

Notes on 1 Corinthians

2024 Edition
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Introduction

DESTINATION

Corinth had a long history that stretched back into the Bronze Age (before 1200 B.C.).¹ In Paul's day it was a Roman colony, the capital of the province of Achaia, and "the fourth perhaps in size in the empire."² The population consisted of Roman citizens who had migrated from Italy, native Greeks, Jews (Acts 18:4), and other people from various places who chose to settle there.



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

²G. G. Findlay, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 2:730.

The ancient city of Corinth enjoyed an ideal situation as a commercial center. It stood just southwest of the Isthmus of Corinth, which was the land bridge that connected Northern Greece and Southern Greece (the Peloponnesus). This site made Corinth a crossroads for trade by land, north and south, as well as by sea, east and west.

In Paul's day large ships would transfer their cargoes to land vehicles that would cart them from the Corinthian Gulf, west of the isthmus, to the Saronic Gulf, east of the isthmus, or vice versa. There stevedores would reload them onto other ships. If a ship was small enough, they would drag the whole vessel across the four-and-a-half-mile isthmus, from one gulf to the other. This did away with the long and dangerous voyage around the Peloponnesus by way of Cape Malea. Later the Romans cut a canal linking these two gulfs. Nero began this project, but it was finally completed in 1893.¹

"Her [Corinth's] colonies were spread over distant coasts in the East and West; and ships came from every sea to her harbours. Thus she became the common resort and the universal market of the Greeks."²

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

"Old Corinth had gained such a reputation for sexual vice that Aristophanes (*ca.* 450-385 B.C.) coined the verb *korinthiazō* (= to act like a Corinthian, i.e., to commit fornication)."³

"... in our own literature 'a Corinthian' still means a polished rake."⁴

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

²*Ibid.*, p. 325.

³Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 2. See also David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 505, for other quotations about Corinth from ancient writers.

⁴Findlay, 2:734.

"The old city had been the most licentious city in Greece, and perhaps the most licentious city in the Empire."¹

The most notorious shrine on Corinth was the Temple of Aphrodite, which stood on top of an approximately 1,900 foot-high mountain just south of the city: the Acrocorinthus. Hundreds of female slaves served the men who "worshipped" there. The Greek geographer Strabo wrote of 1,000 prostitutes, but this probably referred to the early history of the old city, and it may have been an exaggeration.² Other major deities honored in Corinth included Melicertes, the patron of seafarers, and Poseidon, the sea god.

"All of this evidence together suggests that Paul's Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world."³

There were several other local sites of importance to the student of Paul's Corinthian epistles. These included the *bema* ("judgment seat" or "platform"), which was the place where judges tried important cases, including Paul's case (Acts 18:12).⁴ Cenchrea, the port of Corinth on the Saronic Gulf of the Aegean Sea, was the town from which Paul set sail for Ephesus during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18). Isthmia was another little town east of Corinth, just north of Cenchrea, that hosted the Isthmian Games every two or three years.⁵ These athletic contests were important in the life of the Greeks, and Paul referred to them in this epistle (9:24-27).

Paul had first arrived in Corinth from Athens, which lay to the east. In Corinth he preached the gospel and planted a church. There, too, he met Priscilla and Aquila, who were Jews who had recently left Rome. After local Jewish officials expelled the church from the synagogue, it met in a house next door that Titius Justus owned. Paul ministered in Corinth for 18 months, probably during A.D. 51 and 52. He left, taking Priscilla and Aquila

¹Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, p. xii.

²See Fee, pp. 2-3.

³*Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴See the diagram of central Corinth in Mare, p. 186.

⁵Cf. Howson, p. 540.

with him to Ephesus (Acts 18:18). Paul then proceeded on to Syrian Antioch by way of Caesarea (Acts 18:22).

OCCASION AND DATE

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

Then he heard from "Chloe's people" that factions had developed in the church (1:11).¹ He also received a letter from the church in Corinth requesting his guidance in certain matters (7:1). These matters were: marriage, divorce, food offered to idols, the exercise of spiritual gifts in the church, and the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Those who carried this letter also reported other disturbing conditions in the church (5:1; 16:17). These conditions were: the condoning rather than disciplining of immorality, Christians suing one another in the civil courts, and disorders in the church meetings.

These factors led Paul to compose a second letter to this church: 1 Corinthians. In it he dealt with the problem of factions, promised to visit them soon, and said that he was sending Timothy to Corinth (chs. 1—4). Paul also included his responses to the Corinthians' questions about what he had previously written. He next dealt with the oral reports (chs. 5—6), and then with the questions that the Corinthian believers had written to him (chs. 7—16). Thus 1 Corinthians is an "occasional epistle," namely, one occasioned by certain real situations. Paul evidently sent this epistle from Ephesus, by trusted messengers, in the late winter or early spring of A.D. 56 (cf. 16:8).²

It seems that a conflict had developed between the Corinthian church and its founder: Paul. There was internal strife in the church, as the epistle

¹Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), 2020 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

²On the integrity of 1 Corinthians, see Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 442-44.

makes clear. However the larger problem seems to have been that some in the Christian community were leading the church into a view of things that was contrary to that of Paul. This resulted in a questioning of Paul's authority and his gospel (cf. Gal.). The key issue between Paul and the Corinthians was what it means to be "spiritual."¹

PAUL'S CORINTHIAN CONTACTS							
<i>Paul's first visit</i>	His former letter	Their letter to him	1 Corinthians	<i>Paul's painful visit</i>	His severe letter	2 Corinthians	<i>Paul's future visit</i>

CHARACTERISTICS

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

"If in Romans Paul resembles the modern professor of Biblical Theology, in 1 Corinthians he resembles the pastor-teacher, faced with the care of the church on the firing line of Christian warfare."³

"The letter is, in its contents, the most diversified of all St. Paul's Epistles ..."⁴

¹See Fee, pp. 4-15.

²Barrett, p. 26.

³S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1229.

⁴W. J. Conybeare, in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 380.

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

"These two epistles constitute the most telling condemnation of arrogance, self-promotion, boasting, and self-confidence in the Pauline corpus; conversely, they describe in practical terms the nature of Christian life and witness, emphasizing service, self-denial, purity, and weakness as the matrix in which God displays his strength. Perhaps the high-water mark is the emphasis on love as 'the most excellent way' (1 Cor. 12:31—13:13) all Christians must pursue."²

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction 1:1-9
 - A. Salutation 1:1-3
 - B. Thanksgiving 1:4-9
- II. Conditions reported to Paul 1:10—6:20
 - A. Divisions in the church 1:10—4:21
 - 1. The manifestation of the problem 1:10-17
 - 2. The gospel as a contradiction to human wisdom 1:18—2:5
 - 3. The Spirit's ministry of revealing God's wisdom 2:6-16
 - 4. The immature and carnal conditions 3:1-4
 - 5. The role of God's servants 3:5-17
 - 6. Human wisdom and limited blessing 3:18-23
 - 7. The Corinthians' relationship with Paul ch. 4
 - B. Lack of discipline in the church chs. 5—6
 - 1. Incest in the church ch. 5
 - 2. Litigation in the church 6:1-11

¹Carson and Moo, p. 450.

²Ibid, p. 451.

