that the apostle opposes here is their questioning, finding fault, disputing, etc, in the Christian church, as the Jewish men were permitted to do in their synagogues; together with the attempts to usurp any authority over the man, by setting up their judgment in opposition to them; for the apostle has in view, especially, acts of disobedience, arrogance, etc., of which no woman would be guilty who was under the influence of the Spirit of God.” On the words in Chapter Fourteen, “as the Law says,” Clarke comments, “This is a reference to Gen 3:16: Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. From this it is evident that it was the disorderly and disobedient that the apostle had in view; and not any of those on whom God had poured out his Spirit.”

Concerning the words “Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments, “The Jewish worshipper in praying always covers his head with his *tallith*. On the other hand, the Greek custom was to pray with the head uncovered. St. Paul — as some discrepancy of custom seems to have arisen — decided in favor of the Greek custom, on the high ground that Christ, by his incarnation, became man, and therefore the Christian, who is ‘in Christ,’ may stand with unveiled head in the presence of his Father.”

Whether Paul refers to “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” when he says in Chapter Fourteen “as the Law says” is very much open to question. A man’s rule over a woman, as in the verdict God pronounced over Eve, was the immediate result of the first couple’s fall. To apply this to a congregation of people who are saved from sin by the blood of Christ seems to be contradictory. It seems more logical that Paul uses the word “law” in the same manner as “the very nature of things” in the verse, “Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?” Let us put it this way, Paul would never have written these things to Christians in Jerusalem who were steeped in Jewish culture and customs. As *The Pulpit Commentary* states, a Jew always covers his head with his *tallith* when he prays. It was no disgrace either for a Jew to let his hair grow long. This brings us to the inference that Paul addressed the problems in the church in Corinth in the light of the prevailing customs of that time in that place. We could say that Paul contextualized the Gospel.

Why then would the Corinthians have brought up the question of the role of women in the church in the letter they wrote to Paul? We believe that both the church’s question and the apostle’s answer must be seen in the light of the testimony of the Gospel to a pagan society. The preaching of the Gospel message had the effect of emancipating women in a society in which women were supposed to be silent in a male dominated society. A too rapid emancipation of women in the church would become a point against the church among people who strongly held to the principle of male superiority. It would not be understood, and it would become a hindrance to the preaching of the message. As the Gospel contains the seed of human dignity that would eventually lead to the abolition of slavery, so it holds the kernel of freedom from the curse Eve called upon herself by her disobedience to God’s command.

The history of civilization is full of examples of male dominance. The Bible contains the interesting story of Queen Vashti, who refused King Xerxes’ command to make a public display of her beauty. The queen’s disobedience to the king was seen as a feministic effort to undermine male authority. We read: “ ‘According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?’ [the king] asked. ‘She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her.’ Then Memucan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, ‘Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. For the queen’s conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, ‘ ‘King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.’ ‘ This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen’s conduct will respond to all the king’s nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord. Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. Then when the king’s edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest.’ The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice, so the king did as Memucan proposed. He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own

script and to each people in its own language, proclaiming in each people's tongue that every man should be ruler over his own household."²³⁹

Although Paul did not propagate feministic liberation as it is being preached in modern times, we find in his epistles seeds of freedom, both for women and slaves, that would eventually take down all the walls of inequality among human beings. But since a too rapid breaking down of that wall in New Testament times could have closed the door for the preaching of the Gospel, Paul took a stand that, from our perspective, seems too conservative and reactionary. From the perspective of the time in which the apostle lived, it was probably the only stand a wise Christian could take. The Gospel message, however, reverses the curse of Genesis and restores the relationship between the sexes to more than the pre-fall level enjoyed in paradise.

In studying this chapter it must be observed that Paul's use of the Greek here is rather unusual and difficult to understand. An example is the footnote the NIV provides with Verses 4-7 which reads, "[4] Every man who prays or prophesies with long hair dishonors his head. [5] And every woman who prays or prophesies with no covering [of hair] on her head dishonors her head — she is just like one of the 'shorn women.' [6] If a woman has no covering, let her be for now with short hair, but since it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair shorn or shaved, she should grow it again. [7] A man ought not to have long hair."

The obvious conclusion that seems to present itself from these difficult verses is that, first of all, the silence of a woman during a church service, as mentioned in Chapter Fourteen, does not mean that a woman is not allowed to prophesy. Secondly, Paul warns against an overthrow of customs and culture that would jeopardize the preaching of the Gospel. Some standards of social and sexual discrimination ought to be maintained, however hurtful to human dignity they may be, in order to prioritize the preaching of the Gospel. In time the Holy Spirit will overcome all the hurdles to restore honor and dignity to the whole human race.

In Verses 8-10, Paul refers to the creation of man. The Genesis record states first of all, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them,"²⁴⁰ implying that the image of God is expressed in both sexes. The second chapter of Genesis furnishes the more detailed information about the creation of the woman. We read, "But for Adam no suitable helper was found. 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."²⁴¹ Obviously, the animal world served as a paradigm for Adam and awakened in him the desire for companionship. The word "help" or "helper" in that context refers to the filling of the void of loneliness. Adam needed fellowship on his own level, a soul mate to whom he could relate and who could relate to him. The matter of dominance, as we have seen, did not come up until after the fall.

The way Paul puts it, the relationship between husband and wife is still heavily stamped by the presence of sin. This does not mean that the Gospel message would not do its redeeming and liberating work, but that redemption is not the same and identical to the personal experience of the person who is saved from sin. Maybe we could say that to apply the Gospel to our marriage relationships takes an additional effort. The fact that Paul does not make mention of this in the context of this epistle does not mean that the concept is not valid. The apostle's overbearing concern was the testimony of the Gospel in a pagan world. We repeat that too much liberty too soon would do immeasurable damage to the message.

V. 10, "For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head," has never been satisfactorily explained by any commentator. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes about this verse, "In this clause also we must set aside, as idle waste of time, the attempts to alter the text, or to twist the plain words into impossible meanings. The word 'angels' cannot mean 'Church officials,' or 'holy men,' or 'prophets,' or 'delegates,' or 'bridegroom's men,' or anything but angels. Nor can the verse mean, as Bengel supposes, that women are to veil themselves because the angels do so (...Isaiah 6:2), or (as Augustine says) because the angels approve of it. The only question is whether the allusion is to good or bad angels. In favor of the latter view is the universal tradition among the Jews that the angels fell by lust for mortal women, which was the Jewish way of interpreting ... Genesis 6:1, 2. This is the view of Tertullian ... in writing on this subject. A woman, in the opinion and traditions of Oriental Jews, is liable to injury from the *shedim*, if she appears in public unveiled; and these evil spirits are supposed to delight in

²³⁹ Esther 1:15-22

²⁴⁰ Gen. 1:27

²⁴¹ Gen. 20^b-22

the appearance of unveiled women. The objection to this view, that *angeloi* alone is never used of evil but always of good angels, is not perhaps decisive (see ...1 Corinthians 6:3). The verse may, however, mean (in accordance with the Jewish belief of those days) that good angels, being under the possibility of falling from the same cause as their evil brethren, fly away at once from the presence of unveiled women. Thus Khadijah tested that the visitant of her husband Mohammed really was the angel Gabriel, because he disappeared the moment she unveiled her head. On the whole, however, the meaning seems to be, *out of respect and reverence for the holy angels, who are always invisibly present in the Christian assemblies.*"

The Greek word rendered in the NIV "a sign of authority" is *exousia*, which literally means "power." The meaning of that word in this context has evoked another avalanche of interpretations. *The Pulpit Commentary* states about this, "The very brief comment of Luther sums up all the best of the many pages which have been written on the subject. He says that *exousia* means 'the veil or covering, by which one may see that she is under her husband's authority.'"

Verse 11, which the NIV renders, "In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman" is another example of Paul's Greek. The literal reading is, "Nevertheless neither woman is without the man neither the man without the woman in the Lord." The KJV comes closest to the original, but it does not enhance the clarity of the meaning. *The Living Bible* paraphrases this commendably, "But remember that in God's plan men and women need each other."

By saying, "Judge for yourselves. Is it proper..." and "Does not the very nature of things teach you..." the apostle draws the whole discussion into the realm of the subjective. This suggests that there is room for differing opinions. The fact that Paul concludes by saying, "If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice — nor do the churches of God" clearly indicates that the whole subject is not a matter of divine revelation, but of accepted custom. The warning is not against dissenting views but against being contentious. The pertinent lesson for our time is particularly in this part of the apostle's advice. Although the debate about the role of women in the church has not died down, it is the warning against a spirit of contention that ought to be carrying the day in the way we deal with our present problems. The issue of music in the church, for instance today is much hotter than the feminist question. Churches are being ripped apart over the controversy between the organ and the guitar. If our burden would be the unity of the body rather than the way we sing, or pray, or who does the singing, the praying and the preaching, our testimony would be the more powerful.

Another lesson to be drawn from this section is well emphasized by David Prior in *The Message of I Corinthians*. We read, "No doubt there are many cultural conventions when it comes to masculine and feminine roles, jobs and rights which need to be revised or rejected. As Creator, however, God intends that men and women should have different, but complementary, functions. Each human being is to give glory to God by being what God intends him or her to be. The man is to be truly masculine and the woman truly feminine, without allowing stereotypes of either to dictate our perceptions, but rather basing our understanding of what it is to be fully human on the perfect model of Jesus. This principle will make us chary of going overboard on the modern theme of 'unisex.' The fullness of Christian worship can be experienced only as each man and each woman, created for God and redeemed by God, allow their humanness to be expressed according to God's pattern."

B. Rebuke of Disorders at the Lord's Supper

11:17-34

17 In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.

18 In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.

19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat,

21 for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk.

22 Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,

24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.

29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.

32 When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

33 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other.

34 If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.

The question has been asked how Paul came from the topic of the role of women in the church service to the matter of the Lord's Supper. It is true that both deal with the church's worship service, but that fact does not seem enough reason to link the two together. It is doubtful that irregularities in the celebration of the Lord's Supper was one of the subjects mentioned in the letter the church of Corinth had sent to Paul. It seems more likely the information came from "some from Chloe's household"²⁴² from whom Paul had obtained some of the other news about the church. Paul's initial reaction appears to have been unbelief. Things could not be as bad as they had been presented to him. But then the apostles concluded that there is never any smoke without at least some fire.

"Your meetings do more harm than good" sounds like an overstatement, which may have been made intentionally. Paul is probably speaking here, not about the worship service in general but about special gatherings which were known as *agape*, or "love feasts." These gatherings must have been something like our potluck dinners in which everybody brings a dish for a meal that is eaten together in an expression of fellowship. These *agape* were evidently concluded with a celebration of the Lord's Supper. As such the love feasts resembled the Passover celebration, which formed the basis of the institution of the sacrament.

In order to understand what Paul says it is necessary to take a closer look at two Greek words the apostle uses. The word rendered "divisions" is the translation of the Greek *schisma*, which literally means a tear in a piece of material. We find it in the verses, "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse."²⁴³ The word has acquired the meaning of something that tears the church apart, a schism. The second Greek word is *haireisis*, from which our word "heresy" is derived. The original meaning of the word is more neutral, simply meaning "a party." We find it in the verse, "Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy."²⁴⁴ It is from this word that we get the impression that a party spirit ruled the love feasts. The people may have formed cliques and sat together at separate tables as followers of Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ.²⁴⁵ The schism had nothing to do with doctrinal or theological differences but with a matter of preference and style. For people who are supposed to be members of the same body, a topic Paul treats in the next chapter, they rather give the impression of an autopsy in which the members of the body have been cut up and put on separate tables.

Added to this, some individuals had brought an abundance of food and were gorging themselves, while the poor who had been unable to contribute were left to look on. Sharing of food was not part of the celebration. The church in Corinth had moved far away from the church in Jerusalem in the early days after Pentecost of which we read, "There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need."²⁴⁶

²⁴² See I Cor. 1:11.

²⁴³ Matt. 9:16

²⁴⁴ Acts 5:17

²⁴⁵ See I Cor. 1:12.

²⁴⁶ Acts 4:34,35

Leon Morris, in *I Corinthians*, elaborates, “Clubs and associations in antiquity often had communal meals, sometimes paid for out of group funds. It was not uncommon for the food served to the diners to differ in quantity and amount. Theissen cites associations where officials by regulation received more than others, some one and a half times, some twice, and some three times the normal ... He also draws attention to hosts who had better food for privileged guests ... Clearly at Corinth the Holy Communion was a full meal of the type called a ‘love feast’ (Jude 12, some MMS of 2 Pet. 2:13). But what happened at Corinth was a travesty of love. The wealthier members of the congregation clearly provided most of the food, and this could have been a marvelous expression of Christian love and unity. But it was degraded into the very opposite. The poor would have to finish their work before they could come, and slaves would find it particularly difficult to be on time. But the rich did not wait. They ate and drank in their cliques (‘divisions’, v. 18), each eating ‘an own dinner’ ... The food was gone before the poor got there! *One remains hungry, another gets drunk*. There was a sharp contrast between the hungry poor, lacking even necessary food, and the drunken rich. There was no real sharing, no genuinely common meal.”

Paul offers again a solution that is sublime. As the apostle did with the other nasty problems, he goes right to the top to draw the attention of the glory God has in mind for His children. Since the *agape* was concluded by a celebration of the Lord’s Supper, he concentrates on the meaning of that sacrament.

Paul does not elaborate on how he received the details of the Last Supper Jesus celebrated with His disciples. Some Bible scholars interpret the words “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you” as meaning that Paul had received a direct and personal revelation from the risen Lord, as he had regarding the Gospel message.²⁴⁷ It seems illogical, however, that Paul would receive information by means of supernatural communications of events that must have been common knowledge among the early Christians. Some of the Gospel record may already have existed in written form, such as the Gospel of Mark. Paul also had had ample communication with the apostles in Jerusalem to be sufficiently informed about the details of the last meal they had had together with Jesus. “I received from the Lord” may simply mean that Paul had made participation in the Lord’s Supper a personal experience in his fellowship with Christ.

There is an added poignancy in the mention of the betrayal of Jesus in connection with the Lord’s Supper, as if Paul wanted to warn the Corinthians against betraying Jesus as Judas did while taking communion. The first Eucharist was instituted as part of the Passover celebration, which commemorated Israel’s exodus from Egypt. The Passover was at the same time the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was celebrated for the rest of the week following the Passover. Paul referred to this earlier in this epistle when he wrote, “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.”²⁴⁸ In identifying Himself with the lamb, the bread, and the wine, Jesus elevated the Passover to a celebration of a spiritual exodus from the bondage of sin into a life of freedom and dignity. At the same time, our Lord raised the act of eating and drinking in general to an act of worship. The early church probably understood it this way and incorporated the Lord’s Supper into every meal. This may be the meaning of Luke’s statement, “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.”²⁴⁹

This is the second time Paul makes reference to the Lord’s Supper in this epistle; if we count the mention in Chapter Five as pertaining to it also, it is the third time. In Chapter Five, the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread symbolized a break with a life of sin. In Chapter Ten it was a break with idol worship and involvement with demons, and in this chapter it stands for a celebration of brotherly love. In broaching this subject here, Paul lays the foundation for what he wants to state in the following chapter about the unity of the body of Christ.

Paul says that in partaking of the Lord’s Supper, we “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” We can experience and practice the love of fellow believers in Christ, because Christ’s body was broken for them as it was for us and His blood washed them of their sins as it did us. At the same time it declares that Christ will come again and restore the Kingdom of God. What the Corinthians did during their love feasts in gorging themselves and letting others go hungry, meant that they sinned against the body and blood of the Lord. Realization of the meaning of Jesus’ sacrifice for us means the death of our selfish

²⁴⁷ See Gal. 1:11,12.

²⁴⁸ I Cor. 5:7,8

²⁴⁹ Acts 2:46,47

nature. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”²⁵⁰ If Jesus’ death for us does not bring about a change of heart, Christ died in vain for us. We must draw the consequences, as Paul states in Romans, “Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation — but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”²⁵¹

The words in v. 28 “A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup” are often interpreted to mean that we must look at ourselves if there remains any unconfessed sin in our lives. Paul says this in the context of our consideration of others. We partake of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner if we do not recognize Jesus Christ in the person of the other. Jesus explains what brotherly love means in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, where the king says to his servants, “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” and “whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”²⁵² The apostle John goes even further by saying, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”²⁵³ Partaking in the Lord’s Supper brings with it some stiff requirements! The Holy Spirit can only make us willing to lay down our lives for our brothers if we have already laid down our life for Jesus Christ in His crucifixion.

Paul’s admonition about partaking of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner had been widely misunderstood and kept many from participating in the celebration of the sacrament. The thought that we ought to consider ourselves worthy before we can accept the symbols of the body and blood of Christ is of demonic origin. When the Pharisees accused Jesus of communing with sinners, He answered, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”²⁵⁴ We partake of the elements because we are sinners. The NIV renders the Greek adjective *anaxios* correctly as “in an unworthy manner,” not as *being* unworthy. The word modifies the verb, not the noun. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes pertinently, “Unworthiness in the person ought not to exclude any, but unworthily communicating: however unworthy we be, if we penitently believe in Christ’s meritorious death for us, we worthily communicate.” Sinning against the body and blood of the Lord does not mean sinning against the elements, but sinning against our neighbor by not loving him as ourselves.

It seems that Paul attributes the large number of sick people and deaths in the church of Corinth to their mismanagement of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Some commentators suggest that the apostle linked these sicknesses to the intemperance of those who gorged themselves, but that is not clearly stated in this verse. As modern age people we tend to shy away from Paul’s conclusion even though the number of sick people in our churches is staggering. We may want to ask ourselves if there is a link between the number of cancer patients in our congregation and the lack of evidence of brotherly love. Judging ourselves at this point is, of course, quite different from taking an inventory of personal sin that would prevent us from taking communion. Maybe we would live longer and healthier lives if we were willing “to lay down our lives for our brothers.”

Whether being judged by the Lord refers to falling victim to sickness is not clear. If God uses physical ailment as a form of discipline it means that there is hope. Discipline is not the same as punishment. Punishment is for those who reject the truth; discipline is for those who have accepted the truth and who have to learn how to apply it.

Some commentators see in Paul’s closing words in the chapter a condemnation of the fact that the Corinthians combined the celebration of the Lord’s Supper with a love feast, as if the sacred ought not to be attached to the secular. Waiting for one another can hardly be applied to the Lord’s Supper, neither can eating at home be linked to it. The very fact that the Word became flesh means that God erased the dividing line between the sacred and the secular. If we eat the body of Christ and drink His blood, we make the secular sacred. It is true that partaking of the Lord’s Supper is not meant to satisfy our physical appetite, but it is probably also true that in our celebration of the sacrament as it is done at present in many churches, using tiny pieces of crackers and individual little cups, we have moved far from the way the Lord instituted it.

²⁵⁰ Gal. 5:24

²⁵¹ Rom. 8:12-14

²⁵² Matt. 25:40, 45

²⁵³ I John 3:16

²⁵⁴ Matt. 9:12

C. Principles of Exercising Spiritual Gifts
1. The Unity of the Body

12:1--14:40

12:1-31

- 1 Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.*
- 2 You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.*
- 3 Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.*
- 4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.*
- 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.*
- 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.*
- 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*
- 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit,*
- 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit,*
- 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.*
- 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.*
- 12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.*
- 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*
- 14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.*
- 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.*
- 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.*
- 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?*
- 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.*
- 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be?*
- 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.*
- 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"*
- 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,*
- 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty,*
- 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it,*
- 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.*
- 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*
- 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*
- 28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.*
- 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?*
- 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?*
- 31 But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.*

The Chapters 12-14 must be seen as one unit in which Paul deals with the way in which the Holy Spirit reveals Himself in and through those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Chapter Twelve, the apostle emphasized the unity of the body. In Chapter Thirteen, he deals with the governing principle of love in the expression of the functions of the separate part and in Chapter Fourteen he explains the way in which

the gifts of the Holy Spirit ought to be demonstrated in public services. *The Pulpit Commentary* refers to the image of the body Paul uses to illustrate his point as one of Paul's favorite images, which he also uses in Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians.²⁵⁵

In looking at the details of these chapters we must remember the background of paganism from which most of the Corinthians came, which is quite different from the one most of us have come from. David Prior in *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, explains, "This was essentially based in the Greek mystery-religions, in which spiritual experiences were the norm. They had grown accustomed to be *moved* (2) by some kind of supernatural or demonic force, either into a state of trance, or into ecstasy, or into some strange course of action. Such 'inspiration' was regarded, not merely as normal and to be expected, but as a clear authentication of the reality of the divine force involved. If there was no such clear manifestation of inspiration, the power of the relevant divinity was suspect." Leon Morris, in *1 Corinthians*, adds to this, "From the day of Pentecost on, some within the Christian church manifested unusual spiritual gifts. They did things like peak in a tongue they did not understand. To many early believers this kind of thing was preeminently the mark of a 'spiritual' person. By comparison the practice of Christian virtue seemed staid and colorless."

In the phrase "Now about spiritual gifts" the word "gifts" is not in the Greek. Paul uses the single word *pneumatikos*, meaning "the spirituals" or "the things of the Spirit." The word is neuter, which suggests that the apostle does not speak of spiritual people but about spiritual things. Some Bible scholars, however, maintain that the word can refer to either a person or a gift. It is not specifically stated that in treating this subject Paul answers a question the Corinthians asked about in their letter, but this can be understood.

There must have been a good deal of misunderstanding about the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the church in Corinth. Having come out of paganism, the Corinthians tended to lean toward those expressions of the presence of the Holy Spirit that were spectacular, which made them overrate some gifts to the detriment of others, particularly the gift of speaking in tongues. Evidently, speaking in tongues was also part of certain pagan rites. The devil can endow people with this gift as can the Holy Spirit. That is why it is important to establish the basis of recognition of the Lordship of Jesus Christ before even considering the gifts of the Spirit. We must realize that Satan can infiltrate the church by means of gifts that resemble the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Paul uses three words to describe the way the Holy Spirit manifests Himself through the believer in the church: *charisma*, usually translated "gift," *diakonia*, in this context rendered "service," and *energema*, which means "the effect," or "operation." Our word "energy" is derived from it. The three words indicate the three-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the church. The Holy Spirit endows people with gifts of grace. The word *charisma* contains *charis*, meaning grace. The gifts must be used as tools of service, not in order to promote personal interests. And the Holy Spirit controls the effect the gifts of grace have upon the church and the world outside the church.

In this context Paul points to the only source of all gifts, mentioning the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Father fuse together as the source of all the church and the members of the body need to be what they are meant to be. Yet, only the Holy Spirit is mentioned as the agent who chooses what to give to whom.

The fact that the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the church are called gifts means that the person who receives a gift is allowed a certain measure of freedom in the use of it. The word *charisma* suggests that it is a free gift, not a payment for certain efforts or achievements. It also implies that the one who receives it has a certain liberty. In human relationships free gifts do not have strings attached to them; if they do they are considered bribes. They also cannot be taken back, unless the giver is an "Indian Giver," and God is not an "Indian Giver." On the other hand, Jesus compared the Kingdom of Heaven to a man who gave "talents" to his servants to continue his business in his absence. The servant who had failed to invest the talent and make profit was severely taken to task.²⁵⁶ But the emphasis there seems to be more on outreach than on the building up of the body of believers. That parable is framed in on one side by the story of the virgins who expect the arrival of the bridegroom and on the other hand about the people who showed social concern for their fellowmen by recognizing the image of God in them.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ See Rom. 12:4,5; Eph. 4:11-16; Col. 2:19.

²⁵⁶ See Matt. 25:14-30.

²⁵⁷ See Matt. 25:1-14, 31-46.

Paul also calls *charisma* “the manifestation of the Spirit.” That gives us to understand that without an act of surrender on our part, the gift of the Holy Spirit will not serve the purpose for which it is given. If we use the “talent” that has been entrusted to us or the *charisma* with which God has endowed us, without first giving it back to the Lord in an act of self-surrender, the church as a whole will not benefit from it. God respects our individuality in giving us our gift; we must emphasize the Person who gave it to us in the exercise of the gift, otherwise we allow the gift to draw attention to ourselves to our own undoing. The gifts God gives us will only serve for the building up of the church if we use them to glorify God. If we are bent on God’s glory, He will take care of ours.

The words “to each” force the unavoidable conclusion that no one is left out. Even if we cannot find ourselves on Paul’s list, the Holy Spirit did not pass us by if we have taken our surrender to Him seriously. The list of nine gifts the apostle gives in this epistle is not exhaustive. We may safely state that the Holy Spirit has other gifts than wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

It is the diversity of gifts that determines the unity of the body. It is the balance of bodily functions that determines its health. As in the physical body disturbance of the balance promotes cancerous growth which kills the body, so in the spiritual body health demonstrates itself in a well-balanced equilibrium of gifts and functions. The difference between the image and the spiritual reality is that the physical body develops from the fusion of two cells into a perfect match of limbs and organs. They all grow together from a tiny beginning into a full-grown body. The church of Jesus Christ resembles more a combination of limbs and organs that have all been transplanted into it from the outside. It is better to leave that picture behind at this point; otherwise we lose ourselves in a caricature that resembles a physical monstrosity. There is a sense in which every member comes into the church as a full-grown adult, although regeneration by the Holy Spirit is spoken of as the new birth. The melting together of part from divers backgrounds is done by the Holy Spirit, who immerses each of us into one body by an act that is called “baptism.” The Greek word *baptizo* is derived from *bapto*, which can be rendered “to stain as with dye.” There is a sense in which the church of Jesus Christ resembles “a batik,” a cloth, on which patterns are made by soaking them in different kinds of dye, an art in which the Indonesians excel. We will be fitting members of the body of Christ if we allow the Holy Spirit to thoroughly soak us in Himself. Quenching our thirst by drinking the Holy Spirit will determine the color of our life.

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary captures well the essence of Paul’s statement: “Being animated by one Spirit makes Christians one body. Note, All who have the spirit of Christ, without difference, are the members of Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free; and none but such. And all the members of Christ make up one body; the members many, but the body one. They are one body, because they have one principle of life; all are quickened and animated by the same Spirit.”

Having thus established the oneness of the body, Paul proceeds to describe the diversity of its parts. It is sometimes the diversity that accentuates the unity. If you ever had the experience of praying with someone from another country and culture whose language you did not understand, you know what it feels like to be one in Christ. The realization of both being forgiven by the blood of Christ and of both loving the same Master creates a bond of oneness that surpasses all other relationships.

In verses 14-20 Paul describes the people who feel that they are not needed in the body of Christ and in verses 21-26 those who are aware of their own importance as members of the body but who are not sure the others are needed. Both feelings of inferiority and superiority are rooted in carnality and are manipulated by Satan. If we feel inferior to others and covertly harbor sentiments of jealousy we demonstrate to believe that God made a mistake in the way He put together the body of Christ. Such attitude can only be explained by an insufficient intimacy in relationship with the head. If we know that God loves us and has accepted us in Jesus Christ, we will focus our attention upon Him more than upon the fellow members of the body. If our surrender to Christ is genuine, our experience of being loved will eliminate any feeling of inferiority and desire for competition.

Amazingly, the root of the opposite feeling of superiority is the same as the one that causes the inferiority complex. We act as if we are the only ones capable of doing the job as a means to covering up our insufficiency. We think that our fears will melt away if we shout loud enough. Paul himself asked the question, “And who is equal to such a task?” and he answered, “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”²⁵⁸ Those who constitute the hidden parts of the body of Christ, those whose functioning is not visible from the outside, are the more important

²⁵⁸ II Cor. 2:16; 3:5

ones. Their importance would become immediately evident if they were not there. The energy of the body is not produced by those who are at the forefront but by those who operate in the secret of their prayer closet.

In using the illustration of the body and its different members Paul treads ground that was familiar to the Corinthians. They must have been familiar with an incident in Roman history in which the population of Rome rebelled against the senators of the city. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* relates the speech of a famous general, Menenius Agrippa, who saved the day for the empire by telling the following story, "In that time in which the different parts of the human body were not in a state of unity as they now are, but each member had its separate office and distinct language, they all became discontented, because whatever was procured by their care, labor, and industry, was spent on the belly; while this, lying at ease in the midst of the body, did nothing but enjoy whatever was provided for it. They therefore conspired among themselves, and agreed that the hands should not convey food to the mouth, that the mouth should not receive what was offered to it, and that the teeth should not masticate whatever was brought to the mouth. Acting on this principle of revenge, and hoping to reduce the belly by famine, all the members, and the whole body itself were at length brought into the last stage of consumption. It then plainly appeared that the belly itself did no small service; that it contributed not less to their nourishment than they did to its support, distributing to every part that from which they derived life and rigor; for by properly concocting the food, the pure blood derived from it was conveyed by the arteries to every member." *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* continues, "This sensible comparison produced the desired effect, the people were persuaded that the senators were as necessary to their existence as they were to that of the senators, and that it required the strictest union and mutual support of high and low to preserve the body politic. This transaction took place about 500 years before the Christian era, and was handed down by unbroken tradition to the time of Titus Livius, from whom I have taken it, who died in the year of our Lord 17, about forty years before Paul wrote this epistle. As his works were well known and universally read among the Romans in the time of the apostle, it is very probable that Paul had this famous apologue in view when he wrote from 1 Cor 12:14 to the end of the chapter."

The gist of Paul's argument in these verses is that our belonging to the body of Christ does not depend upon our choice but on God's. If we are born again because we believe that the sacrifice of Christ has atoned for our sins, the Holy Spirit merges us into the fellowship of believers and He determines our place in the body. It is entirely His decision, not ours or that of the other members of the body. The matter of prominence and honor also belongs to God. The idea seems to be that God honors more those body parts that we honor less and vice versa. The reference is probably to clothing. We cover up those body parts the exposure of which would be considered indecent. Yet, the attention we pay to clothing also constitutes a form of honor.

God's honor consists in the bestowal of function. The brevity of Paul's explanation makes this part of the text rather cryptic. A picture never truly and completely represents reality. The main point Paul wants to make is that in the fellowship of believers the members must recognize and maintain the unity that God has created. We must also understand that God's value system is quite the opposite of ours. It is important that we conform our behavior to His concept of honor, not ours. The way we do this becomes evident in our reaction to the joys and sorrows or the other members. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "St. Chrysostom illustrates this verse by saying that if a thorn runs into the heel, the whole body feels it and is troubled; and that, on the other hand, if the head is garlanded, the whole man is glorified." Generally speaking though, we find it easier to cry together than to rejoice together.

Having driven home his point, Paul proceeds to show how this diversity in unity works. In this the apostle, at the same time, sticks to the picture of the body as an illustration of the fellowship of the believers and he also seems to deviate from it in a striking way. The list of apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, etc. is easy to understand, but the advice to eagerly desire the greater gifts seems to contradict what the picture had been trying to confirm. In the image of the body, one member cannot progress to the function of another member, although there is evidence of a collateral in case one member has been injured or incapacitated. What must be meant is not that the eye, for instance, would take over the function of the ear, but that each member reach for that gift that gives meaning and content to the exercise of all gifts, the gift of divine love. In Chapter Fourteen, however, Paul seems to indicate that it is possible for a member of the body to add other gifts to the one that determines the place in the body. He writes, "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy."