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

- G. The collection for the Jerusalem believers 16:1-12
 - 1. Arrangements for the collection 16:1-4
 - 2. The travel plans of Paul and his fellow apostles 16:5-12
- IV. Conclusion 16:13-24
 - A. Final exhortations 16:13-18
 - B. Final greetings and benediction 16:19-24

MESSAGE

A phrase in 1 Corinthians 1:2 suggests the theme of this great epistle. That phrase is "the church of God which is in Corinth." Two entities are in view in this phrase, and these are the two entities with which the whole epistle deals. They are the church of God and the city of Corinth. The church of God is a community of people who share the life of God, are under the governing will of God, and cooperate in the work of God. The city of Corinth was ignorant of the life of God, governed by self-will, and antagonistic to the purposes of God. These two entities stand in vivid contrast to one another and account for the conflict that we find in this epistle. In the order in which Paul probably wrote them, Galatians deals mainly with soteriology (salvation), 1 and 2 Thessalonians with eschatology (future things), and 1 and 2 Corinthians with ecclesiology (the church). J. Sidlow Baxter noted that Romans deals mainly with doctrine (teaching), 1 and 2 Corinthians with reproof, and Galatians with correction (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16).¹

"in Romans we have the *norm*; in Corinthians the *sub-norm*; in Galatians the *ab-norm*."²

The church of God in view in this epistle is not the universal church but the local church. These two churches are really not that different from one another. The local church is the micro form of the universal church, and the universal church is the macro form of the local church. What is true of one is true of the other. Whatever we find in a local church exists on a larger scale in the universal church. That is, whatever we find in one local church exists in many local churches. The New Testament consistently speaks of

¹J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 6:93.

²*Ibid.*, 6:94.

the church as people, not buildings. The word "church" (Gr. *ekklesia*) means a group of people who have been called out from the rest of humanity for a special purpose.

The Apostle Paul addressed these local church people in Corinth as believers, because that is what they were (cf. 1 Thess. 5:5). They shared the life of God because the Holy Spirit indwelt them (12:13). They had submitted to God's rule over them to some extent. They were people whom God had commissioned to carry the gospel to every creature. We need to bear these things in mind as we read about the church of God in Corinth, because we might otherwise conclude that they were unbelievers in view of their conduct.

The city of Corinth is the other entity of primary importance in our grasping the major significance of this epistle. What characterizes the "world" (Gr. *kosmos*, "the whole mass of men [people] alienated from God, and therefore hostile to the cause of Christ¹) generally marked Corinth. In the first century when other people described a person as a Corinthian they were implying that lust, lasciviousness, and luxury characterized that one. These were the marks of Corinth. Corinth as a city was ignorant of the true God, entirely self-governing as a Roman colony, and self-centered in her world. These traits marked the lives of individual unbelievers in Corinth. The city was going in the opposite direction from the direction that God had called the church to go. The local culture always impacts the local church.

My father wrote in a devotional booklet on 1 Corinthians, "It seems very often that those communities which excel in the brightness of their shining are also characterized by the darkness of their shadows."²

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

¹*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. *kosmos*, p. 357, definition 6.

²Robert L. Constable, *Called Saints*, devotional 3, p. 2.

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

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

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

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

One of the symptoms of Corinthian cultural influence was intellectual freedom. There was much interest in intellectual speculation in Corinth, as there was in its neighbor city of Athens. The phrase "Corinthian words" was a synonym for elaborate language in Paul's day.¹ Corinth glorified human wisdom. The Corinthians discussed and debated all sorts of opinions. Each intellectual leader had his group of disciples. Discussion of every subject under the sun prevailed with great diversity of opinion.

Unfortunately, this spirit of intellectualism had invaded the church. There was even a veneration of human wisdom among the Christians. They had chosen their own Christian leaders, whom they viewed as celebrities (ch. 1). Intellectual restlessness prevailed in the church as well as in the city. The believers sampled Christian teaching like the general populace dabbled in philosophical argumentation. This extended to such fundamental

¹J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St Paul*, p. 170.

doctrines as the Resurrection (ch. 15). The popular talk shows of today would have been very popular in Corinth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

One of the central revelations of this epistle then is that the church fails to fulfill her function in her "city" (i.e., culture) when the spirit of "the city" invades her. The church allows the spirit of "the city" to invade her when she forgets that God wants her to be unique. The church fails when it adopts the ideas and activities of its environment rather than those revealed for it in God's Word.

In view of all this, Paul constantly appealed to his readers to be what they really were as Christians. Christians are not the people that we once were. We are "saints" (1:2). We need to remember that and act accordingly. We do not need to catch the spirit of our age. We need to correct the spirit of our age. When the church catches the spirit of its age it catches a disease and becomes anemic, weak, and sickly. We avoid catching this spirit by staying spiritually healthy and by keeping the message of the Cross central in our lives. We do it by exercising the power of the Resurrection, and we do it by keeping others, rather than self, primary as we walk by the Spirit.

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

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

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

The law of the church must be the law of love. This is the opposite of the selfish outlook. Paul emphasized the importance of love in chapter 13. It is

no accident that Paul wrote his classic chapter on love to this church, because the Corinthian church was sadly lacking in love.

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

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

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

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

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

This epistle calls the church in every age to recognize its responsibility to its "city." The church is responsible for the intellectual, moral, and social conditions in its "city." Unfortunately many churches believe they exist

merely to conserve the life of their members. We live in a cultural climate very similar to the one in which the Corinthian Christians lived. It is a culture characterized by intellectual pluralism, situational ethics, and personal selfishness. We face the same challenge that the Corinthian believers did. Consequently what this epistle reveals is extremely relevant for us. We have responsibility for how people in our "city" think, how they behave, and whom they glorify. What they need is the message of the Cross delivered in the power of the Resurrection.

This letter is also a call to separation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Third, the message of the church must always be the message of the Cross and the Resurrection. This is a message of failure and success, of success out of failure. That is the message of hope that "the city" needs to hear. Consequently we need to "be firm, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord," knowing that our labor is not in vain in the Lord (15:58).¹

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

Exposition

I. INTRODUCTION 1:1-9

To begin his letter Paul greeted the Christians in Corinth and expressed gratitude to God for them. This positive and complimentary introduction contrasts with the generally critical spirit of the epistle that follows. Paul began with praise and commendation for his readers' good qualities, as was his typical practice. He knew this congregation well, having lived in Corinth for 18 months. The fact that he referred to "Jesus Christ" (or "Christ Jesus" or "Lord Jesus Christ" or "Christ" or "Jesus Christ our Lord") nine times in these first nine verses shows the central place that the Lord Jesus occupied in the apostle's thinking and writing that follows.

A. SALUTATION 1:1-3

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

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

"Sosthenes" may have been the same Sosthenes who was the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:17), though he may have been a different person.¹ He was with Paul in Ephesus when Paul penned this epistle. Though Luke did not record his conversion in the Book of Acts, Sosthenes quite clearly became a believer ("our brother"), assuming this was the same man. Probably he was the same man, and Paul referred to him because the Corinthians knew him well. Sosthenes was probably not the co-writer or amanuensis (literary assistant)

¹R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, pp. 21-22, argued that he was a different person.

of this epistle but only Paul's companion who joined Paul in sending it to Corinth.¹

1:2 Paul sometimes referred to all the Christians in a particular locality as "the church of God" in that place (cf. 10:32; 11:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:5). However to the Corinthian church, where party spirit was a problem, this reminder focused on the church's true Lord ("their Lord and ours"). This was not the church of Cephas (Peter) or Apollos or even Paul, each of whom had their admirers in Corinth. There may or may not have been more than one house-church in Corinth at this time.²

God had set the Corinthians apart from sin (but not from other sinners) in order to be His holy people by uniting them with Him through faith in His Son (cf. John 17:17). "Sanctified" (set apart) may be a metaphor for conversion here (cf. v. 30; 6:11). They were "saints" (Gr. *hagios*, holy) by divine calling (i.e., positional sanctification; cf. Rom. 1:7; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2). The concept of being "in Christ" may be the most foundational and pervasive one in Paul's theology.³

"All of mankind is divided between the 'saints' and the 'ain'ts.' If you 'ain't' in Christ, then you are an 'ain't.' If you are in Christ, then you are a 'saint.'"⁴

The Corinthians were not saintly in their conduct (i.e., progressive practical sanctification), as this letter makes clear. Perhaps Paul mentioned their saintly calling to inspire them to be more saintly in their conduct. They were saints who were sinning.⁵

"Biblical sanctification is fourfold: (1) primary, equivalent to the 'efficacious grace' of systematic theology (cf. II Thess 2:13; I Pet 1:2); (2)

¹Findlay, 2:758.