The last several verses of this chapter, verses 28-30, are wrought with difficulties that are not easy to unravel. After having mentioned three particular offices, apostles, prophets, and teachers, there is

mention of gifts without any reference to office. The NIV tries to clarify the texts by adding the words “those having...” “those able to...” “those with gifts...” etc., which are not in the Greek. *Young’s Literal Translation* of v. 28 reads, “afterwards powers, afterwards gifts of healings, helpings, governings, divers kinds of tongues.” “Those able to help others” is the translation of one Greek word *antilepsis*, “helps, or support.” which is found nowhere else in the New Testament. “Those with gifts of administration” is the rendering of another Greek word, *kubernesis*, meaning, “to steer,” which is also found in this verse only. Both words have caused an avalanche of opinions among Bible scholars. Leon Morris, in *1 Corinthians*, explains (if that is the right word in this context), “Commentators and translators guess at meanings like ‘works of charity’ ... and ‘gifts of support’ ... for the first, and ‘gifts of administration’ ... or ‘good leaders’ ... for the second. *Antilēmpseis* certainly means help of some sort, but what that kind of helping is that requires a special charisma we simply do not know. *Kybernēseis* is the activity of the steersman piloting a vessel ... It looks like a word of direction of some sort, but we have no way of knowing which. The two terms remind us of the immense amount about life in the apostolic church of which we are ignorant.”

The easiest word to analyze is “apostles,” as those sent by direct order of Christ to evangelize. Peter narrowed the definition by stating that apostles ought to be “men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”²⁵⁹ Prophets were those who not only prophesied in terms of foretelling the future but also in proclaiming the Word of God. The act of inspired preaching makes one a prophet. The task of the teacher was to explain and apply the same Word. In his Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul extends the list and also explains the purpose of the various gifts by stating, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”²⁶⁰ It is obvious that some of those mentioned already also had the gifts mentioned next. Paul, for instance, performed miracles and healed, he also professed to speak in tongues.

The hypothetical questions, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets?” etc. require a negative answer. This means that the claim of our Pentecostal brothers that all who are filled with the Holy Spirit ought to be speaking in tongues lacks a biblical foundation. Paul also indicates that some gifts are superior to others and that it is legitimate to “eagerly desire the greater gifts.” That is the point where reality deviates from the image of the body.

2. The Most Excellent Way

13:1-13

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part,

10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

²⁵⁹ Acts 1:21,22

²⁶⁰ Eph. 4:11-13

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

This thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians is the most compelling example of Paul's eloquence. It evinces Paul's poetic nature as none of his other writings do. This chapter ought to be sung, rather than be read.

The key word in this chapter is "love" as the translation of the Greek word *agape*. Leon Morris, in *I Corinthians*, observes, "The Greek word was not in common use before the New Testament ... But the Christians took it up and made it their characteristic word for love (it occurs 116 times in the New Testament, 75 being in Paul). Whereas the highest concept of love before the New Testament was that of a love for the best one knows, the Christians thought of love as that quality we see on the cross. It is a love for the utterly unworthy, a love that proceeds from a God who is love. It is a love lavished on others without a thought whether they are worthy or not. It proceeds from the nature of the lover, not from any attractiveness in the beloved. The Christian who has experienced God's love for him while he was yet a sinner (Rom. 5:8) has been transformed by the experience. Now he sees people as those for whom Christ died, the objects of God's love, and therefore the objects of the love of God's people. In his measure he comes to practice the love that seeks nothing for itself, but only the good of the loved one. It is this love that the apostle unfolds."

Agape-love is the most characteristic feature of the Christian religion. It is the word that uniquely describes the character of God. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* appropriately states, "Christianity is the only religion that sets forth the Supreme Being as Love. In heathen religions He is set forth as an angry being and in constant need of appeasing." The apostle John writes, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him."²⁶¹ In our exercise of *agape*-love we demonstrate that God has communicated His very character to us. It is this love that stimulates in us the willingness to bring the ultimate sacrifice. "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."²⁶²

In this chapter Paul shows that love is essential in the exercise of all spiritual gifts. Verses 1-3 demonstrate that love is the ultimate factor that gives meaning to the gifts of the Spirit. Verses 4-7 tell how love evinces itself. And Verses 8-13 indicate the eternal nature of love which proves its supremacy.

Interestingly, the apostle begins with the exercise of the gifts of tongues in his effort to determine the meaning of spiritual gifts.

Leon Morris, in *I Corinthians*, states about the gift of tongues, "The ability to speak in different kinds of tongues appears to have been a special form of speech when the person uttering the words did not know what they meant (unless he also had the gift of interpretation). Some have interpreted this from Acts 2, where 'tongues' seem to mean speaking in a foreign language. But it is difficult to see this here. Whereas in Acts 2 the characteristic is intelligibility (Acts 2:8-11), here the characteristic is unintelligibility ('no-one understands him', 14:2). The gift here is not part of the church's evangelistic program (as in Acts 2), but one exercised among believers. It is not understood by people who speak other languages, but requires a special gift of interpretation. Without that gift of interpretation, the speaker in tongues is to speak 'to himself and God' (14:28), which is a strange way to treat one of the world's recognized languages. The gift was not one whereby people might be more readily understood by others, but one in which they did not even understand themselves. Utterances in no known language, but under the influence of the Spirit, seems to be Paul's meaning."

Yet, "the tongues of men and of angels" suggests languages that are both known and unknown on earth. And the very word "language" presupposes meaning. A language is composed of words and words are sounds that convey meaning. The meaning may elude us if we do not know the language but that does not mean that it is not there. "Speaking in tongues," therefore, is not a mere uttering of sound. We all face the strange phenomenon that we are able to convey thoughts and emotions by producing sounds that others can understand. The fact that we do not understand the process does not keep us from making use of it. It is obvious from Paul's treatment of the subject that he recognized "speaking in tongues" as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, one that he practiced himself. We read in Chapter Fourteen, "I thank God that I speak in

²⁶¹ I John 4:8,16

²⁶² I John 3:16

tongues more than all of you.”²⁶³ We assume that the apostle did not mean that he was multi-lingual, speaking Hebrew, Greek and Latin; he probably referred to the tongue of angels.

As we said above, it is interesting that Paul mentions tongues as the first spiritual gift that must be exercised within the framework of love. The fact that speaking in tongues was prevalent in the pagan religion from which most Corinthians had emerged, probably, gave legitimacy to the Christian church by the exercise of that gift under the control of the Holy Spirit. Chapter Fourteen, as we will see, suggests that the Corinthians may have put too much emphasis on that legitimacy to the detriment of other gifts the Holy Spirit had given.

In the next verse the apostle lumps together the gifts of prophecy, knowledge and faith that would propel persons to prominence and leadership in the church and he says that, without love, these gifts have no intrinsic value. The following statement about absolute surrender of one’s property and body seems to be impossible without the presence of *agape*-love, yet the apostle assumes that possibility. In speaking of “faith that can move mountains,” Paul obviously refers to Jesus’ statement, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done.”²⁶⁴

The mention of surrendering one’s body to the flames is probably a reference to the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who were thrown into King Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace for refusing to bow down to his statue.²⁶⁵ Some Bible scholars have thought that the text should read, “that I may boast,” instead of “surrender to the flames.” The difference would be in the exchange of one letter, which could constitute a copying error. Another suggestion is that a person would give himself into slavery as a substitute for someone else and would be branded in the process. The possibility of a suicide martyr who put fire to himself can be ruled out safely. It is a frightening thought that the ultimate proof that God’s love is in us, the sacrifice of our own body, could become an empty ritual intended for self-glorification and demonstrating a complete lack of love. I am thinking of John’s statement, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”²⁶⁶ How could we take the proof of Christ’s love for us and turn it around to prove the opposite? It would make one into a modern-day suicide bomber. I suppose Satan could deceive some people in doing just that.

Verses 4-7 show us the way love demonstrates itself in practical, everyday circumstances. This is the way God’s love operates and the way the Holy Spirit reveals Himself in the life of a believer. Paul gives us two positive examples of what love is: patient and kind. This is followed by eight negatives: no envy, no boasting, not proud, not rude, not self-seeking, not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs, does not delight in evil. This topped off with five positives: love rejoices with the truth, it always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. This inventory of fifteen characteristics can be of help for us to determine how much control of our life the Holy Spirit has taken.

David Prior, in *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, writes, “It is important that Paul uses *verbs* in describing such love: a loving person will behave in a certain way; he will do, and not do, certain things because of the kind of person he is becoming, through the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit. These qualities, these actions, are top priorities for every Christian in a local church. If these are absent, the church will languish and fail, if not disintegrate, however active successful and large it may be. The verbs Paul uses are all in the present continuous tense, denoting actions and attitudes which have become habitual, ingrained gradually by constant repetition. They sound ordinary, obvious, almost banal; but they are probably the most difficult habits to cultivate. It is not coincidental that these four verses perfectly describe the character of Jesus himself, and of nobody else. This becomes clear when we substitute ‘Jesus’ for ‘love’ in this passage, and then by contrast insert our own name instead.” *The Commentary* proceeds to give the following headings to Verses 4-7, which it borrows from a volume of *Church Dogmatics* by Karl Barth: i. Love and the darkness in ourselves (4b-5a), ii. Love and the darkness of others (5b-6), and iii. Love and the apparent darkness in God (7).

Having said that love is patient and kind, which we are not in our carnal condition, Paul proceeds to hold the mirror before us to show us what our reactions ought to be to different circumstances in human relations. Love “does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil.” Envy is the incentive for most

²⁶³ See I Cor. 14:18.

²⁶⁴ Matt. 21:21. See also 17:20.

²⁶⁵ See Dan. 3.

²⁶⁶ I John 3:16

of our actions in life. It is the way we react to peer pressure. Our feeling of inferiority pushes us to “keep up with the Joneses.” Loving our neighbor as ourselves will neutralize that evil. If envy is present in our life we obviously lack in our love for God. The first and the second commandment are closely linked together. Jesus said, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”²⁶⁷ Boasting, pride, rudeness and self-seeking all grow on the same rootstock of envy. When envy goes the others will wither also.

The Greek word rendered “patient” is *makrothumeo*. The KJV renders it “longsuffering.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments, “[It] has a long mind; to the end of which neither trials, adversities, persecutions, nor provocations, can reach. The love of God, and of our neighbor for God’s sake, is patient toward all men: it suffers all the weakness, ignorance, errors, and infirmities of the children of God; and all the malice and wickedness of the children of this world; and all this, not merely for a time, but long, without end; for it is still a mind or disposition, to the end of which trials, difficulties, etc., can never reach. It also waits God’s time of accomplishing his gracious or providential purposes, without murmuring or repining; and bears its own infirmities, as well as those of others, with humble submission to the will of God.”

“Love is patient.” When we turn this statement around, we come to realize that impatience is an indicator of absence of love. There is more than one meaning to the statement that can be seen on some billboards for the promotion of sexual purity: “True love waits!” This virtue pertains not only to our inter-human relations but also in our fellowship with God. It is to those who love God with all their heart that David says, “Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.”²⁶⁸ If we love God enough not to run ahead of Him, we will also be able to be patient with our fellowmen.

“Kind” is the rendering of the Greek word *chresteuomai*, which is derived from the word *chreestos*. The word *chresteuomai* is only found in this verse in the New Testament and some Bible scholars believe that Paul may have coined it himself. The connection between love and kindness is easy to see, even in human relations. It seems only a small step between the Greek words *chreestos* and *Christos*, meaning Christ. Even if it would mean sinning against the laws of linguistics to make this connection, we can safely state that God’s love toward us demonstrates itself most clearly in the kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Envy is the first negative in the following series of eight pejoratives. It is the translation of the Greek word *zeloo*, which can either mean, “to have warmth of feeling for or against someone.” It is derived from the word *zelos*, meaning, “heat,” or “zeal.” We find it in a negative sense in the verse, “Because the patriarchs were *jealous* of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt.”²⁶⁹ And with a positive connotation in, “I am *jealous* for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.”²⁷⁰ The context determines the meaning.

“Boast” is the translation of the Greek word *perpereuomai*. The word is only found here in the New Testament.

Phusioo, “proud,” has the meaning of “to inflate.” This must have been a characteristic trait of the Corinthians since Paul uses the word six times in this epistle alone.²⁷¹

“Rude” is *aschemoneo* in Greek, meaning, “to act unbecomingly.” The word is also uniquely Pauline in that it appears only in First Corinthians. The other place is in “If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married.”²⁷²

“Self-seeking” does not require a closer look; the Greek words have the same meaning as in English.

“Easily angered” is the rendering of *paroxuno*, meaning “to exasperate.” We find the same word in “While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was *greatly distressed* to see that the city was full of idols.”²⁷³

²⁶⁷ Matt. 22:37-40

²⁶⁸ Ps. 27:14

²⁶⁹ Acts 7:9

²⁷⁰ II Cor. 11:2

²⁷¹ See I Cor. 4:6,18,19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4.

²⁷² I Cor. 7:36

²⁷³ Acts 17:16

“It keeps no record of wrongs” is a better translation of the Greek *logizomai to kakov*, than the King James’ rendering, “thinketh no evil.” The literal meaning of *logizomai* is “to take an inventory.”

The meaning of “evil” in the phrase, “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth” is literally, “injustice.” *Agape*-love is obviously on the side of truth and justice.

Paul concludes the description of love’s qualities by stating that love “always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” “Protect” is the translation of the Greek *stego*, meaning, “to cover with silence.” This does not have the meaning of “a cover-up” as we understand the term. It is this act of covering up in love that God demonstrated to Adam and Eve after they fell into sin. God did not tear off their fig leaves to expose the shame of their nakedness, but He gave them a genuine protection, provided by the death of a fellow creature. We read, “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”²⁷⁴ The ultimate demonstration of God’s covering love is in the atonement of our sin.

“[It] always trusts” contains the word *pistuo*, which means, “to have faith in.” It also has the meaning of “to credit something to someone’s account.” This reminds us of the words “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”²⁷⁵ “Hope” is the rendering of the Greek *elpizo*, which also has the meaning of “to confide,” or “to trust.”

And finally, “perseveres” is the translation of *hupomeno*, “to undergo,” or “to bear trials.” Each of these words relates the actions of *agape*-love to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. But the way Paul applies the characteristics of *agape*-love to us serves to indicate what our response to God’s love for us ought to be in relationship with our fellowmen.

“Love never fails.” The Greek word *pipto* means, “to collapse.” We find in the short parable of Jesus about the house built on the rock: “The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it *did not fall*, because it had its foundation on the rock.”²⁷⁶

In describing the eternal character of love, Paul brings in several other gifts that are particularly geared to our existence in the framework of time on earth. Prophecies, tongues and wisdom will not be carried over into eternity but love will. *The New Living Translation* captures well the gist of what Paul is saying, “Love will last forever, but prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will all disappear. Now we know only a little, and even the gift of prophecy reveals little! But when the end comes, these special gifts will all disappear.” Most of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are meant as temporal means to guide us through life on earth. Love is both a gift of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit. Love is the essence of God’s character.

It is not that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are imperfect; the limitations are in us. It is our immaturity that determines the partial benefits of God’s gifts. The imperfection of knowledge is no reflection upon knowledge itself. The knowledge of a child differs from the knowledge of an adult who has earned a doctoral degree, but this does not discredit or invalidate a child’s knowledge. The seed contains all the characteristics of the tree. We cannot say that a child is an imperfect adult. The adult has outgrown the child but he has not discarded his childhood in the sense that he feels that he was wrong then and is now right. When Paul states, “I put childish ways behind me,” he does not pass judgment on what he was before. It would, however, be wrong if we, as adults, would continue to react to life the way we did when we were young.

Bringing in the mirror as an illustration is a masterly touch. The example becomes even more meaningful when we understand that mirrors then were not what they are now. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains, “Our ‘glasses’ were unknown in that age. The mirrors were of silver or some polished metal, giving, of course, a far dimmer image than ‘glasses’ do. The rabbis said that ‘all the prophets saw through a dark mirror, but Moses through a bright one’ St. Paul says that no human eye can see God at all except as an image seen as it were behind the mirror.” We can update Paul’s illustration by comparing our knowledge of God with seeing His face in a picture. We all know the president of the United States of America and the queen of England that way, even if we have never shaken their hands. The difference between life on earth and in eternity is that we will see God face to face. It will be the most life-changing experience we have ever had. In the words of the apostle John, “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. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is

²⁷⁴ Gen. 3:21

²⁷⁵ Gen. 15:6

²⁷⁶ Matt. 7:25

pure.”²⁷⁷ To be like Him will be to know Him as He knows us. That concept is almost impossible to grasp in our present condition.

In saying, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love” Paul undoubtedly refers to life on earth. Faith and hope will no longer be needed in eternity. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments, “Without faith it is impossible to please God; and without it, we cannot partake of the grace of our Lord Jesus; without hope we could not endure, as seeing him who is invisible; nor have any adequate notion of the eternal world; nor bear up under the afflictions and difficulties of life; but great and useful and indispensably necessary as these are, yet charity or love is greater; LOVE is the fulfilling of the law; but this is never said of faith or hope.”

3. The Proper Exercise of Gifts

14:1-40

1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

2 For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.

3 But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.

4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

5 I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.

6 Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?

7 Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes?

8 Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?

9 So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.

10 Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning.

11 If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me.

12 So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

13 For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says.

14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.

15 So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.

16 If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying?

17 You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.

18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.

19 But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

20 Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.

21 In the Law it is written: "Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me," says the Lord.

22 Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.

23 So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

24 But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all,

25 and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

²⁷⁷ I John 3:2,3

26 *What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.*

27 *If anyone speaks in a tongue, two — or at the most three — should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret.*

28 *If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.*

29 *Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.*

30 *And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.*

31 *For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.*

32 *The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.*

33 *For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints,*

34 *women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.*

35 *If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*

36 *Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?*

37 *If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.*

38 *If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.*

39 *Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.*

40 *But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.*

In studying this chapter it is important to understand the conditions that must have prevailed in the church of Corinth. The main topic in this chapter is a comparison between the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy. In a way this could be defined as a comparison between ecstasy and edification. As we saw before, most members of the congregation came from a pagan background and brought with them some baggage of their former beliefs. Speaking an unknown language while in a trance was considered proof of being initiated into the supernatural. This tendency seems to have been carried over to some extent into the church. The Corinthians must have thought that they were more spiritual if they gave evidence of being spiritually connected by speaking in tongues. That enhanced their status in the church and fed their carnality. An ambitious striving for the first place in the congregation quenched the spirit of love. Paul had explained in the previous chapter that striving to excel spiritually without love was self-defeating. That does not mean, however, that we ought not to strive to excel.

Paul exhorts the members of the church in Corinth to “eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.” Bible scholars have searched deep and wide for the exact meaning of this statement, which is repeated four times in this chapter.²⁷⁸ The question is what does Paul mean by “prophecy?” David Prior, in *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, comments, “Whatever Paul means in encouraging the gift of prophecy, he does not suggest that any Christian can be on a par with those original prophets as organs of divine revelation. Any subsequent manifestation of this gift must be submitted to the authoritative teaching of the original apostles and prophets, as contained in the Canon of Scripture. Is there, then, a subsidiary prophetic gift and ministry today? It has often been equated with preaching, or with the kind of preaching which teaches biblical truth, notably expository preaching.” The same *Commentary* continues, “An important principle to follow is sketched by Paul himself, when he *both* stresses the special value of prophecy *and* wants every Christian at Corinth to use it. In other words, we must look for (and expect to find) an understanding of the New Testament gift of prophecy which is neither banal nor esoteric. It is presumably a gift which at the same time uniquely strengthens the church and is accessible to any member. We must not trivialize it in our attempts to understand it, nor must we make it so specialized that it lies beyond the reach of most Christians. To equate it with expository preaching is to fall into the latter danger. A church in which everybody is an expository preacher (or any kind of preacher, for that matter) would be a nightmare, and is manifestly not what Paul wants for the Corinthians. Equally, it is very easy to empty the gift of prophecy of its unique, immediate and distinctive content. It then becomes nothing more than sanctified common sense. At this point it is, perhaps, helpful to take Michael Green's summary as a working definition of prophecy: ‘a word from the Lord through a member of his body, inspired by his Spirit

²⁷⁸ See I Cor. 14:1,5,31,39.

and given to build up the rest of the body.’ Such a ministry is available to every Christian, as the Holy Spirit ‘apportions to each one individually as he wills.’ ”

It remains difficult to ascertain what form prophecy takes in the New Testament church. Paul’s definition that it is “for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort” shows the end, not the beginning. To assume that prophecy is always extemporaneous, because the Holy Spirit inspires it cannot be proven from the context of Paul’s writing. The presence of the canon limits the liberty of the prophet and distinguishes present day prophecy from the gift of the Old Testament prophets. The practice of the gift in some churches of charismatic persuasion sometimes gives one the feeling that there may be as many tares as wheat in this field. We may accept that prophecy can be extra-biblical in content but true prophecy can never contradict the written Word. In a way the gift of prophecy is as much shrouded in mystery as the gift of tongues is. The safest way to determine whether an utterance is prophetic is to see if it bears the fruit of “strengthening, encouragement and comfort.” In our eager desire for spiritual gifts, we ought to be driven by a desire to be a blessing to the fellow-members of the body of Christ.

This brings us back to the enigma of tongues. The argument that all speaking in tongues means the use of an existing language is difficult to maintain. When the apostles spoke in tongues on the day of Pentecost, they obviously spoke in languages that were understood by the foreigners who had come to Jerusalem.²⁷⁹ But Paul defines speaking in tongues as speaking to God without being understood by men. He not only does not condemn the exercise of this gift, but even states that he practices the gift himself. “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.”

In order to understand something about this gift we must remember that, as human beings, we are made up of body, soul and spirit. Our spirit is the organ that allows us to fellowship with God. We must not equate spirit with soul, as if the spirit is the domain that governs our mental abilities and our soul is the emotional part. Our soul is the organ that administers our thoughts, emotions and will. With our spirit we have access to a domain that our soul cannot enter. The experiences of our spirit may influence our thinking and our feelings and direct our will, but that does not make spirit and soul identical. So our spirit can commune with God independently of the soul, even if our feelings are stimulated and our tongue produces the sounds. Not having received the gift of tongues myself, I cannot speak from experience. But I can understand that this kind of communion with God can be very uplifting to the emotions and stimulating to our thought-life.

The question of edification in the exercise of gifts seems to be the predominant concern of the apostle in this chapter. We could compare the two gifts that are the subject of chapter to the use of music and of speech. Both can convey meaning, but meaning is more easily conveyed in the use of words than by music. A comparison between melody and meaning easily leads us into a domain where the boundaries of reason become vague. One may appeal to us more forcefully than the other according to our character and inclination. There are lines of separation between a melody, a poem and a piece of prose, but there are instances in which the divisions become very vague.

The Fausset’s Bible Dictionary states about the gift of tongues, “Still praise, not teaching, was the invariable use made of the gift. The places where tongues were exercised were just where there was least need of preaching in foreign tongues (Acts 2:1-4; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor 14:1). Tongues were not at their command whenever they pleased to teach those of different languages. The gift came, like prophesying, only in God’s way and time (Acts 2:1-18; 10:46; 19:6). No express mention is made of any apostle or evangelist preaching in any tongue save Greek or Hebrew (Aramaic). Probably Paul did so in Lycaonia (Acts 14:11,15); he says (1 Cor 14:18) ‘I speak with tongues (the Vaticanus manuscript, but the Sinaiticus and the Alexandrinus manuscripts ‘with a tongue’) more than ye all.’ Throughout his long notice of tongues in 1 Cor 14 he never alludes to their use for making one’s self intelligible to foreigners. This would have been the natural use for him to have urged their possessors to put them to, instead of interrupting church worship at home by their unmeaning display.” One could argue that the word “unmeaning” in *The Fausset’s Bible Dictionary* is uncalled for. The fact that words spoken in “tongues” are not understood by others, or even by the one who speaks, does not make them meaningless.

In the case of Peter’s preaching at the home of Cornelius, the gift was evidence to Peter and those who had come with him, that the Holy Spirit had come upon the gentiles; it was also understood by them, otherwise they could not have known that these people were praising God. We read, “The circumcised

²⁷⁹ See Acts 2:4-12.

believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.”²⁸⁰

When Jesus gave the great commission to His disciples He mentioned the gift of tongues as part of the evidence that would follow their preaching. “And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”²⁸¹ There is no reason to limit the realization of Jesus’ prediction to what happened on the day of Pentecost.

Paul seems to be saying in v.6 that tongues may be used to convey a revelation, knowledge, prophecy or instruction, provided the message is interpreted in a language the audience understands. Bible scholars have puzzled over the meaning of the four words Paul uses in this verse, trying to understand the various shades of meaning.

In the next verse Paul seems to make the connection between tongues and music, without going into any detail. The fact that he speaks about a tune being played by the flute or the harp suggests that the instrument must produce a series of notes that are arranged in such logical sequence that they make up a recognizable melody. We don’t know how much absolute music, or if any, was known in Paul’s day. By this we mean that there could be music that was not played by way of accompaniment of a text. We assume that at that time the words determined the music and that music as an independent entity as we know it now was none-existent. That would make the mention of the sounding of the trumpet consistent with the mention of the first two instruments. The trumpet was not played by way of accompaniment but its sounding was ruled by specific instructions as to the meaning of each blast.²⁸²

Paul’s mention of foreign languages does not exclude the use of an extra-terrestrial one. In his opening statement in the previous chapter he mentions “the tongues of men and of angels.” The tongues in the church in Corinth must have fitted into one of these two categories.

All the apostle has been saying so far in this chapter about the gift of tongues pertains to the use of it in the congregation. If tongues are used to give a demonstration of one’s spirituality, the gift ought not to be exercised. A person, who speaks in tongues for the purpose of showing off, is no better than the hypocrite who prays at the street corner.²⁸³ The only way in which one may speak in tongues in a church service is when interpretation is available. At the end of the chapter, Paul states clearly that such use should not be forbidden.

Paul accuses those who speak in tongues without interpretation in the church of immaturity. Verse 20 could read: “Grow up!” Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, has the following refreshing paraphrase of this section: “To be perfectly frank, I’m getting exasperated with your infantile thinking. How long before you grow up and use your head—your *adult* head? It’s all right to have a childlike unfamiliarity with evil; a simple *no* is all that’s needed there. But there’s far more to saying *yes* to something. Only mature and well-exercised intelligence can save you from falling into gullibility.”

Paul’s line of reasoning in Verses 20-25 seems to be contradictive because of the cryptic way the apostle expresses himself. In order to understand what is meant we have to look at the background of the prophecy quoted from Isaiah, as well as at the context in which Paul places it. Obviously, Isaiah’s words do not refer to the gift of tongues as the Holy Spirit bestowed it on the New Testament church. The only resemblance between Isaiah’s prophecy and Paul’s epistle here is that both use the same word, but in different contexts. Isaiah prophesied against Samaria, announcing that the Northern Kingdom of Israel would end up in captivity by a conqueror whose language they would not understand. We read in Isaiah, “Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people.”²⁸⁴ God will use the language of the captors of Israel to make them understand that they were in captivity because of their sin. They had started out by replacing their vital and living fellowship with God with a system of legalism. The Word of God had become a rulebook which they would quote liberally to each other while all the time continuing to sin against it. There were like thieves who would say, “Thou shalt not steal.”

In the application of this prophecy to the church in Corinth, Paul seems to warn them of the consequences of their legalism. This would only make sense if we can assume that, while Paul was in

²⁸⁰ Acts 10:45,46

²⁸¹ Mark 16:17,18

²⁸² See Num. 10:5,6,9.

²⁸³ See Matt. 6:5.

²⁸⁴ Isa. 28:11

Corinth, he had preached on the subject, so that the members of the church would understand his oblique reference to it in this epistle.

The apparent problem is that Paul seems to contradict himself by stating in v. 22 that tongues are a sign to the unbelievers and in v. 23 he states the exact opposite by saying that, if an unbeliever would come into a church service and hears people speaking in tongues, he will conclude that they are out of their mind. Leon Morris, in *1 Corinthians*, observes: "But perhaps the best suggestion is that of B. C. Johanson ... who argues that v. 22 should be seen as a rhetorical question (like that in Gal. 4:16), where the construction is similar). The Corinthians may well have argued that a man speaking in 'tongues' would be a sign to outsiders that God was at work, whereas prophecy did no more than convey a message to the believers. Paul asks, 'are tongues, then, a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers, and prophecy for believers, not for unbelievers?' He proceeds to refute this view in the examples that follow."

The Pulpit Commentary states, "The application of this Old Testament quotation furnishes one of the many singular instances of quotation which prove that the Jews often referred to the *words* without any direct reference to their context or original meaning. He here wishes to show that glossolally had little or no value except as an evidence to unbelievers, and illustrates this by ... Isaiah 28:11, 12. Now, in that passage Isaiah tells the drunken priests, who scornfully imitated his style, that, since they derided God's message so delivered to them, God would address them in a very different way by the Assyrians, whose language they did not understand; and that even to *this* stern lesson, taught them by people of alien tongue, they would remain deaf. In the original, therefore, there is not the least allusion to any phenomenon resembling the 'gift of tongues.' But the mere *words* of a scriptural passage always came to Jews with all the force of an argument, independently of their primary meaning; and it was enough for St. Paul's purpose that in Isaiah the allusion is to unintelligible utterance, and to the fact that the teaching which it was meant to convey would be in vain. And other lips. St. Paul does not quote the LXX. The Hebrew has 'with stammerings of lips and another tongue will he speak.' "

If we read v. 23, "Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers," against the background of Isaiah's prophecy Paul quotes, we could take "unbeliever" to mean the person who resisted God by hiding in legalism, not necessarily someone who was unfamiliar with the Gospel. The Greek word rendered in the NIV "some who do not understand" is *idiotes*, from which the English word "idiot" is derived. The original meaning, however, has nothing to do with a person who is insane or mentally challenged; it means "a private person," or "an ignoramus." A footnote in the NIV reads, "an inquirer." We could then read, "So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some inquirers or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?" We could say that the effect of tongues upon outsiders would lead to the question who are the *idiots*?

It is interesting to see how Paul tests the value of speaking in tongues as opposed to prophecy by the reaction of outsiders to either phenomenon. Both people who are interested in the Gospel (the inquirers) and those who are skeptical toward it (the unbelievers) will say that speaking in tongues makes no sense but prophecy does. The latter will force them to recognize that something supernal takes place in the congregation.