²Craig S. Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 21, believed there were many.

³See James S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ*.

⁴J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 5:4-5.

⁵See Robert L. Saucy, "'Sinners' Who Are Forgiven or 'Saints' Who Sin?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):400-12.

positional, a perfect standing in holiness, true of all believers from the moment of conversion (cf. Acts 20:32; 26:18); (3) progressive [or practical], equivalent to daily growth in grace (cf. Jn 17:17; Eph 5:26; II Cor 7:1); (4) prospective, or ultimate likeness to Christ positionally and practically (cf. I Thess 5:23). The use of the perfect participle here refers to positional sanctification."¹

"Paul understands Christian ethics in terms of 'becoming what you are,' a perspective that emerges in 1 Corinthians in a number of ways."²

"Perhaps the single greatest theological contribution of our letter to the Christian faith is Paul's understanding of the nature of the church, especially in its local expression. If the gospel itself is at stake in the Corinthians' theology and behavior, so also is its visible expression in the local community of redeemed people. The net result is more teaching on the church here than in any of Paul's letters."³

The saints "in every place" are probably those in churches in other places, some of whom had come to the Savior through the witness of Christians other than Paul. This seems more likely than that they were just Paul's converts who lived near Corinth (cf. 2 Cor. 1:1; Rom. 16:1). This seems probable in view of "every place" or "everywhere" (NIV), and in view of how this verse ends.⁴ Paul evidently wanted his readers to remember that they were part of a large body of believers (cf. 12:12); they were not the only church. They needed to fit into the family of God harmoniously rather than being a rebel congregation.

¹Johnson, p. 1230.

²Fee, pp. 17-18.

³Ibid., p. 18.

⁴NIV refers to *The Holy Bible: New International Version*.

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

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

B. THANKSGIVING 1:4-9

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

"What is remarkable here is the apostle's ability to thank God for the very things in the church that, because of the abuses, are also causing him grief."¹

1:4 Paul was grateful that God had poured out His "grace" on the Corinthian believers "in Christ Jesus." Paul usually referred to the Lord as Christ Jesus rather than as Jesus Christ. The "Christ Jesus" order put the emphasis on His divine character as Messiah rather than on His human nature, and it encouraged his readers to submit to Him as their Lord. Along with receiving Christ Jesus, and being placed in Him (positional sanctification), the Corinthians had received much grace.

1:5 By "speech" or "speaking" (NIV; Gr. *logos*, lit. word) the apostle meant eloquence: the ability to express their "knowledge" (Gr. *gnosis*) fluently and effectively. As we will see, knowledge and eloquence were two things that the Corinthians valued very highly. These characteristics appear, by their usage in this letter and in 2 Corinthians, to have been common buzzwords in Corinth. *Logos* occurs 26 times in 1 and 2 Corinthians compared to 58 times in Paul's other epistles, and *gnosis* appears 16 times in these two epistles but only

¹Fee, p. 36.

seven times in all of Paul's other writings. Paul had to put these gifts in their proper place among the other gifts. Nevertheless these were great gifts, and Paul was thankful that God had given them to the Corinthians. God had "enriched" the Corinthians by giving this church the gracious gifts of "all speech" and "all knowledge."

1:6 The Corinthians' reception of these gifts had endorsed the truthfulness of the gospel. Giving these gifts was one of the ways that God validated ("confirmed") the gospel message in the early history of the church (cf. Gal. 3:2-5; Heb. 2:3-4).

1:7 God had blessed the Corinthians greatly with spiritual gifts. Note that Paul praised his readers for their gifts ("you are not lacking in any gift"), but he did not praise their behavior. Ancient orators typically praised their audiences for both.¹ But Paul could not do that.

The revealing ("revelation") "of our Lord Jesus Christ" to His saints would occur at the Rapture. That would be God's greatest gift to them. The early Christians awaited Jesus' return eagerly. This reference to the Rapture is one of many indications that the apostles taught the imminent (i.e., any moment) return of the Lord for His own (cf. 4:5; 15:51-52; 16:22; Phil. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Thess. 1:10-12; Titus 2:13; James 5:7-9; 1 John 2:28; Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 17, 20).²

"Three words are prominently employed in connection with the return of the Lord: (1) *Parousia*, also used by Paul of the coming of Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:17), of Titus (2 Cor. 7:6, 7), and of his own coming to Philippi (Phil. 1:26). The word means *personal presence*, and is used of the return of the Lord as that event relates to the blessing of Christians (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Th. 4:14-17) and to the destruction of the man of sin (2

¹Keener, p. 22.

²See Wayne A. Brindle, "Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:630 (April-June 2001):146-48.

Th. 2:8). (2) *Apokalupsis*, employed here, and meaning *unveiling, revelation*. This word emphasizes the visibility of the Lord's return. It is used of the Lord (2 Th. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13; 4:13), of the sons of God in connection with the Lord's return (Rom. 8:19), and of the man of sin (2 Th. 2:3, 6, 8), and always implies perceptibility. And (3) *epiphaneia*, translated 'brightness' (2 Th. 2:8) or 'manifestation' in some other versions. It means *an appearing*, and is used of both advents (first advent, 2 Tim. 1:10; second advent, 2 Th. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Ti. 2:13)."¹

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

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

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

¹ *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1233.

² *Ibid.*

The Greek word translated "blameless" (*anegkletos*) means not reprobable, or without accusation (cf. Col. 1:22; 1 Tim. 3:10; Titus 1:6-7). It does not imply that at the judgment seat of Christ there will be complete equality among believers (cf. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). Nor does it mean that once God regenerates a person that individual never sins again (cf. 1 John 1:6-10). It means that every Christian will stand before the Lord without fear of condemnation, because God has imputed our sins to the Savior, and He has borne them for us (cf. Rom. 5:1; 8:1).

1:9 Paul's confidence that his readers would one day stand before the Lord blameless did not rest on the Corinthians' ability to persevere faithfully to the end. It rested on God's ability and promises to preserve them. God had begun the good work of calling them "into fellowship with His Son," and He would be "faithful" to complete that work (cf. Phil. 1:6; 1 John 1:1-4).

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

G. Campbell Morgan wrote that 1:9 and 15:58 are the "boundaries" of this epistle. Chapter 1 verse 9 contains Paul's fundamental affirmation, and 15:58 is his concluding exhortation.¹

"... God is the subject of all the actions of the thanksgiving. And in every case that work is mediated by or focused on 'his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.' Thus the christological emphasis

¹G. Campbell Morgan, *The Unfolding Message of the Bible*, pp. 389-90; idem, *The Corinthian Letters of Paul*, p. 19.

that began in the salutation is carried through in an even more emphatic way in this introductory thanksgiving. Everything God has done, and will do, for the Corinthians is done expressly in 'Jesus Christ our Lord.' ... His concern here is to redirect their focus—from themselves to God and Christ and from an over-realized eschatology to a healthy awareness of the glory that is still future."¹

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

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

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

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

"Because Paul primarily, and in seriatim [point by point] fashion, addresses *behavioral* issues, it is easy to miss the intensely *theological* nature of 1 Corinthians. Here Paul's understanding of the gospel and its ethical demands—his theology, if you will—is getting its full workout."²

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

¹Fee, p. 46. Paragraph division omitted.