This brings us back to the question of what prophecy is. Since Paul contrasts prophecy to revelation in vv. 29 and 30, prophecy is obviously not revelation. This certainly distinguishes the New Testament gift from the Old Testament one. Paul goes on to describe the effect prophecy will have upon those who attend a worship service without being part of the congregation. The fact that that person is a sinner will, first of all, become clear to him and then to the congregation. The Greek text reads literally, "he is convinced of all, he is judged of all." That this is not the result of finger pointing by believers to unbelievers is obvious from the result in which the outsider falls down and worships God. Since conviction of sin is part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we must conclude that it is awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit that brings about conviction of sin. It is in the observation of that presence in the lives of the believers that brings unbelievers to that conclusion. We may assume that conviction of sin in the heart of an inquirer or unbeliever will lead that person to make confession and to give a word of testimony. It does not need a supernatural revelation to know that those who enter a church service are sinners. Those who are members of the church are so because they have gone through that experience themselves. Salvation always consists in conviction of sin and assurance of forgiveness. That seems to be the experience Paul describes in these verses.

That fact that this is brought about by the exercise of prophecy brings us again to the question of what is prophecy. It could be that what Paul calls prophecy is nothing more or less than a public reading of

a portion of Scripture in the congregation, with or without comments on the text. That Scripture reading, accompanied by the presence of the Holy Spirit, can bring about conviction and conversion is beyond doubt. If this in our mind does not qualify as a gift of the Spirit we may have to review our position. We do not know what the state of literacy was in the world at Paul's time; it was certainly less than it is now. Especially if the church in Corinth consisted in part of converted slaves, the number of those who could read and write must have been small. To have some in the church who could read the Old Testament and explain clearly what was read was certainly the Spirit's gift to the church. Paul's emphasis on the gift of prophecy results then in giving prominence to the written Word in the church services.

The last part of this chapter (vv. 26-40) deals with the order of a church service, the liturgy. This gives us an interesting glimpse in how services in the early church were conducted. We get the impression that no one person was particularly in charge; everyone present could participate either by singing a hymn, preaching a sermon, passing on a revelation, or speaking in tongues if there was interpretation. Paul does not use the word "prophecy" in this list, but instead he uses the Greek *didache*, meaning "doctrine" or "instruction." This further clarifies for us that prophecy in this context amounts to instruction.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary gives the following introduction to this section: "Instruction for the exercise of the gifts is given here. The section is important because it is 'the most intimate glimpse we have of the early church at worship' ... What a contrast is found here with the formal and inflexible order of service that prevails in most of Christendom today! Barclay, in commenting upon this freedom and informality, points out two facts that emerge here. First, 'Clearly the early church had no professional ministry' ... Second, in the service itself 'there was clearly no settled order at all' ... The early believers did not come to the worship meeting to hear a sermon from one man or simply to receive; they came to give. Much has been lost by the renouncement of these privileges." Some Brethren Churches still follow this kind of free style order of service, usually in combination with a communion service, but without the exercise of the gift of tongues.

Barnes' Notes, however, instead of understanding Paul's description to be one of the order of service, interprets it to mean a description of a disorder of service. The author believes that there was a minister in charge of the service, to whom no one paid attention! We read: "It is, evidently, not meant that all these things (meaning, hymn singing, prophecy, revelation, etc.²⁸⁵) would be found in the same person, but would all exist at the same time; and thus confusion and disorder would be inevitable. Instead of waiting for an intimation from the presiding officer in the assembly, or speaking in succession and in order, each one probably regarded himself as under the influence of the Holy Spirit; as having an important message to communicate, or as being called on to celebrate the praises of God; and thus confusion and disorder would prevail. Many would be speaking at the same time, and a most unfavorable impression would be made on the minds of the strangers who should be present, 1 Cor 14:23. This implied reproof of the Corinthians is certainly a reproof of those public assemblies where many speak at the same time; or where a portion are engaged in praying, and others in exhortation. Nor can it be urged that in such cases those who engage in these exercises are under the influence of the Holy Spirit; for, however true that may be, yet it is no more true than it was in Corinth, and yet the apostle reproofed the practice there. The Holy Spirit is the author of order, and not of confusion (1 Cor 14:33); and true religion prompts to peace and regularity, and not to discord and tumult."

It is true that Paul's insistence upon limitation of the number of people, who could stand up to prophesy or pray in tongues, suggests that there was an obvious lack of order and that people, so to speak, elbowed their way to the platform in their desire to be heard. One interesting feature is that criticism of the sermon or sermons was not only not forbidden but even encouraged. It seems that everyone who took to the pulpit claimed to be under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and thus demanded his right to speak. Paul only attributes direct inspiration to those who receive a revelation during the service and he gives them priority over all the others.

This brings us to the statement about the role of women in the church that has caused so much confusion and division in the church. Paul seems to say that a woman is not allowed to preach or teach in a church service. Three words stand out in this statement: silence, submission, and law. Evidently, "the law" is not a reference to the Law of Moses but to the rabbinic tradition.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary comments as follows on the words "women should remain silent in the churches," "This was a Jewish ordinance; women were not permitted to teach in the assemblies, or even to ask questions. The rabbis taught that 'a woman should know nothing but the use of her distaff.'

²⁸⁵ My interpretation of "these things."

And the sayings of Rabbi Eliezer, as delivered ... are both worthy of remark and of execration; they are these: 'Let the words of the law be burned, rather than that they should be delivered to women.' This was their condition till the time of the Gospel, when, according to the prediction of Joel, the Spirit of God was to be poured out on the women as well as the men, that they might prophesy, i.e. teach. And that they did prophesy or teach is evident from what the apostle says, 1 Cor 11:5, where he lays down rules to regulate this part of their conduct while ministering in the church."

J. Sidlow Baxter, in his book, *Explore the Book*, has this to say about the role of women in the church, both in connection with ch. 11 and 14: "How grievously misconstrued have been Paul's words concerning woman in relation to her husband and to the public assembly of Christian believers! Let us learn once and for all, from this eleventh chapter, verse 5, that women certainly did 'prophesy' (i.e. preach or teach, to edify, exhort, comfort, under the impulse from the Holy Spirit) in that church of the first days. The words 'every woman praying or prophesying' indicate that it was general. In this passage Paul's concern is solely that what they wear in thus taking public part should conform to the preservation of true womanly dignity." The same author continues about Chapter Fourteen: "But what, then, about chapter xiv. 34-7: 'Let your women keep silence in the churches'? Well, is it thinkable that Paul could so soon and so seriously contradict himself? Remember, he is here answering questions which the Corinthians had asked him by letter. Why had they raised the matter? The reason is not far to seek. In the early Church there was a Judaizing party agitating to graft rites and rules of Judaism upon the Christian faith. Ever since Paul's victorious collision with Peter at Antioch (Gal. ii.11-21) his lonely but mighty struggle for the freedom of the Gospel from Jewish legalism had been contested by these Judaizers. They followed Paul in the churches which he founded and did all they could to undermine his authority, professing to represent a superior form of Christianity with the authority of the Jerusalem apostolate behind them. They held the usual Judaistic view of woman; and it is to their statements that Paul is replying in I Corinthians xiv. The component sentences of verses 34 and 35 are all from the Oral Law, or Tradition of the Elders, which was the armory of Judaizers. Paul quotes them to repudiate them. That is why he adds, 'What! Did the word of God come from you? Or did it come only to you?' Would they set that teaching above his own? 'If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord' (verse 37). Paul is the champion of woman's liberation, and it is tragic that he has been so misinterpreted."

It would be inappropriate to leave this topic without a reference to Paul's advice to Timothy: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent."²⁸⁶ To go into minute detail in connection with this verse would be beyond the scope of a study in First Corinthians. A few brief comments may, however, be helpful. The context of the second chapter of I Timothy seems to be a prayer meeting. Paul seems to make allusion to some strange behavior in that kind of setting. In the phrase, "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing" the words "anger" and "disputing" seem to be unusual, but they obviously refer to incidents that had occurred. The reference to modesty, decency, and propriety in women's dress code also seems to be out of place. It begs the question what people who came to a prayer meeting in the church in Ephesus thought they were doing. In the phrase, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" Paul uses the Greek word *authenteo*, which the KJV renders, "usurp authority over." One of the meanings in Classic Greek was "to kill someone with his own hands." The suggestion is that some women in Ephesus came to a church prayer meeting for the very purpose of embarrassing their husbands. What Paul wanted to prevent was not the prophesying or public speaking by a married woman, but the domineering of a hen-pecked male by an overbearing female. The concluding phrase, "But women will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety" even suggests that some of those women refused to have a family with children or bring up their family. After all, we all know that a woman's salvation is not brought about by childbearing.

IV. Counsel Concerning the Resurrection 15
 A. Fact of Christ's Resurrection 15:1-11

1 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.

2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

²⁸⁶ I Tim. 2:12

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,

8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

11 Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

The fifteenth chapter of this epistle, together with Chapter Thirteen, form two of the pillars of the Christian faith. Both excel in beauty of language and power of expression. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the turning point in the history of the universe and the core of the Gospel message. Although this is not specifically stated, we may assume that, in this chapter also, Paul answers some questions that were put to him in the letter the church in Corinth had sent.

It is important to realize that resurrection pertains to the body. Our soul cannot die and, consequently, cannot be resurrected either. The fact that the body plays such a vital part in our salvation seems to have lost its importance in our concept of the Gospel message. When we think about the Gospel, we think in terms of salvation of our soul, not of our body. Paul maintains that without the resurrection of our body salvation would not be complete. We read in his Epistle to the Romans, “Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.”²⁸⁷ We must bear this truth in mind as we read Paul’s definition of the content of the Gospel in the opening verses of this chapter.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary introduces this chapter with: “In approaching this chapter it is helpful to have some conception of the Greek view of life. In general the Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, but they did not accept the resurrection of the body. To them the resurrection of the body was unthinkable in view of the fact that they held the body to be the source of man’s weakness and sin. Death, therefore, was very welcome, since by it the soul would be liberated from the body; but resurrection was not welcome, because this would constitute another descent of the soul into the grave of the body. This was the skepticism that Paul faced at Athens (cf. Acts 17:31-32) and that the Christian faces in the modern world. ... The problem at Corinth developed in the Christian church. The believers had accepted resurrection, at least in the case of Christ; but under the influence of Greek thought, some doubted the bodily resurrection of Christians. Therefore, the apostle wrote to combat the doctrinal weakness.”

Paul opens his treatise of the topic of the resurrection with the reminder that this is the Gospel he preached when he founded the church in Corinth. The fact that they were members of the church means that their lives were based on these truths. “Otherwise, you have believed in vain” ought not to be interpreted as if people could lose their salvation by ceasing to believe. One believes in vain when the object of faith turns out to be spurious; in other words when it turns out to be not true that Christ rose from the dead.

Many people have trouble believing in a resurrection of the body because, as far as they can see, death is the end of life. Unbelief in resurrection suggests that not only death is final, but also that it is the logical end of life. If anything, death is not logical. Our whole attitude toward life, our struggle for survival denies this. If we understand that death is the most illogical conclusion of life, resurrection ought to be seen as a logical reversal of an illogical phenomenon. Paul’s question to the Roman governor Festus and King Agrippa, “Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?” requires a logical answer.²⁸⁸

Paul demonstrates the logic of the resurrection by using arguments that are verifiable. The fact of Jesus’ death and burial could be attested to by research in the archives of the Roman government in

²⁸⁷ Rom. 8:23,24^a

²⁸⁸ See Acts 26:8.

Jerusalem. Most of the witnesses of Jesus' resurrection were still alive when Paul wrote this epistle, barely 20 years after the fact.

Christ's death, burial, and resurrection are said to have occurred "according to the Scriptures." "The Scriptures" here refer obviously to the Old Testament since the New Testament was still in the process of being written when Paul wrote this epistle. Most commentators draw attention to the fact that Paul makes mention of Christ's burial as conclusive evidence of His death. The Roman government would not have given permission to a burial if Jesus had still given some sign of life. If it had not been a dead body that was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, Jesus' coming back to life could not be called a resurrection.

Prophetic references to Jesus' death are found in abundance in the Old Testament. There are only a few verses that predict His burial. In Psalm Sixteen David refers to burial, resurrection and glory: "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."²⁸⁹ Isaiah refers to Jesus' burial: "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death."²⁹⁰ The Romans would have dug a hole for the bodies of the crucified, but by Joseph of Arimathea's claiming the dead body, Jesus was interred with the rich. Hosea's prophecy speaks of a third day in which restoration will take place: "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence."²⁹¹

Jesus put great emphasis on the Old Testament Scriptures as proof of the validity of His experiences. To the two men who walked with Him to Emmaus He said: " 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."²⁹²

Paul does not give a complete list of Christ's appearance after His resurrection. None of the women are mentioned, although they were the first ones to see the risen Lord. But the testimony of women, however important Jesus' appearance to them may have been, would have carried no weight of evidence for sophisticated male members of the Corinthian church. Jesus' appearance to Peter is nowhere described directly in the Gospels. Mention is made of it indirectly in Luke's Gospel.²⁹³ Paul uses "the Twelve" as an expression for the group of disciples who were gathered in the upper room. When Jesus first appeared to His disciples only ten of them were present plus the two men from Emmaus; Thomas was absent. The second appearance when Thomas was there, there were only eleven, Judas having committed suicide.²⁹⁴

Jesus' appearance "to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time" is not recorded in detail in any of the Gospels. It is generally supposed that Paul refers to the gathering in Galilee to which Matthew refers. We read, "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go."²⁹⁵ The fact that, at the time of Paul's writing, almost five hundred witnesses of Jesus' resurrection were still alive constitutes a very powerful proof.

Jesus' meeting with James is nowhere mentioned in the Gospels. Of the three James's that could be meant only James, the brother of Jesus really qualifies. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on Paul's note: "The 'James' intended is undoubtedly the only James then living, who was known to the whole Christian Church, namely, 'the Lord's brother,' the author of the Epistle, and the Bishop of Jerusalem (...Galatians 2:9; ...Acts 15:13; 21:18). James the son of Zebedee had by this time been martyred, and James the son of Alphaeus was never much more than a name to the Church in general. There is no mention of this appearance in the Gospel; but in the Gospel of the Hebrews was a curious legend (preserved in St. Jerome...) that James had made a vow that he would neither eat nor drink till he had seen Jesus risen from the dead, and that Jesus, appearing to him, said, 'My brother, eat thy bread, for the Son of man is risen from the dead.' The truth of the appearance is strongly supported by the fact that James, like the rest of the Lord's 'brothers, 'did not believe' in Christ before the Crucifixion, whereas *after the*

²⁸⁹ Ps. 16:9-11

²⁹⁰ Isa. 53:9

²⁹¹ Hos. 6:2

²⁹² Luke 24:25-27

²⁹³ See Luke 24:33.

²⁹⁴ See John 20:19-29.

²⁹⁵ Matt. 28:16

Resurrection we find him and the rest of ‘the Lord’s brothers’ ardently convinced (...John 12:3-5; ...Acts 1:14; 9:5, etc.). Of all the apostles (...Acts 1:3; ...Luke 24:50) James the Lord’s brother was only an apostle in the wider sense of the word.”