²Idem, "Toward a Theology of 1 Corinthians," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 38.

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

Thus this epistle, which differs from Paul's other letters, in which he began with doctrine and ended with practice, is not really that different. In dealing with a practical issue (divisions in the church), Paul taught doctrine.

A. DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH 1:10—4:21

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

"... this opening issue is the most crucial in the letter, not because their 'quarrels' were the most significant error in the church, but because the nature of this particular strife had as its root cause their false theology, which had exchanged the theology of the cross for a false triumphalism that went beyond, or excluded, the cross."²

"Triumphalism" is the belief that Christians are triumphing now over sin and its consequences to the exclusion of persecution, suffering, and some human limitations. It is sometimes, and it was in Corinth, an evidence of an over-realized eschatology, which is that we have already entered into certain blessings of salvation that really lie ahead of us in the eschaton (end times). "Prosperity theology" is one popular form of triumphalism. Prosperity theology is the teaching that it is not God's will for Christians to experience suffering, sickness, or pain, but health, wealth, and happiness.

¹Ibid., pp. 38-39.

²Idem, *The First ...*, p. 50.

"Amongst the four Evangelical Epistles [i.e., Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Galatians], this is *the epistle of the cross in its social application*."¹

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

The surface manifestation of this serious problem of divisions within the church was the party spirit that had developed in it. Members of the church were appreciating their favorite leaders too much, and not appreciating the other leaders enough. This was really a manifestation of self-exaltation: Their boasting about their teachers of wisdom demonstrated pride in themselves as being wise.

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

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

Bad theology usually lies behind bad behavior. There was already disagreement among members of this congregation, but there was not yet division in the sense of a church split. Paul urged his original readers to unite in their thinking. The Greek word *katartizo*, translated "made complete," describes the mending of fishnets in Mark 1:19. Paul wanted the Corinthians to come together in their thinking, to take the same view of things, to have "the same mind" (cf. Phil. 2:2),

¹Findlay, 2:739.

²Fee, "Toward a ...," p. 41.

and to experience consensus in their "judgment" of what they needed to do.

"... there is nothing more out of keeping for Christians than their being divided from each other. For the most important principle of our religion is this, that we be in concord among ourselves."¹

"The gospel that effects [*sic* affects] eschatological salvation also brings about a radical change in the way people live. This is the burden of this letter and the theological presupposition behind every imperative. Therefore, although apocalyptic-cosmological language is also found, salvation is expressed primarily in ethical-moral language."²

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

"When I was a pastor in Pasadena, we had a nursery room for babies, and we called it The Bawl Room. I have learned that in some churches the entire church is a bawl room, because of the bawling baby Christians."³

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

¹John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians*, p. 25.

²Fee, "Toward a ...," p. 47. "Apocalyptic-cosmological language" is language that describes the complete destruction of the whole creation.

³McGee, 5:8.

It was normal that some would appreciate "Paul." since he had founded the church and had ministered in Corinth with God's blessing for 18 months. "Apollos" had followed Paul there and was especially effective in refuting Jewish unbelievers and in showing that Jesus was the Messiah. He was a gifted apologist (defender of the faith) and orator (Acts 18:24-28).

There is no scriptural record that Peter ("Cephas") ever visited Corinth, though he may have. Cephas is the Hellenized form of the Aramaic *kepa*, meaning rock (cf. John 1:42). Since Peter was the leading apostle to the Jews, it is understandable that many of the early Christians, especially the Jewish believers, would have venerated him. Some may have even been his converts.¹ A fourth group apparently professed loyalty to no human leader but boasted of their allegiance to "Christ" alone. Perhaps they had had some personal contact with Jesus in Judea. They appear to have regarded themselves as the most spiritual element in the church. They had devised their own brand of spiritual elitism, as had the fans of the other apostles. This made them feel superior to the other factions, even though in reality they were no better.

"The fault of the Christ party is the fact that it allows itself to become only a party and thus is also drawn into the party wranglings."²

1:13 This last group may have been using "Christ" as the name of a party within the church. This, in a sense, cut Him off from the other members of the church. It was unthinkable to Paul that Christ had been "divided" and made the favorite of only a segment of the church.

Next Paul referred to his own supporters. How foolish it was to elevate him over Christ, since Christ did what was most important: He was "crucified" for all of them. Note the central importance of the Cross in Paul's thinking. Paul's followers had not submitted to water baptism in order to identify with Paul but to identify with Christ. This reference shows how highly

¹Findlay, 2:764.

²Lenski, p. 43.

Paul regarded water baptism. It is God's specified way for the believer to identify publicly with his or her Savior (Matt. 28:19; cf. Acts 8:16; 19:5; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). It implies turning over allegiance to the One named in the rite.

"It is unsafe to infer from such expressions as this (cf. Acts x. 48, xix. 5 ...) that the formula of baptism in the name of the Trinity (as commanded Matt. xxviii. 19) was dispensed with, and the name of Jesus alone pronounced. Baptism in or into the name of Jesus is to be regarded as an abridged expression to signify Christian baptism, retaining the characteristic element in the formula."¹

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

"Gaius Titius Justus would be a complete Roman name (*praenomen, nomen gentile, cognomen*)."²

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

1:15 Paul deliberately did not baptize most of his converts so that there would be no question as to whose disciples they were. This was one way that he kept Christ central in his ministry. Paul believed baptism was important, but each baptism was just as valid whether he or any other believer administered it. He was not superior to other believers in this respect.

1:16 The members of Stephanas' household were the first converts to Christianity in the Roman province of Achaia (16:15). It was unimportant to Paul how many people he personally baptized.

¹Lightfoot, p. 155.

²F. F. Bruce, ed., *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 34.

He was not keeping score. This is clear because he temporarily forgot that he had baptized Stephanas' household (cf. v. 14). As he continued to write the Lord brought them to mind.

"Paul casts no reflection on baptism, for he could not with his conception of it as the picture of the new life in Christ (Rom. 6:2-6), but he clearly denies here that he considers baptism essential to the remission of sin or the means of obtaining forgiveness."¹

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

"What he does here is simply to point out the chief thing in his calling."²

"Cleverness of speech" or "words of human wisdom" (NIV) greatly impressed the Greeks. This is the first of 16 references to wisdom (Gr. *sophia*, here translated "cleverness") in 1:17 through 3:23, which indicates Paul's emphasis in this section of the epistle.

"The Greeks were intoxicated with fine words; and to them the Christian preacher with his blunt message seemed a crude and uncultured figure, to be laughed at and ridiculed rather than to be listened to and respected."³

One of the features of Paul, Apollos, Peter (Cephas), and Christ that made them attractive to various segments of the Corinthian church was evidently their individual oratorical

¹A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:76.

²Calvin, p. 31.

³William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, p. 22.

styles. Later Paul pointed out that the Corinthian Christians were viewing things through carnal eyes, namely, looking at things like unsaved people do (3:1-4). Paul did not emphasize or place confidence in the method of his preaching but rather in the message of the Cross. He did not want to draw attention away from the gospel message to his style of delivering that message.

"Paul represents himself as a preacher, not as an orator. Preaching is the proclamation of the cross; it is the cross that is the source of its power."¹

"The Gospel's appeal is not to man's intellect, but to his sense of guilt by sin. The cross clothed in wisdom of words vitiates [spoils] this appeal. The Gospel must never be presented as a human philosophical system; it must be preached as a salvation."²

"But what if someone in our day speaks in rather brilliant fashion, and makes the teaching of the Gospel sparkle with his eloquence? Should he be rejected on that account, as if he spoiled it, or obscured the glory of Christ? I answer first of all that eloquence is not in conflict with the simplicity of the Gospel at all, when, free from contempt of the Gospel it not only gives it first place, and is subject to it, but also serves it as a handmaid serves her mistress."³

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

¹Barrett, p. 49.

²Johnson, p. 1231.

³Calvin, p. 34.

"With this observation Paul is fully launched on his epistle. As in Romans (cf. i. 16 ff.), mention of the Gospel sets his thought and language in motion."¹

The crux of the Corinthians' party spirit lay in their viewing things like unbelievers did, specifically viewing Christian preachers and teachers like unbelievers did. The Corinthians failed to see the important issues at stake in ministry and instead paid too much attention to external, superficial matters. This was a serious condition, so Paul wrote many words in the following section to deal with it (1:18—4:21). This is still a major problem for many Christians worldwide, who have been too influenced by the attention given to celebrities in their respective cultures, and evaluate Christian ministers on the basis of their style, charisma, or persona (public image), rather than on their faithfulness to the Word of God.

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

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

"There are ... three particularly important expository passages in 1 Corinthians. They may be regarded as the letter's principal theological discourses and as such deserve special attention. These three key discourses deal, respectively, with the wisdom of the cross (1:18—2:16), the nature of Christian community (12:4—13:13), and the resurrection of the dead (chap. 15). In each instance Paul's reflections on the topic are deliberate and focused, and lead him to develop a more or less extended and coherent argument. Moreover, each of these passages occurs at an important point within the overall structure of the letter. The discourse on wisdom, situated prominently at the

¹Barrett, p. 49.

beginning of the letter, supports the apostle's urgent appeals for unity (1:10—4:21). It can be argued that the discourse on Christian community undergirds, directly or indirectly, all of the counsels and instructions in chaps. 8 through 14. And the discourse on resurrection, a response to those who claim that 'there is no resurrection of the dead' (15:12), is located prominently at the end of the letter."¹

"In this part of the [first] discourse [i.e., 1:18—2:5] the argument proceeds in three steps: Paul makes his main point in 1:18-25, confirms it in 1:26-31 with an appeal to the Corinthians' own situation, and then further confirms it in 2:1-5 with reference to what and how he had preached in Corinth. The apostle's thesis is registered first in 1:18 and then twice restated (in 1:21 and 1:23-24)."²

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

The folly of a crucified Messiah 1:18-25

"This paragraph is crucial not only to the present argument (1:10—4:21) but to the entire letter as well. Indeed, it is one of the truly great moments in the apostle Paul. Here he argues, with OT support, that what God had always intended and had foretold in the prophets, he has now accomplished through the crucifixion: He has brought an end to human self-sufficiency as it is evidenced through human wisdom and devices."³

1:18 The message ("word," *logos*) "of the cross," in contrast to the speech (*logos*) of human wisdom (v. 17), has the Cross as its central theme.⁴ When people hear it, it produces opposite effects in those who are on the way to hell and in those who

¹Victor Paul Furnish, "Theology in 1 Corinthians," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 63. Paragraph division omitted.

²Ibid., p. 65. Paragraph division omitted.

³Fee, *The First ...*, p. 68.

⁴G. Campbell Morgan, *Categorical Imperatives of the Christian Faith*, p. 71, took the *logos* as referring to Christ.

are on the way to heaven. Paul contrasted "foolishness" and weakness with wisdom and "power" (cf. Rom. 1:16).

"What would you think if a woman came to work wearing earrings stamped with an image of the mushroom cloud of the atomic bomb dropped over Hiroshima? What would you think of a church building adorned with a fresco of the massed graves at Auschwitz? ... The same sort of shocking horror was associated with *cross* and *crucifixion* in the first century."¹

1:19 Paul's quotation of Isaiah 29:14 ("I will destroy the wisdom of the wise ...") shows that it has always been God's method to expose the folly of merely human wisdom. Merely human wisdom is the wisdom that disregards what God has revealed and seeks to explain reality by excluding God.

1:20 The first three questions in this verse ("Where is the wise person? ... the scribe? ... the debater of this age?") recall similar questions that Isaiah voiced when the Assyrians' plans to destroy Jerusalem fell through (Isa. 33:18; cf. Job 12:17; Isa. 19:12). Paul's references to "this age" (Gr. *aión*) and "the world" (*kosmos*) clarify that here he was speaking of purely natural wisdom in contrast to the wisdom that God has revealed. God's wisdom centers on the Cross. That is, all of reality must be understood in the light of what Jesus Christ accomplished when He died on the cross.

"In first-century Corinth, 'wisdom' was not understood to be practical skill in living under the fear of the Lord (as it frequently is in Proverbs), nor was it perceived to be some combination of intuition, insight, and people smarts (as it frequently is today in the West). Rather, wisdom was a public philosophy, a well-articulated world-view that made sense of life and ordered the choices, values, and priorities of those who adopted it. The 'wise man,' then, was someone

¹D. A. Carson, *The Cross & Christian Ministry*, p. 12. Paragraph divisions omitted.

who adopted and defended one of the many competing public world-views. Those who were 'wise' in this sense might have been Epicureans or Stoics or Sophists or Platonists, but they had this in common: they claimed to be able to 'make sense' out of life and death and the universe."¹

"... man with all his shrewdness is as stupid about understanding by himself the mysteries of God as an ass is incapable of understanding musical harmony."²

1:21 Human reasoning ("wisdom") does not enable people to get "to know God," nor does it save them from their sins. These benefits come only through "the foolishness" (in the eyes of the unsaved person) "of the message preached" (Gr. *kerygma*), namely, the gospel.³ The true estimation of things, therefore, is that human reasoning is folly when it comes to understanding God and our relationship to Him.

"The astronomer gazes at the miracle of the stars for years and then tells us with an air of finality that he has found no God. The natural scientist announces that the brutes are his ancestors and declares that all life has evolved from a tiny cell that was found in the primordeal [*sic* primordial] slime. Pantheism proclaims: 'God is all, and all is God.' So the catalog of human achievement lengthens and proclaims what 'the world' 'through its wisdom' (using it as a medium) had done and still does 'in the wisdom of God' (in this vast sphere of most wondrous wisdom)."⁴

¹Ibid., pp. 15-16.

²Calvin, p. 38.

³See Larry J. Waters, "Paradoxes in the Pauline Epistles," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:668 (October-December 2010):430-35.

⁴Lenski, pp. 60-61.

Paul was not saying that all the wisdom that unbelievers have produced is worthless. He said, "the world through its wisdom did not come to know God."

"Not every human knowledge about any given topic—physics or medicine, for instance—is under debate in our text (at least not primarily). Paul has something more specific in mind ... Paul aims specifically at the human wisdom *about God* as 'wisdom of the world,' at 'theo-logy' as 'wisdom of the world.'"¹

Neither did Paul mean that we can know nothing about God from the things that He has made (cf. Rom. 1). He meant that we cannot obtain an adequate knowledge of God through these things.

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

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

"... the 'Jews' and 'Greeks' here illustrate the basic idolatries of humanity. God must function as the all-powerful or the all-wise, but always in terms of our best interests—power in our behalf, wisdom like ours! For both the ultimate idolatry is that of insisting that God conform to our own prior

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

views as to how 'the God who makes sense' ought to do things."¹

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

"Our living through one who died, our being blessed by one who was made a curse, our being justified by one who was himself condemned, was all folly."²

"... the later Jews, recognizing the prediction of the prophets that the Messiah should suffer, were driven to the expedient of supposing two Christs, both a suffering and a glorified Redeemer, called respectively Ben Joseph and Ben David."³

Paul used the terms "Greeks" (v. 22) and "Gentiles" (v. 23) interchangeably. The terms "Greek" and "Jew" contrast the two groups of people in terms of culture and language, and the terms "Gentile" and "Jew" contrast them in terms of race and ethnicity.