The phrase “then to all the apostles” is difficult to place in the Gospel record. Since Paul already mentioned one appearance to the Twelve, the reference is probably not to the incident on the day of resurrection or the one that occurred one week later. And when Jesus appeared at the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, as John records, only five of Jesus’ disciples were present.²⁹⁶

Paul describes himself during his own encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus as “one abnormally born.” The Greek word is *ektroma*, meaning “a miscarriage, or an abortion.” The term normally refers to a premature birth. We cannot say, however, that Paul was prematurely born again; his new birth was rather too late than too early. The comparison seems to be to someone who has no claim on life, someone who survived against all odds. David Prior, in *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, observes, “Apparently the word was used as a term of abuse. Perhaps it has been hurled at Paul by his opponents.” To conclude from the words “and last of all he appeared to me also” that Paul was the last person to whom Jesus ever revealed Himself after His resurrection, as Prior suggests, seems to be reading too much into the text. The following verses bear out what Paul means with his comparison. Comparing himself to the other apostles, Paul puts himself at the very last place because of his history as a persecutor of the early church. Paul was never able to rid himself of the scars of his past; he carried that baggage with him all through his life. In a way this became a blessing in that it made the grace of God stand out so much the clearer against the darkness of his background. Paul went through life in humble amazement that God had been able to make a healthy human being out of what came into the world as a miscarriage.

But having placed himself at the lowest point, the apostle seems to state that he outshined the others in the effectiveness of his ministry. We would raise our eyebrows if it were not for the addition that it was the grace of God that demonstrated itself in this outburst of energy. The Book of Acts bears out Paul’s statement. Luke may have been partial to Paul’s ministry, but there is no record that any of the other apostles matched Paul as a church planter. Somehow Paul manages to show off his achievements without putting down the others.

B. Importance of Christ’s Resurrection

15:12-19

12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.

16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.

17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.

19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

The import of this section hinges on the consequences the established fact of Jesus’ resurrection on the preaching of the Gospel and the destiny of those who believe. Evidently, there were some in the church in Corinth who rejected the resurrection of the dead in general while at the same time accepting the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The objections may have found their basis either in pagan philosophy or in the influence of Judaism, particularly the influence of the Sadducees. *The Pulpit Commentary* calls the people in Corinth who preached a Gospel without resurrection, “The Corinthian Sadducees.” Paul uses the line of Greek philosophers in arguing inductively that the establishment of one single fact proves the futility of the objection. Christ’s resurrection is an established fact, attested to by more than five hundred eyewitnesses, whose testimony could still be verified. The resurrection from the dead of one human being destroys the theory that resurrection is an impossibility. Others may have spiritualized the resurrection by equating it to conversion and regeneration. Paul mentions two people in his letter to Timothy who propagated this

²⁹⁶ See John 21:1,2.

doctrine: "Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some."²⁹⁷

But Paul goes well beyond destroying one philosophical objection; he demonstrates that the resurrection from the dead, not only of Christ but of all of Christ's followers, is at the core of the Gospel message. Preaching and believing of the message becomes an exercise in futility if it is not based on the singular proven fact of Jesus' resurrection. Furthermore, denial of Christ's resurrection constitutes an insult to God Himself. Those who preach a Gospel that is not based on the resurrection are an insult to God. Without a resurrection death has the last word. Christ's death on the cross as an atonement for our sins would be meaningless without His resurrection. Without Christ's resurrection, we who believe in Him have no future. Not only would our debt of sin not be paid for but we base our lives upon a myth for which we suffer without hope of relief.

Some have said that Christians have the advantage of atheists in that, if it turns out that the Christian faith is based upon a myth and there is no life after death, the Christian has not lost anything. If, however, it turns out that there is life after death, the atheist has lost everything. Paul's words, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" seem to contradict this. There is, of course, some truth in the first statement, at least as far as the fate of the atheists is concerned.

The Pulpit Commentary observes about Paul's statement regarding Christ for life on earth alone: "The remark only has an *absolute* bearing when Christians really are suffering from persecutions, as they did in St. Paul's day (...2 Corinthians 1:5; ...2 Timothy 3:12). But to some extent all Christians have to bear their cross, and if all that they give up and suffer is sacrificed to a delusion, they deserve most pity in one sense, because they have been most conspicuously befooled. In *another* sense they are still the happiest of men; for their delusion, judged by its fruits, is more blessed than the dreary blank which is the only alternative."

C. Order of the Resurrections

15:20-28

***20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.
22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.
23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.
24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.
25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.
26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.
27 For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.
28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.***

By calling Christ "the firstfruits," the apostle links His resurrection to two Old Testament feasts: the Feast of the Firstfruits and the Feast of Pentecost.²⁹⁸ The two feasts were separated by seven Sabbaths, which is fifty days. In the New Testament the coming of the Holy Spirit occurred fifty days after Jesus' resurrection. Both feasts were celebrated "on the day after the Sabbath" which is Sunday.

Paul also demonstrates that, like our sinful nature, the resurrection is "hereditary." We inherited our sinful nature from Adam who fell in sin; we obtain our right to the resurrection from Jesus' victory over death. In both instances Adam and Jesus Christ are representatives of the whole human race; both acted in behalf of all humanity. Paul used the same comparison between Adam and Christ with a slightly different emphasis in his Epistle to the Romans.²⁹⁹ There have been people, who died and came back to life, but their resurrection was a temporal phenomenon; they all died a second time. Jesus' resurrection is unique in that He rose with a glorified body. Our death in Adam is the physical result of our spiritual death; our resurrection in Christ is the ultimate consequence of our regeneration. When Adam sinned, his spirit died and he was no longer able to fellowship with God; when we are born again our spirit is brought back to life

²⁹⁷ II Tim 2:17,18

²⁹⁸ See Lev. 23:9-21.

²⁹⁹ See Rom. 5:12-20.

and our fellowship with God is restored. As Adam's death has universal consequence so does Jesus' resurrection. Paul states that "in Christ all will be made alive." In this the apostle makes no distinction between the redeemed and the lost. Since no further details are given we can only speculate what this will mean for those who will not spend eternity in heaven. We assume that for the ungodly the resurrection of their bodies will not mean glorification.

We conclude from the order of resurrection in v. 23 that the resurrection of believers will not occur until the Second Coming.

What Paul states about "the end" in Verses 24-28 opens a window upon the consummation of time and events that are difficult to imagine. We understand that the purpose of Christ's reign is to put down all resistance against God. This would mean the ultimate and final defeat of Satan and all who are associated with him. It will be the death of death itself. Leon Morris, in *1 Corinthians*, observes: "In v. 12 'some' said, 'There is no resurrection', but Paul replies, 'There will be no death.' " David expressed this principle prophetically in Psalm 110. We read, "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' "³⁰⁰ In that prophecy the subjugation of all enemy resistance seems to be attributed to God, the Father. The active part, played by the Son is expressed in the words, "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.' "³⁰¹ We understand this to mean that the Son's victory is brought about by the sacrifice He brought as a priest. In dying on the cross, Jesus acted as a human being. God cannot die, and although Jesus is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, He died as a man, not as God. We assume that when Paul states, "the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him," he speaks about the man Jesus Christ who submits Himself to the authority of the Father, not about God submitting to God.

The far-reaching implication of this statement is that it is a man who puts down the rebellion against God. This fact has its bearing upon all of mankind. Whatever may be the origin of evil in eternity, sin came into this world through the disobedience of one man. The defeat of sin and death is brought about by the obedience of one man also. At the same time it is God who is the source of victory: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet!" The glorious conclusion of all this is expressed in Paul's words, "that God may be all in all." Everything and everybody will be so filled with the glory of God that it will be impossible to distinguish one from the other. This will be Pantheism in its true form.

David Prior, in *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, states: "We must pause to recollect how far Paul has come from reminding the Corinthians about the basic facts of the gospel. We can now see why he adjudged their shaky doctrine about the resurrection of the dead to be so perilous. To Paul's redeemed, renewed and uniquely inspired mind, there was an unbroken continuity between the empty tomb and the perfection of heaven. Remove the fact of resurrection and you have excised the very life-principle of the kingdom of God."

Paul uses the Greek verb *hupotasso*, "to subdue," "to submit," or "to be made subject" five times in verses 27 and 28. Unfortunately, the NIV translates this with different words. The rendering "the Son himself will be made subject" is particularly regrettable since it suggests that Jesus' submission to the Father was forced instead of voluntary.

There remains a mystery in Paul's words that is impossible to explain, not only regarding Jesus' voluntary submission to the Father but about the submission of every created being. Paul does not mention the fate of the lost. If they are not included in God's being all in all, the very words would contradict themselves. Yet, if God will be all in those who resist Him, how can that be? It would be wise to refrain from speculation. *The Pulpit Commentary* quotes Bengel, who wrote: "There is implied something new, but also supreme and eternal. All things, and therefore all men, without any interruption, no created thing claiming a place, no enemy creating opposition, shall be subordinated to the Son, the Son to the Father. All things shall say, 'God is all things to me.' This is the consummation; this the end and summit. Further than this not even an apostle can go."

³⁰⁰ Ps. 110:1

³⁰¹ Ps. 110:4

29 Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?

30 And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour?

31 I die every day — I mean that, brothers — just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.

32 If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

34 Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God — I say this to your shame.

If we faced some statements that are difficult to explain in the previous section, these verses evoke even more questions. What does Paul mean with being "baptized for the dead?" How did he fight wild beasts? What is the relationship between the resurrection of the dead and good character?

The Adam Clarke's Commentary calls v. 29 "the most difficult verse in the New Testament." *The Commentary* states: "The sum of the apostle's meaning appears to be this: If there be no resurrection of the dead, those who, in becoming Christians, expose themselves to all manner of privations, crosses, severe sufferings, and a violent death, can have no compensation, nor any motive sufficient to induce them to expose themselves to such miseries. But as they receive baptism as an emblem of death in voluntarily going under the water, so they receive it as an emblem of the resurrection unto eternal life, in coming up out of the water; thus they are baptized for the dead, in perfect faith of the resurrection. The three following verses seem to confirm this sense."

Leon Morris, in *1 Corinthians*, states in a footnote about v. 29: "Ernest Evans says there are more than 200 interpretations." To add or own to this seems futile. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The 'interpretations' of this verse are so numerous that it is not even possible to give a catalogue of them. Many of them are not worth recording, and are only worth alluding to at all as specimens of the willful bias which goes to Scripture, not to seek truth, but to support tradition. They are mostly futile and fantastic, because they pervert the plain meaning of the plain words. It is a waste of time and space to give perpetuity to baseless fancies. Such are the notions that 'for the dead' can mean 'for our mortal bodies' (Chrysostom); or 'for those about to die' (Estius, Calvin, etc.); or 'over (the sepulchers of) the dead' (Luther); or 'to supply the vacancies left by the dead' (Le Clerc, etc.). Equally unwarrantable are the 'explanations' (?) which make those who are being 'baptized' mean those who are 'passing through a baptism of suffering' (!). Not a single argument which is worth a moment's consideration can be urged in favor of any one of these, or scores of similar views. If we are to get rid of everything that is surprising on the ground that it is 'immensely improbable,' we may as well discard Scripture at once, and reconstruct early Christian history out of our own consciousness. It has been very usual to represent it as we think that it ought to have been, and not as it was."

The most literal interpretation assumes that some baptized believers in Corinth asked to be baptized again in behalf of someone who had passed away. Some heretics in a later period of church history, like Marcion, practiced this form of baptism, but there are no indications that the practice existed in Paul's time. Marcion probably based his ritual upon a literal interpretation of Paul's text. To give validity to posthumous baptism of an individual one must attribute spiritual power of regeneration to the water and suppose that this power can be transferred to others. Such a concept seems to contradict all clear biblical teaching of repentance of sin and acceptance of forgiveness. If such were the accepted practice in the church in Corinth, we would have expected Paul to argue against it. The context suggests that Paul agrees since he uses the ritual, if that is what it was, as an implied proof of the resurrection. If a literal interpretation of Paul's words leads to an unacceptable ritual, the alternative would be to chip away at the meaning of the words "baptism" or "for the dead." Since there is no limit to what we can do with words when we move away from their primary meaning, we may in fact end up with more than 200 interpretations. It may be better to leave the mystery lie where it is.

Referring to his own experience, Paul asks the question what would be the point of risking his life on a daily basis if the resurrection was not absolutely assured. In his second epistle to the same church, Paul gives a concise account of his most painful experiences: "As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots;

in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger.”³⁰² This reference is quite clear. The mention about his fighting wild beasts in Ephesus, however, presents us with another question mark.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary suggests, “If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus” means, “I have fought with beastlike men—Demetrius and his craftsmen.” The commentary adds: “Heraclitus, of Ephesus, had termed his countrymen ‘wild beasts’ 400 years before. ... Paul’s Roman citizenship exempted him from literal fighting with wild beasts in the arena. He was still at Ephesus (1 Cor 16:8), where his life was daily in danger (2 Cor 1:8). Though the tumult (Acts 19:29-30) had not yet taken place (for after it he set out immediately for Macedonia), this letter was written just before it, when the storm was gathering; ‘many adversaries’ (1 Cor 16:9) were already menacing him (cf. Rom 16:4; Acts 18:18-19,26).” This explanation seems to be the most satisfying one. The only problem remaining is the connection between the resurrection and Paul’s facing of human opposition to his preaching of the Gospel. The implication seems to be that this kind of antagonism caused an almost unbearable emotional burden to the apostle.

The words “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” are a literal quotation from Isaiah, who, foreseeing the siege of Jerusalem, proclaimed: “The Lord, the LORD Almighty, called you on that day to weep and to wail, to tear out your hair and put on sackcloth. But see, there is joy and revelry, slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine! ‘Let us eat and drink,’ you say, ‘for tomorrow we die!’ ” In the context of Isaiah’s prophecy it is the attitude of people who were oblivious to the meaning of their experiences. They did not recognize that God wanted them to understand that their lives were in danger, not only physically but even more spiritually. Facing certain death, they did not turn to God in repentance, but to food and drink to blunt the impact of disaster. In the context of First Corinthians, Paul asserts that the hope of resurrection is a superior antidote to life’s problems than escape into oblivion.

Paul’s call to repentance in Verses 33 and 34 echoes Isaiah’s words. The words “Bad company corrupts good character” are probably a popular wellknown quotation. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* suggests that they are a quotation from Menander’s lost comedy of Thais.

E. Bodies of the Resurrected Dead

15:35-50

35 *But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"*

36 *How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.*

37 *When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.*

38 *But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.*

39 *All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another.*

40 *There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.*

41 *The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.*

42 *So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable;*

43 *it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;*

44 *it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*

45 *So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.*

46 *The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.*

47 *The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven.*

48 *As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.*

49 *And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.*

50 *I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*

³⁰² See II Cor. 6:4,5.

Paul answers two questions in this section. Whether these had actually been asked in the letter the Corinthians had sent is not clear, but, evidently, some people in Corinth had voiced objections to Paul's preaching the resurrection of the dead.

The Greek mythology celebrated, in the Eleusinian mysteries, the resurrection of Dionysus, or Bacchus, the son of Zeus, who had been killed by the Titans. Every year the risen Dionysus was symbolically conducted from Athens to Eleusis in joyful procession. An ear of corn, plucked in solemn silence, was exhibited to the initiated as the object of mystical contemplation, as the symbol of the god, prematurely killed, but, like the ear enclosing the seed-corn, bearing within himself the germ of a second life.³⁰³ Jesus, probably, referred covertly to this part of Greek mythology when He said to the Greek who wanted to see Him, "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."³⁰⁴ Paul may have thought of, both the Eleusinian mysteries, and of Jesus' words. The illustration of the grain of wheat had a familiar ring for the Corinthians.

Paul's illustration does not explain the mystery of the resurrection. The comparison with the sowing of seed is nothing more than a comparison. Seed that is planted in the soil is alive; a body that is buried in the ground is dead. The only similarity between sowing and a funeral is that in both cases something or someone is put in the ground. Seed that is sown does not literally decompose; it germinates. A dead body decomposes. The force of Paul's argument is more in its reference to what the Corinthians used to believe in their old mythology than in the similarity between agriculture and resurrection.