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

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 74.

²Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 1804.

³Lightfoot, p. 163.

over a century before the cross appears among Christians as a symbol of their faith."¹

"Notice that men will be saved, not by foolish preaching, but by the preaching of 'foolishness,' that is, by the preaching of the Cross."²

1:24 "The called" contrast with the unsaved, among "both Jews and Greeks" (1:2; Rom. 8:28, 30). "Christ" is the instrument of God's "power" in conquering the forces of evil and delivering people from their control. He is also the instrument of God's "wisdom" in solving the problem that human reasoning could not unravel, namely, how people can know God and be reconciled to God. The wisdom literature of the Old Testament personified wisdom as God's agent in revelation, creation, and redemption. Jesus Christ personally is that wisdom, because He is God's instrument of power for the salvation of everyone who believes in Him (Rom. 1:16; cf. v. 30).

"This is Paul's most brilliant epigrammatic description of the world in which the Gospel is preached, and of the Gospel itself."³

1:25 "The foolishness of God" ("that act of God which men think foolish"⁴), the gospel of the Cross, is "wiser" than human wisdom, and the "weakness" of God ("that act of God which men think weak"⁵), in the eyes of unbelievers, is "stronger" than human strength.

"If men were asked how God should proceed to save the world they would certainly not say by sending his Son to the cross."⁶

"At the moment, books are pouring off the presses telling us how to plan for success, how

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 76.

²McGee, 5:12.

³Barrett, p. 54.

⁴Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 2:2:481.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Lenski, p. 71.

'vision' consists in clearly articulated 'ministry goals,' how the knowledge of detailed profiles of our communities constitutes the key to successful outreach. I am not for a moment suggesting that there is nothing to be learned from such studies. But after a while one may perhaps be excused for marveling how many churches were planted by Paul and Whitefield and Wesley and Stanway and Judson without enjoying these advantages. Of course all of us need to understand the people to whom we minister, and all of us can benefit from small doses of such literature. But massive doses sooner or later dilute the gospel. Ever so subtly, we start to think that success more critically depends on thoughtful sociological analysis than on the gospel; Barna becomes more important than the Bible. We depend on plans, programs, vision statements—but somewhere along the way we have succumbed to the temptation to displace the foolishness of the cross with the wisdom of strategic planning. Again, I insist, my position is not a thinly veiled plea for obscurantism, for seat-of-the-pants ministry that plans nothing. Rather, I fear that the cross, without ever being disowned, is constantly in danger of being dismissed from the central place it must enjoy, by relatively peripheral insights that take on far too much weight. Whenever the periphery is in danger of displacing the center, we are not far removed from idolatry."¹

In these verses (18-25) Paul sought to raise the Corinthians' regard for the gospel message by showing its superiority over anything that humans can devise through reasoning and philosophizing. His purpose in doing so was to encourage them to value the content of the message more highly than the wisdom evident in the presentations of those who delivered it.

"One can scarcely conceive a more important—and more difficult—passage for the church today than this one. It is

¹Carson, p. 26.

difficult, for the very reason it was in Corinth. We simply cannot abide the scandal of God's doing things his way, without our help. And to do it by means of such weakness and folly! But we have often succeeded in blunting the scandal by symbol, or creed, or propositions. God will not be so easily tamed, and, freed from its shackles, the preaching of the cross alone has the power to set people free."¹

It should be clear by now that "the preaching of the cross" is the same as the preaching of the gospel. It is the good news that God has revealed Himself in the Person of His Son and has provided salvation from sin for those who trust in His work *on the cross* as what satisfied God's demands against sinners (cf. 1 Pet. 2:24; 1 John 2:2).

The folly of the Corinthian believers 1:26-31

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

1:26 This verse reflects that there were few in the Corinthian assembly who came from the higher intellectual and influential levels of their society ("not many wise" or "mighty" or "noble"). The names of early converts to Christianity indicate that the majority of them were either slaves or freedmen (i.e., former slaves who had been freed, different from "free men" who had never been slaves). This is clear, for example, in Paul's salutations in Romans 16.² This characteristic has marked most local churches throughout history. The Corinthian Christians were saints by calling (v. 2), but they were of humble origins, generally speaking, in their callings in life.

¹Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 77-78.

²Lightfoot, p. 165.

1:27-28 The Old Testament is full of illustrations of God choosing less than promising material as His instruments, both human and otherwise. In the Book of Judges, for example, we see Him using an ox goad (Judg. 3:31), a nail (4:21), trumpets, pitchers, and lamps (Judg. 7:20), a millstone (Judg. 9:53), and the jawbone of a donkey (Judg. 15:15). His method did not change with the coming of Christ, nor has it changed since then.

"Things that are not" (v. 28) are things that are "nothing." This probably refers to the four things just mentioned: "the foolish," "the weak," "the insignificant," and "the despised."¹ They are non-entities in the eyes of the world: "as good as having no existence."² The "things that are" are those things and individuals that the world values highly. Paul did not mean that God cannot or will not save the wise, the strong, the noble, or the respected, but the glory of the gospel is that God's mercy extends to those whom the world tends to write off.

1:29 God has chosen this method so that the glory for His life-transforming salvation might be His and His alone. How wrong then to glorify His messengers! Boasting here has the idea of putting one's full confidence in some inappropriate object in order to secure oneself, namely, "the wise," "the things which are strong," and "the things that are" (vv. 27-28).

1:30 God is the source ("due to Him") of the believer's life "in Christ Jesus" (cf. v. 2). "Righteousness and sanctification and redemption" are metaphors of and aspects of salvation, which is the result of the "wisdom of God" (cf. 6:11). The "and" in this verse, that precedes "righteousness," can be translated "even." Righteousness focuses on our right standing in the sight of God (justification), sanctification on His making us more holy (sanctification), and redemption on our final liberation from sin (glorification).³

¹Lenski, p. 77.

²Alford, 2:2:482.

³Morgan, *The Corinthian Letters of Paul*, p. 41.

1:31 This loose quotation from Jeremiah 9:24 summarizes Paul's point: Instead of emphasizing the Lord's servants and what they have done, we should focus on what the God Himself has done in providing wisdom and power in Christ.

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

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

Election means that God has initiated the whole plan and process of salvation under discussion in this chapter, rather than the Corinthians or any of His servants (Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or even Christ).

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

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

"The matters of *literary context* and *the continuity of the argument* are all important in understanding I Corinthians 2. Otherwise, much of the chapter reads like pure Gnosticism, and

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

Paul is made the advocate of a private religion reserved for the spiritual elite (2:6-16)."¹

2:1 Paul reminded his readers that when he had ministered "the testimony of God" to them he did not present himself as a "superior" person in his speech ("speaking ability") or "wisdom." Some early texts have "mystery" (Gr. *mysterion*) instead of "testimony" (*martyrion*). The difference is not very significant. The gospel was both the message that God had previously not revealed, which the apostles made known (a mystery), and the message to which they bore witness (a testimony). The apostle's preaching in Corinth was "not in excellence of rhetorical display or of philosophical subtlety."²

"When a speaker would first come to a city (2:1), he would advertise a meeting where he would declaim [present a speech] (normally praising the city); if he proved successful and attracted enough students, he would stay on in the city. Paul points out that he did not come to them like such sophists [teachers who used clever but false arguments], pandering to popularity (see further 2 Cor 2:17)."³

"It is possible to sacrifice the prophet to the artist, to be so concerned with eloquence and language and phrasing and beauty of style that the impact of truth is lost."⁴

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

¹Charles B. Cousar, "Expository Articles: I Corinthians 2:1-13," *Interpretation* 44:2 (April 1990):169. One of the tenets of Gnosticism was that only their initiates could understand deep truth.

²Lightfoot, p. 170.

³Keener, p. 34.

⁴Morgan, *The Corinthian ...*, p. 44.

"In adding *crucified* Paul does not mean that he proclaimed nothing about Christ except the Cross, but [that] the very humiliation of the Cross did not keep him from proclaiming Christ."¹

"I think we make a mistake in supposing that just pinning our faith to a verse of Scripture is salvation. I wonder whether many have not been deceived in that way. I hear people speak of knowing they are saved, and when asked why, they reply, 'Because I believe John 3:16 or John 5:24,' and you look for some evidence of a new life in them and do not find it. ... You see, believing a text does not save anybody. Believing in CHRIST saves all who trust Him."²

"According to Acts xviii. 1 Paul moved on to Corinth from Athens, and it is often supposed that after an attempt to marry the Gospel to Greek philosophy in his Areopagus speech (Acts xvii. 22-31), which was attended with indifferent success (Acts xvii. 32 ff.), he determined to change his tactics and preach nothing but the cross.³ For this imaginative picture there is no evidence whatever."⁴

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

¹Calvin, p. 49.

²Harry A. Ironside, *Addresses on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 80-81.

³E.g., Barclay, p. 26.

⁴Barrett, p. 63.

advancing of such an epistemology gives the letter a theological purpose that unifies its otherwise unconnected structure."¹

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

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

2:3 The reason that Paul felt "weakness," "fear," and trembled greatly when he entered Corinth was probably because he sensed his personal inadequacy in the face of the spiritual needs that he faced there (cf. Acts 18:9-10). However some interpreters have believed that when Paul entered Corinth he was ill:

"If this was epilepsy, or malarial fever (Ramsay), it might well be the recurrent trouble which he calls a 'thorn for the flesh' (2 Cor. xii. 7)."³

"By weakness Paul generally means, here and several times afterwards, whatever can detract from the standing and dignity of someone in the estimation of other people."⁴

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

²Carson, p. 35.

³Robertson and Plummer, p. 31.

⁴Calvin, p. 50.

2:4 Paul did not design his content ("message," *logos*) and/or his delivery ("preaching," *kerygma*), in order to impress his hearers with his eloquence or "wisdom." Rather he emphasized the simple message that he announced.

"He had displayed among the Corinthians no tricks of oratory, no flights of eloquence, no pretensions of philosophy, in giving them his testimony of the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus."¹

Paul's preaching was a "demonstration," not a performance. Conviction came as a result of the Holy Spirit's "power," not the cleverness of the preacher. We should not interpret this verse as belittling persuasion (cf. 2 Cor. 5:11) but as emphasizing that conviction does not come as a result of persuasive argumentation. It comes as "the [Holy] Spirit" opens blind eyes as Christians herald the gospel. The warning implicit in Paul's testimony is against self-reliance on the part of the preacher.

"Those who minister the Word must prepare and use every gift God has given them—but they must not put their confidence in themselves."²

"Mere human *sophia* ["wisdom"] may dazzle and overwhelm and seem to be unanswerable, but ... it does not penetrate to those depths of the soul which are the seat of the decisions of a lifetime."³

"It is possible for arguments to be logically irrefutable, yet totally unconvincing."⁴

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

¹Charles R. Erdman, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 30.

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:573.

³Robertson and Plummer, p. 33.

⁴Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 52.

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

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

Paul's reference to the Holy Spirit's power (vv. 4-5) led him to elaborate on the Spirit's ministry in enlightening the minds of believers and unbelievers alike. The Corinthians needed to view ministry differently than the way they were viewing it. The key to this change would be the Holy Spirit's illumination of their thinking. People who are pursuing true wisdom (*sophia*) cannot perceive it except as the Holy Spirit enlightens them.

Paul constructed his argument in this section with three contrasts that overlap slightly: The first contrast is between those who receive God's wisdom and those who do not (vv. 6-10a), and the second one contrasts the Spirit of God with the spirit of the world (vv. 10b-13). The third contrast is between the "natural" person and the "spiritual" person (vv. 14-16).¹

"Paul is not here rebuilding what he has just torn down. He is retooling their understanding of the Spirit and spirituality, in order that they might perceive the truth of what he has been arguing to this point. While it is true that much of the *language* of this paragraph is not common to Paul, the explanation of this phenomenon is, as before, to be found in his using *their* language but filling it with his own content and thus refuting them. The theology, however, is his own, and it differs radically from theirs. ... Paul's concern throughout is to get the Corinthians to understand who they are—in terms of the cross—and to stop acting as non-Spirit people."²

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

¹Carson, pp. 46, 52, 56.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 100. Paragraph division omitted.

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

"All Christians are 'mature' in the sense that they have come to terms with the message of the cross, while all others, by definition, have not."¹

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

The deep things of God require a type of "wisdom" that is different from secular wisdom, namely, a wisdom that is "not of this age nor of the rulers of this age." In this present age, between the two advents of Christ, those who control public opinion dominate secular wisdom. These "rulers" are those individuals who set the standard for what unbelieving people who disregard God's revelation consider as true (cf. 1:20, 26). For example, Charles Darwin, Stephen Hawking, and Carl Sagan have all promoted belief in concepts that reject Scriptural revelation, and their influence has been widespread. However these people are on the way out ("are passing away"), because the popular perception of what is true changes, and because Christ will end their rule as intellectual leaders eventually by showing their wisdom to be folly (15:24-25; Col. 2:15).

"By *rulers of the world* he means those who are eminent in the world because of some talent."²

2:7 The "wisdom" that Paul proclaimed was a hidden wisdom that God had not previously revealed. It was not some revelation in addition to the gospel. It was the gospel message about Christ crucified. The plan of salvation that involves the message of the Cross is the wisdom of God. This message was unknown

¹Carson, p. 47.

²Calvin, p. 53.

before Christ came. It was "a mystery" in that sense. The message of the Cross is a further unfolding of God's plan and purpose beyond what He had revealed and what people had known previously.

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

The end purpose of this new revelation was the saints' ultimate glorification by their being conformed to the image of God's Son.

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

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

The phrase "the Lord of glory" implies that Jesus Christ Himself is the most glorious of all Persons—because of who He is and what He did on the cross. It also ties in with the saints'

¹Cousar, "Expository Articles . . .", p. 171.

glory (v. 7). It is through union with Him that we will experience glory.

"Men sometimes speak of 'the simple gospel.' The expression is proper enough if by it they wish to describe the Christian message when free from all human admixtures and corruptions. However, in a truer sense, the gospel is anything but simple. It involves the most profound philosophy which has ever been presented to the intellect of man. It comes directly from the mind and heart of God. It is so subtle, so mysterious, it so far surpasses the most exalted creations of human reason, that it cannot be understood or appreciated by men unless they are aided by the Spirit of God."¹

2:9 The source of the quotation in this verse is evidently Isaiah 64:4 and 65:17. These two verses summarize Paul's point well. There are many things that we can know only by revelation. The more we understand what God has revealed, the more clearly we see that He has designed His plans for "those who love Him" for our blessing. Here "those who love Him" probably refer to all true Christians, not just a select group of Christians, in view of the flow of Paul's argument.

"Paul's thought is that there is no method of apprehension open to man (eyes, ears, or understanding) which can give him any idea of the wonderful things that God has made ready for *them that love him* (cf. Rom. viii. 28)."²

"These words do not refer to the unknown glories of heaven, as commonly is supposed, but to the way of salvation which God has prepared by the life and death and resurrection and saving power of Christ."³

¹Erdman, p. 33.