For us also there is a similarity between the two in that we do not really know how a grain of wheat germinates; neither do we comprehend the miracle of physical resurrection. We accept the first because the fact that grain that is sown produces a harvest is impossible to deny. Those who had seen the crucifixion and then saw Christ after His resurrection from the dead could not deny it either.

There is, however, a similarity between the harvest and the resurrection in that our earthly bodies contain the seed of resurrection. God uses the elements of our present physical existence to make us into a new creation.

I find Paul's reasoning in Verses 38-41 difficult to follow. The best explanation is probably to suppose that the apostle leaves, for a moment, the topic of resurrection and fixes on the diversity of the Creator. In one sweeping motion he lets his eyes roam over all of creation, beginning with life on our planet and ending in the universe. It is as if he wants to say, "look at the endless variety of all God has made. Why would we for one moment think that God could not take a mortal body and make it into an immortal one?"

We distinguish three levels of creation, four if we included the grain of wheat: there is vegetable life, animal life, heavenly life, and planetary existence. (We can hardly qualify the stars and planets as living beings). All of this testifies to the originality of the Creator. Paul may have been inspired by the words of Daniel, "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever."³⁰⁵

Most Bible scholars understand Paul's use of the words "heavenly bodies" to refer to angels, not to stars and planets. *The Pulpit Commentary* mentions Tertullian's interpretation who made "men" to mean servants of God; "beasts," Gentiles; "birds," martyrs; "fishes," those who have been baptized; the "sun," Christ; the "moon," the Church, etc.

Barnes' Notes has the following useful comment on this section: "The idea here is, that although all the bodies of animals may be composed essentially of the same elements, yet God has produced a wonderful variety in their organization, strength, beauty, color, and places of abode, as the air, earth, and water. It is not necessary, therefore, to suppose that the body that shall be raised shall be precisely like that which we have here. It is certainly possible that there may be as great a difference between that and our present body, as between the most perfect form of the human frame here and the lowest reptile. It would still be a body, and there would be no absurdity in the transformation. The body of the worm, the chrysalis, and the butterfly is the same. It is the same animal still. Yet how different the gaudy and frivolous butterfly from the creeping and offensive caterpillar! So there may be a similar change in the body of the believer, and yet be still the same. Of a skeptic on this subject we would ask, whether, if there had been a revelation of the changes which a caterpillar might undergo before it became a butterfly-a new species of existence

³⁰³ Condensed from *Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament*.

³⁰⁴ John 12:24

³⁰⁵ Dan. 12:3

adapted to a new element, requiring new food, and associated with new and other beings-if he had never seen such a transformation, would it not be attended with all the difficulty which now encompasses the doctrine of the resurrection? The skeptic would no more have believed it on the authority of revelation than he will believe the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. And no infidel can prove that the one is attended with any more difficulty or absurdity than the other.”

The best idea of what a resurrected human body will be like can be obtained from the resurrected Christ. When Jesus showed himself to His disciples, He said: “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”³⁰⁶ Not only what Jesus clearly recognizable, His resurrected body was composed of the same members His mortal body possessed. The scars of the crucifixion were even carried over from one body into the other. To Thomas, He said, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side.”³⁰⁷ Yet, when John saw Jesus in his apocalyptic vision, he described Him with the words, “His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.”³⁰⁸ None of that glory was demonstration in the Upper Room on the day of His resurrection.

In Verses 42-44, the apostle returns to the image of sowing and reaping. Four points of contrast are mentioned between that which is sown and that which is harvested. What is perishable turns into that which is imperishable. Dishonor is transformed into glory. Weakness turns into power and a natural body becomes a spiritual body.

In comparing the natural body we inherited from Adam with the resurrection body we will inherit through Jesus Christ, Paul uses the Greek words *soma psuchikon* and *soma pneumatikon*. Both expressions are difficult to translate properly. *Psuchikos* contains the word *psyche*, “soul,” which we use in a variety of meanings. *Psuchikos* in the New Testament usually refers to the lower nature; it is the opposite of that which is spiritual. In Chapter Two of this epistle Paul writes: “The man *without the Spirit* does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”³⁰⁹ James uses it in the verse: “Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, *unspiritual*, of the devil.”³¹⁰ But in referring to the creation of Adam, of whom we read: “the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being,”³¹¹ the word has none of the pejorative connotations it obtained later on. *Soma psuchikon* is simply the natural body with which we were born, which we inherited from our parents. *Soma pneumatikon* is the body we receive in the resurrection which we inherit from our Lord Jesus Christ.

David Prior’s contribution in *The Message of 1 Corinthians* may be helpful here. We read: “In the whole of this section, we are particularly hamstrung both by the limitations of English in rendering key Greek words, and by popular views of man which divide his nature into different parts (e.g. body, mind and spirit). The Greek word, *psyche*, often translated ‘soul,’ is used by Paul to describe our natural physical existence as human beings. Paul here is contrasting the body which expresses this natural human life (44, *soma psychicon*) with the body which will eventually express the supernatural life of God’s Spirit in the fullness of his kingdom (*soma pneumatikon*). Even now God’s Spirit dwells in our mortal bodies: but the more the Spirit makes us like Jesus, the more these mortal bodies groan under the strain of anticipating their own demise and the freedom of totally new bodies designed for glory and power. There the English words used in this section can bring more confusion than clarity. Perhaps the most helpful single clue is to note Paul’s contrast between the bodies we have now for our natural human existence and the bodies we will be given when we enter into our full inheritance in heaven. The first body has all the limitations of our earthiness; the second body has all the capacity of God’s Spirit. From this perspective it is obvious that the first body (*flesh and blood*) cannot inherit the kingdom of God, because decay and corruption cannot be part of what is eternally incorruptible (50). In summary, we must acknowledge that in this whole discussion Paul is struggling to describe the indescribable. As Ladd says, ‘Who can imagine a body without

³⁰⁶ Luke 24:39

³⁰⁷ John 20:27

³⁰⁸ Rev. 1:14-16

³⁰⁹ I Cor. 2:14

³¹⁰ James 3:15

³¹¹ Gen. 2:7

weakness? or infection? or tiredness? or sickness? or death? This is a body utterly unknown to earthly, historical experience.... it is an order of existence in which 'laws of nature' ... no longer obtain. In fact, when one puts his mind to it, it is quite unimaginable."

There seems to be an elementary difference of substance and composition between the earthly body and the heavenly body. This is expressed in the words "The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven." We easily understand the first part about Adam's creation from the dust of the earth, the atoms and molecules that compose our planet. The second part about Jesus is more difficult to grasp. After all, as a human being, Jesus' body was composed of the same elements as Adam's and every human body. Jesus' birth from the virgin Mary was the result of her impregnation by the Holy Spirit. If we could understand that mystery we would be able to understand it all. In his Epistle to the Philippians, Paul states the point more clearly: "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."³¹²

"Inherit" in v. 50 is the translation of the Greek word *kleronomeo*. This word seems strange in the context of the resurrection. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* explains, "*Kleronomeo* strictly means 'to receive by lot' (*kleros*, 'a lot,' *nemomai*, 'to possess'); then, in a more general sense, 'to possess oneself of, to receive as one's own, to obtain.' " *The Dictionary* proceeds to show a list indicating how in the New Testament "the idea of inheriting broadens out to include all spiritual good provided through and in Christ, and particularly all that is contained in the hope grounded on the promises of God."

When Paul declares that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable," he obviously does not define the new resurrected body as possessing no flesh or blood. When Jesus appeared to His disciples on the day of His resurrection, He said: "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."³¹³ To conclude from Jesus' words, as some theologians have done, that the new body does not contain blood, seems unwarranted. What Paul obviously intended to say was that the perishable body cannot inherit the Kingdom. The human body in its present state would not be able to bear the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."³¹⁴ As God said to Moses, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."³¹⁵

F. Bodies of the Translated Living

15:51-58

**51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-
52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.
53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.
54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."
55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"
56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**

The metamorphosis Paul refers to pertains to those who are already dead at the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ as well as to the believers in Christ who will still be alive at that moment. Over the centuries Bible scholars have subjected this section to much scrutiny and have come up with various theories about Paul's expectations regarding the end of the world and the doctrine of inspiration of the Bible. It seems obvious that the apostle expected the soon return of Christ and that he anticipated still being alive when the moment occurred. We conclude this from his statement in First Thessalonians, where, speaking of the same subject, he writes: "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen

³¹² Phil. 3:20, 21

³¹³ Luke 24:39

³¹⁴ II Cor. 4:17 (KJV)

³¹⁵ Ex. 33:20

asleep.”³¹⁶ To conclude from this that Paul’s mistaken expectation undermines the doctrine of inspiration of Scripture seems unwarranted. The Holy Spirit has allowed other statements to be included in the canon that are of a much more doubtful character. Inspiration of the Bible does not mean that everything stated in it represents the will or the intent of God. Jesus’ own statement in the last verse of the Bible, “Yes, I am coming soon” indicates that the Holy Spirit wants us all to have the same expectation the apostle Paul had.

The fact that Paul answers the obvious concern of the Corinthian Christians regarding how the Second Coming of Christ would affect those who had already died is an indication that the expectation of all was that the event was imminent.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the words “We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed” in v.51, “There is a great diversity of readings in this verse, noticed even by St. Jerome and St. Augustine. St. Jerome says that all the Latin manuscripts had ‘we shall all rise,’ and that the Greek manuscripts wavered between ‘we shall all sleep’ and ‘we shall not all sleep.’ Some Greek manuscripts had ‘we shall all rise, but we shall not all be changed.’ This reading cannot be right, for it contradicts the next verse. There is little doubt that the reading of the Authorized Version is right. It accounts for all the variations. They arose from a desire to shelter St. Paul from an apparent mistake, since he and his readers *did* all sleep. But (1) St. Paul may have written under that conception of the imminence of Christ’s personal return which he expresses in ... 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, where he evidently imagines that the majority of those to whom he was writing would be of those who would be ‘alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord’; or (2) even if he no longer entertained that expectation, the ‘we’ may naturally apply to the continuity of the Christian Church. For in ... 2 Corinthians 4:14 he uses ‘us’ of those who shall die and be raised. The universal expectation of the immediate return of Christ in the first century rose (1) from their non apprehension of the truth that the close of the old dispensation *was* the ‘coming’ to which our Lord had primarily referred in his great eschatological discourse (... Matthew 24:34), and (2) from the fact that watchfulness was intended to be the attitude of the Church, and the day and hour of Christ’s coming were kept absolutely unrevealed ...Matthew 24:36; 25:13).”

Paul’s statement in v. 50 that the perishable cannot inherit the imperishable is a conclusion based on human logic. The explanation of the mystery regarding the mode of resurrection is the outcome of a divine revelation. Paul uses some interesting sound effects to draw our attention to what he has to say. We imagine that he lowered his voice and put his fingers on his lips when he pronounced the word “mystery,” after which he surprises with the loud shout of the trumpet.

The mystery is not in the accompanying sound effects. Jesus had already announced to His disciples that His return to earth would be accompanied by the sounding of a battle cry. We read: “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”³¹⁷ Evidently, the trumpets also sounded on the day of Jesus’ ascension. The disciples on earth may not have heard it, but the psalmist prophesied: “God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets.”³¹⁸

The question should be asked what the mystery part is in Paul’s statement. Some Bible scholars believe it is the fact that not all will have died at the moment of the Second Coming. It seems more logical to assume that the mystery pertains to how the metamorphosis will take place, rather than how it will affect those who are still alive. The change from dead bodies into glorified bodies and from mortal bodies into immortal bodies will basically be the same and it will occur in a split second. “In a flash” is the rendering of the Greek word *atomos*, from which the word “atom” is derived. It is the smallest particle of time that cannot be cut. It is the time it takes to blink.

Paul’s statement, “Death has been swallowed up in victory” is a quotation from Isaiah’s triumphant prophecy about the ultimate result of Jesus’ death at the cross of Golgotha. The complete text reads: “On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine--the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth.

³¹⁶ I Thess. 4:15

³¹⁷ Matt. 24:30,31

³¹⁸ Ps. 47:5

The LORD has spoken.”³¹⁹ It is God who swallowed up death and who has invited all of humanity in the celebration of the resurrection. At that day, He will extend His ultimate consolation to all who have grieved the death of their loved ones by wiping off their tears. It will be our day of rehabilitation and coronation.

Paul’s quotation here is neither from the Hebrew nor from the Septuagint. The text is found in what is called “the vernon of Theodotion.” The Hebrew word *netsach* has a wide variety to meaning. It can be rendered “forever,” or “victory.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states beautifully, “Death is here personified and represented as a devouring being, swallowing up all the generations of men; and by the resurrection of the body and the destruction of the empire of death, God is represented as swallowing him up; or that eternity gulps him down; so that he is endlessly lost and absorbed in its illimitable waste. How glorious a time to the righteous, when the inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick; when God shall have wiped away all tears from off all faces, and when there shall be no more death. This time must come. Hallelujah! The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.”

Paul’s last quotation in this section is from Hosea’s prophecy about the captivity of Israel and Judah. In the context of Hosea, the words seem to be an expression of God’s conflicting emotions in passing judgment and loving the objects of His punishment. We read in Hosea, “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?”³²⁰ But Bible scholars have differently interpreted Hosea’s words. Some see in them God’s intent not to deliver Judah and Israel from their impending doom. Another possible translation is: “Will I ransom them from the power of the grave; will I redeem them from death?” etc. In that case God calls upon death and the grave to do their destructive work.

It is obvious that Paul used a good deal of freedom in applying Hosea’s words to give power to his own statement. The quotation is not used to prove the truth of what he says but to express elation about the ultimate victory. Paul clearly interpreted Hosea’s text as God’s positive intent to show compassion.

It is interesting to look at the different shades of meaning between the Hebrew and the Greek in the original and the quotation. Hosea used the words *qoteb*, “extermination” and *deber*, “plague” or “destruction”; Paul uses *nikos*, “conquest” or “triumph” and *kentron*, “sting” or “goad.” Although these words are far from being equivalents, they do not contradict each other in meaning.

At first glance v. 56, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law,” seem out of place. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments, “The best comment on this expression is to be found in the Epistle to the Romans; see especially ... Romans 4:15; 7:10-12. It must be admitted that this passing allusion to a distinct doctrine does not seem, at first sight, to harmonize with the glorious unity of the subject. No one can read it without a slight sense of *jar*, because it seems to introduce the element of dogmatic controversy. But this sense of incongruity is removed when we remember how intensely St. Paul felt that man is confronted with the horror of a broken Law, which at once reminds him of a Being infinitely holy, and of his own self condemnation (Romans 7; 2 Corinthians 3). It is the sense that the Law in its deathful aspect is annulled, and the sinful soul delivered, which prompts the outburst of the next verse.” In Romans 4:15 and 7:10-12 we read, “Because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.” And: “I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.”

V. 57 also contains in a nutshell a whole volume of Pauline doctrine that deserves more than a casual glance. Through Jesus Christ, God gives us the victory over sin and death. This means in the first place that we must be “in Christ” in order to be victorious. As Paul states in Romans, “Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation-but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”³²¹ Our victory over sin and death is gained in our surrender to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Not only sin, but also that which is the consequence of sin, death, will be swallowed up in our victory. God gives us that victory through Jesus Christ and what God gives us is ours.

Paul’s statement in the last verse of this chapter receives its power from the previous verses. “The work of the Lord” is not only our personal testimony, evangelism, or missionary involvement; it is the proclamation of the Lord’s victory over sin, death, and all the power of Satan. As Paul states in the last

³¹⁹ Isa. 25:6-8

³²⁰ Hos. 13:14

³²¹ Rom. 8:12,13

chapter of Romans, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”³²² Facing the awful reality of demonic opposition and the reality of sin and death in this world, we tend to feel overwhelmed and powerless. We need to be reminded daily of the magnitude of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead in order to keep the right perspective on life. Compared to the bombastic manifestations of evil, the silent and almost secret event of Christ’s resurrection seems to be completely drowned out. In reality, it means that death has been swallowed up in victory. Over against the manifestations of death, we must remind ourselves that we are on the side of life, eternal life. Our God is the God of the living and we are the living.

V. Counsel Concerning the Collection for Jerusalem 16:1-4

1 Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.

2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.

4 If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

The words “Now about” had been used earlier to refer to matters the Corinthians had brought up in their letter to Paul. Here, the apostle reverses the direction of communication and presents them with his own question which requires their answer.

After the glorious ending of the previous chapter, the apostle’s feet are again firmly planted on earth; this pertains to money matters. The only connection between the previous chapter and this one may be that the resurrection took place on the first day of the week and Paul suggests to the Corinthians what they ought to do on that day on which they commemorated the Lord’s resurrection.

Paul’s burden for the poor Christians in Jerusalem dates from the time when Barnabas officially introduced him to James, Peter, and John. In his Epistle to the Galatians, Paul wrote: “All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.”³²³

In the days immediately following Pentecost there were no poor in the church of Jerusalem. We read in Acts, “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.” *The Pulpit Commentary* dryly comments, “The enthusiastic communism of the earliest Christian society in Jerusalem had soon ceased, being, as all experience proves, an impossible experiment under the conditions which regulate all human life, and it may have aggravated the chronic distress.” One factor that attributed to the need was the famine that affected the whole Roman Empire during the reign of Claudius who reigned from 41-54 A.D.³²⁴ If Paul wrote this epistle in 56 A.D., as we suggested, the church in Jerusalem would barely have recovered from that crisis.

There is no Biblical record, other than Paul’s remark here, of the apostle’s efforts to organize a relief effort for Jerusalem in the churches of Galatia. In his second epistle, which he probably wrote one year later, Paul reminded the Corinthians of their promise to gather money.³²⁵ In his Epistle to the Romans he mentions the same offering. We read: “Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.”³²⁶

“On the first day of every week” is the rendering of the Greek “On the first Sabbath.” This can also be rendered, “on the first day after the Sabbath.” *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “The Jews, however, used the word Sabbath to denote the week; the period of seven days; Matt 28:1; Mark 16:9; Luke 18:12; 24:1; John 20:1,19; compare Lev 23:15; Deut 16:9. It is universally agreed that this here denotes the first day of the week, or the Lord’s Day.” This is the first indication in the New Testament that the early church held its worship services on Sunday, the first day of the week, celebrating the Lord’s resurrection. This is confirmed by Luke, who records in the Book of Acts that Paul spoke to the church in Troas on a Sunday.

³²² See Rom. 16:20.

³²³ Gal. 2:10

³²⁴ See Acts 11:27-30.

³²⁵ See II Cor. 8 and 9.

³²⁶ Rom. 15:25,26

We read: “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.”³²⁷

It is important to observe Paul’s approach to the Lord’s money. The suggestion is that giving ought to be systematic and not merely on emotional impulse. A complete surrender of ourselves and our possessions makes us realize that all we have is borrowed. David understood this clearly when he made his contributions to the construction of the temple and said, “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”³²⁸ It has been said that the wallet is the best thermometer of a person’s conversion.

Paul was also aware of the dangers that accompany the handling of money. Corruption must have been rampant in the Roman Empire and the way the church handled money matters was part of her testimony to a pagan world. It was considered wise to entrust the transportation of money to a committee who would be able to keep checks on the individuals of which it was composed. Paul offers himself as chairman of such a committee if the need would arise.

VI. Conclusion

16:5-24

- 5 After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you-for I will be going through Macedonia.*
6 Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go.
7 I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.
8 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost,
9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.
10 If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am.
11 No one, then, should refuse to accept him. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers.
12 Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity.
13 Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.
14 Do everything in love.
15 You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers,
16 to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it.
17 I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you.
18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.
19 The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.
20 All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.
21 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.
22 If anyone does not love the Lord-a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!
23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.
24 My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.

It is not easy to trace Paul’s actual travel from Ephesus to Corinth. Looking at the map, we see that the easiest way to go from one point to the other would have been for the apostle to cross the Aegean Sea. Going from Ephesus to Corinth via Macedonia, was indeed an enormous detour.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary explains, “He was not yet in Macedonia (as 1 Cor 16:8 shows), but at Ephesus; but he was thinking of passing through it (not abiding, as he proposed to do at Corinth). ... He did ‘abide, and even winter,’ for the three WINTER months in Greece (Corinth) (Acts 20:3,6). Paul probably left Corinth about a month before the ‘days of unleavened bread,’ the Passover

³²⁷ Acts 20:7

³²⁸ I Chron. 29:14

(to allow time to touch at Thessalonica and Berea, from which cities two of his companions were; as we read he did at Philippi); thus the three months at Corinth would be December, January, and February.”

Reading Paul’s second epistle to this church, it appears that the apostle changed his mind several times about when and how to travel to Corinth. We read: “Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, ‘Yes, yes’ and ‘No, no’? I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.”³²⁹ The mass demonstration against Paul in Ephesus, finally made Paul decide to leave that city and head for Macedonia overland. It could be that trying to board a ship in Ephesus at that point would have been too hazardous to try. Luke reports, “When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-by and set out for Macedonia. He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, where he stayed three months. Because the Jews made a plot against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia.”³³⁰ Most Bible scholars assume that Paul did in fact stay in Ephesus through Pentecost.

Paul states that the Holy Spirit opened “a great door for effective work” in Ephesus in the face of great opposition. Paul spent two years in that city, causing a revival that was unprecedented. Evidently, many people who suffered demonic oppression or possession were being delivered, because we read that some Jewish exorcists, unsuccessfully, tried Paul’s formula of using the Name of Jesus in their own séances. This resulted in a mass public confession by sorcerers who publicly burned their satanic emblems and paraphernalia.³³¹ Luke testifies that “God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.”³³² The satanic counterattack in the form of the protests by Demetrius and his fellow silversmiths, who saw their sales of silver shrines of Artemis drop to a dangerous low, put an effective stop to this. That was when Paul decided to leave Ephesus.³³³

Paul’s comments regarding Timothy are interesting. We know little about Timothy except what we learn from Paul’s epistles. He was, evidently, rather young when Paul met him and engaged him in the ministry of the Gospel. He must have been easily intimidated, because Paul wrote to him, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.”³³⁴ Paul foresaw that Timothy could possibly be too shy to stand up to those in the church in Corinth who caused all the trouble and divisions. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* adds, “His youth would add to this, as well as his country, Lystra, despised in refined Corinth.” Paul’s fatherly concern for his adopted son shines through very tenderly in the recommendation he sent to Corinth. His concern for the church is also evident in his unsuccessful efforts to talk Apollos into visiting Corinth. The word “Now about” could indicate that the Corinthians had asked Paul to send Apollos. Whether either Timothy or Apollos ever made it to Corinth is not known.

V. 13 is one of the most virile commands of Christian character in this epistle, and maybe in the whole New Testament. The Greek is very powerful in the use of single words. “Be on your guard” is the rendering of the single Greek word *gregoreuo*, meaning, “watch,” or “keep awake.” The command creates awareness of the possibility of an enemy attack. “Stand firm” is the translation of the Greek verb *steko*, “to be stationary,” or “to persevere.” “Be men of courage” also is one single verb in the imperative, *andrizomai*, “to act manly.” Leon Morris, in *I Corinthians*, states: “More probably it is meant to counter the immaturity so manifest in some of the Corinthians. Paul wants them to act like responsible adults.” *Krataioo* means, “be empowered.” The verb can also be considered to be in the passive mode, “be made strong.” It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word we find in Daniel, where the angel touches Daniel who had fainted. We read, “Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. ‘Do

³²⁹ See II Cor. 1:15-17, 23,24.

³³⁰ Acts 20:1-3

³³¹ See Acts 19:13-20.

³³² Acts 19:11,12

³³³ See Acts 19:23-41.

³³⁴ I Tim. 4:12

not be afraid, O man highly esteemed,' he said. 'Peace! Be strong now; be strong.' When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, 'Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength.'³³⁵ "Do everything in love" in no way contradicts the strong language of the previous verse; it rather reinforces it. Nothing is stronger than love. The bride in The Song of Solomon says: "Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave."³³⁶ In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, love is death's undoing.

Stephanas is mentioned three times in this epistle, of which twice in this chapter.³³⁷ We know little about him and his extended family apart from the fact that he was Paul's first convert in Achaia, that Paul baptized him and his household and that the church in Corinth had sent him to deliver a gift to the apostle. Paul's testimony about him and his family is that "they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints." This probably means that they exercised hospitality. Stephanas also appears to have been one of the elders of the local church. Some Bible scholars believe that he may have been among those who believed the Gospel when Paul addressed the philosophers in Athens,³³⁸ but the fact that he was obviously well-known in Corinth suggests that he was a native of that city.

The phrase "For they refreshed my spirit and yours also" in v. 14, is a sample of Paul's virtuosity and playful use of language. It can mean that Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus who brought a gift to Paul from the church in Corinth were people who encouraged the church. But it rather suggests that in sending Paul a gift the Corinthians were a blessing to themselves. The quotation of Jesus' words Paul spoke to the elders of Ephesus is fitting here, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."³³⁹

In the greetings that close this epistle, Paul mentions specifically Aquila and Priscilla, whom he had first met in Corinth. Aquila was originally from Pontus at the Black Sea, had moved to Rome and then to Corinth, ending up in Ephesus. At every place the faithful couple opened their home for church services. Paul actually called Priscilla by the name Prisca, which is what the Greek text has at this place. Priscilla is the name Luke uses for her in the Book of Acts. Leon Morris, in *1 Corinthians*, states: "They evidently had the habit of using their home in the service of the Lord, for they had a church in their house when they were in Rome (Rom. 16:5), just as they did at Corinth. Such a church would be small. R. Banks says 'The entertaining room in a moderately well-to-do household could hold around thirty people comfortably' ... Aquila and Prisca were courageous, for they risked their lives for Paul, though we know no details (Rom. 16:4). They were able, for they instructed no less a personage than Apollos in the correct understanding of the faith (Acts 18:26). An interesting point is that, in four of the six places where this couple is mentioned, Prisca's name comes first. Evidently she was an outstanding person in her own right."

In the closing verses of this epistle Paul wrote the last lines himself. The rest of the epistle was evidently dictated to Sosthenes. Romans was dictated to Tertius.³⁴⁰ It was not unusual for Paul to add a few words in his own handwriting to some of his epistles. In Second Thessalonians we read, "I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write."³⁴¹ In the letter to the Colossians also we read, "I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you."³⁴²

V. 22 rates among one of the most difficult verses in the New Testament. Some versions leave the last two words un-translated. The King James Version, for instance, reads: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." The Greek word *anathema* has the meaning of a ban or excommunication. *Strong's Dictionary* states about *maran atha* that it is "of Aramaic origin (meaning our Lord has come); maranatha, i.e. an exclamation of the approaching divine judgment." The placing of the two words together would indicate that it is not Paul who pronounces the judgment but the Lord Himself. Jesus' own words in John's Gospel, probably, shed the brightest light on this verse. We read: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."³⁴³ Paul's words could be seen as a comment on the

³³⁵ Dan. 10:18,19

³³⁶ Song 8:6

³³⁷ See I Cor. 1:16; 16:15, 17.

³³⁸ See Acts 17:34.

³³⁹ Acts 20:35

³⁴⁰ See Rom. 16:22.

³⁴¹ II Thess. 3:17

³⁴² Col. 4:18

³⁴³ John 3:17,18

Second Psalm: “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment.”³⁴⁴ The Greek word for “love” used in this verse is not *agapao*, the word for divine love, which we would expect, but *phileo*, “have affection.”

In our modern pluralistic society, Paul’s words sound like a prime sample of intolerance. *The Pulpit Commentary* expresses the shocked reaction these words evoke in most people: “I cannot pretend to understand what St. Paul means by it, unless it be ‘Let personal love to Christ be the *essential* of Christian fellowship, and let him who has it not be regarded *as apart from the Church*.’ Commentators call it ‘an imprecation,’ or ‘malediction,’ and say that it means ‘Let him be devoted to God’s wrath and judgment.’” That language is, indeed, very like the language of religious hatred and religious usurpation in all ages, but it is the very antithesis to the general tone of the apostle. *If* this were the meaning, it would seem to resemble the very spirit which Christ himself severely rebuked as the Elijah spirit, not the Christ spirit. But I do not believe that, even in a passing outburst of strong emotion, St. Paul had any such meaning. For (1) the Jews used *cherem*, not only of the severer form of excommunication (*shem atha*), but even of the milder and by no means severe *temporary* form (*nidui*); and (2) it cannot be *more* severe than ‘handing over to Satan’ (...1 Corinthians 5:5; ...1 Timothy 1:20), which was merciful in its purpose.”

Adam Clarke believes that Paul’s ire is directed against the Jews who rejected Christ as the Son of God. But why would Paul express this particularly to the church in Corinth, which consisted mainly of converted pagans?

Leon Morris, in *1 Corinthians*, writes about the word *Maranatha*: “Being Aramaic, the expression cannot have originated among the Greeks, but must go back to the early days of the church in Palestine. Moreover it must have expressed a sentiment that the early church regarded as very important, else the foreign word would never have been taken over in this way by Greek-speaking Christians (we still use words like Hallelujah and Amen). It is not certain how we should understand the expression. The first part is the word *Mar* which means ‘Lord’, and we should not overlook the importance of the ascription of this title to Jesus in the early days of the Palestinian church. ‘Our’ is conveyed in Aramaic by the addition *an* or *ana*. The latter part of the expression is from the verb ‘*atha*, ‘to come’. If we read *atha* it might mean ‘has come’, in which case there is a reference to the incarnation as Chrysostom held. Or it could mean ‘comes’ (cf. Mt. 18:20). It might even be future, ‘Our Lord will come’. ... Probably the best way of taking it is to divide the expression as *Marana tha* and take the verb as imperative. ‘Our Lord, come’ (a prayer like that in Rev. 22:20, ‘Come, Lord Jesus’). It would then express the eager longing felt by the church in those early days for the speedy return of the Lord. Others have suggested that the words mean ‘the Lord art thou’, or ‘Our Lord is a sign’, but both seem improbable.”

Although the concluding verses of this epistle sound simple enough, they are not without some textual problems. The prayer “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you” is more or less typical of a Pauline conclusion to his epistles, but “My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen” certainly, is not. The Greek reads literally “My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.” Although this is a parallel construction with the previous sentence, it does not make much sense. The NIV translates this, “My love to all of you in Christ Jesus,” which gives it the sense of “I love you all.” Some Bible scholars believe that a copying mistake may have crept into the text and that the Greek words *agape mou*, “my love,” should actually read *agape theou*, “the love of God,” which would be more in the apostle’s style in the conclusion of an epistle. Some important manuscripts omit the word “Amen.” The addition makes the last two verses into a prayer of benediction, in which the grace of Jesus and the love of God (or Paul) are the main topics.

Toccoa Falls, GA, 2/14/05

³⁴⁴ Ps. 2:12