²Morris, p. 57.

³Erdman, p. 34.

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

"The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded."¹

The mystery religions of Greece promised deeper insights and new knowledge to their devotees. However any Christian can apprehend the very best that God has revealed, because every believer possesses the spiritual organ of perception, namely, the Holy "Spirit." "Searches" (Gr. *ereuna*) means continually examines. The idea is that the Spirit completely understands the things of God, even the deepest things, so He can enable the Christian to understand them.

"Apparently they [Paul's Corinthian readers] have thought of spirituality mostly in terms of ecstasy and experience, which has led some of them to deny the physical body, on the one hand, and to a sense of 'having arrived' (cf. 4:8), on the other."²

"They considered Paul's preaching to be 'milk'; on the contrary, he implies, redemption through the cross comes from the profound depths of God's own wisdom, which his Spirit, given to those who love him, has searched out and revealed to us."³

2:11 It is necessary for someone to be a human being in order to understand "the thoughts" of another human being. Animals cannot do it. Paul was not talking about mind-reading here. He was talking about understanding what another person

¹John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:7:4.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 110.

³*Ibid.*, p. 111.

understands. Likewise it is necessary for someone to have the indwelling "Spirit of God" in order to understand "the thoughts of God." Unbelievers cannot do it, because they do not have the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:9).

2:12 "We" is emphatic in the Greek text. All believers have "received ... the Spirit who is from God" (the Holy Spirit; 12:13; Rom. 8:9). He helps us to understand ("know") "the things" that God has "freely given to us" (by revelation). This Spirit is vastly different from the "spirit [viewpoint or mindset] of the world." Unbelievers cannot understand "the things of God" because they have no one who can enable them to understand these supernatural things.

"... as a man's own spirit best understands his inner thoughts, so the Spirit of God alone can grasp divine truths (verse 11), and alone can interpret to those within whom he dwells 'the things that are freely given to us by God' (RV)."¹

"The tragic failures of men to understand clearly God's revealed will is but a commentary on the weakness and limitation of the human intellect even when enlightened by the Holy Spirit."²

"The Christian is to resist the spirit of the world. But when we say this we must understand that the world-spirit does not always take the same form. So the Christian must resist the spirit of the world *in the form it takes in his own generation*. If he does not do this he is not resisting the spirit of the world at all. This is especially so for our generation, as the forces at work against us are of such a total nature."³

2:13 Paul and the other apostles spoke the truths ("these things") that the Holy Spirit had helped them understand (cf. vv. 6-7). They did not choose their words based on what people

¹Bruce, p. 40. RV refers to *The Revised Version*.

²Robertson, 4:87.

³Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, p. 18.

generally regarded as the best ones with which to persuade ("words taught by human wisdom"). They did not rely on the rhetorical devices that the orators used either. The Holy Spirit guided them, not only in their communication of divine truth, but in their perception of it. "Spiritual thoughts" are concepts that the Holy Spirit enables us to understand. "Spiritual words" are those that He guides people to use in expressing these thoughts. "The Spirit" enables us to speak in language appropriate to the message instead of in words taught by human wisdom.

"In other words he properly combines that heavenly wisdom of the Spirit with plainness of speech, and in such a way that it shows openly the very power of the Spirit Himself."¹

In short, the Holy Spirit plays an indispensable role both in understanding and in communicating God's revelation. Lightfoot rendered the phrase translated "combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" as follows: "applying spiritual methods to explain spiritual truths."² Matthew Henry believed that Paul meant "comparing ... one part of divine revelation with another."³ But the context favors Lightfoot's interpretation.

2:14 "A natural person" is any person who does not possess the Holy Spirit, namely, an unbeliever.⁴ Every human being is a natural person until he or she trusts in Christ and receives the Spirit. Paul called this type of person a "natural" (Gr. *psychikos*) person because he or she is only what that one is by nature, namely, spiritually dead, without God. The natural person has no supernatural Person indwelling him or her, and that person's viewpoints and ideas are exclusively the natural, human kind. He or she "does not accept" and "cannot understand" all that God has revealed, because he or she does

¹Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 60.

²Lightfoot, p. 180.

³Henry, p. 18:05.

⁴See Barrett, p. 77.

not possess the indwelling "Spirit of God" who enables believers to understand spiritual matters.

The natural person can, of course, understand the gospel and experience salvation, but only when the Holy Spirit illuminates his or her understanding. Paul did not mean that an unbeliever is mentally or intellectually incapable of understanding the words of Scripture. An unbeliever rejects and does not accept everything that God wants him or her to have. One of these things is eternal life through faith in His Son. It is as though God speaks in a language that the unbeliever does not understand (it is "foolishness to him"). He or she fails to respond properly. He or she needs an interpreter. That is a ministry that only the Holy Spirit can perform.¹

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

"Human ears cannot hear high-frequency radio waves; deaf men are unable to judge music contests; blind men cannot enjoy beautiful scenery, and the unsaved are incompetent to judge spiritual things, a most important practical truth."³

"The other day I read a letter from a man who is a comedian. He says he is a comedian in a nightclub. He listens to me teach the Bible by radio, and he thinks I am an oddball. In fact, he thinks I am funnier than he is! Well, that is the way

¹See Robert A. Pyne, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Conversion," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:598 (April-June 1993):204-5.

²Carson, p. 64.

³Johnson, p. 1233.

he *should* feel. Why? Because he is a natural man and cannot discern spiritual things."¹

2:15 In contrast to the natural person stands the "spiritual" (Gr. *pneumatikos*) person. He or she is a Christian, a person who possesses the Holy Spirit (cf. 3:1). One of the things that the spiritual person is able to do is to discern or make judgments (Gr. *anakrino*) regarding "all [spiritual] things." In other words, the spiritual person has a discernment of spiritual truth that a natural person lacks. This affects his or her values and decisions. For this very reason he or she is a puzzle to the natural person. The unsaved person cannot understand holiness, but the holy person can understand the depths of evil. Even carnal fellow believers cannot fully understand the spiritually mature person ("he himself is discerned [or judged] by no man"). That is all right, in one sense, because the spiritual person's judge is ultimately God, not other people.²

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

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

¹McGee, 5:15.

²See Charles C. Ryrie, "What Is Spirituality?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126:503 (July-September 1969):204-13, or idem, *Balancing the Christian Life*, pp. 12-23.

did, because that person understands things from God's perspective, at least partially.

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

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

The basic theological point of tension between Paul and the Corinthians in this epistle was over what it means to be a *pneumatikos*, a Spirit-person. Because of their experience of *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues), they considered themselves to be like the angels and in need only of shedding their bodies. The sources of this distorted view were popular philosophy tainted with Hellenistic dualism. Hellenistic dualism viewed anything material as evil and anything non-material, or spiritual, as good. The result was a "spirituality" and "higher wisdom" that had little connection with ethical behavior.¹

"The concern from here on will be to force them to acknowledge the folly of their 'wisdom,' which is expressing itself in quarrels and thereby destroying the very church for which Christ died."²

"Paul's concern needs to be resurrected throughout the church. The gift of the Spirit does not lead to special status among believers; rather, it leads to special status vis-à-vis [regarding] the world. But it should do so always in terms of the centrality of the message of our crucified/risen Savior. The Spirit should identify God's people in such a way that their

¹Fee, "Toward a ...," pp. 37-38.

²Idem, *The First ...*, p. 120.

values and worldview are radically different from the wisdom of this age."¹

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

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

3:1 Here Paul introduced a third category of humanity, namely, the "fleshly" (Gr. *sarkinos*) or immature Christian. The Corinthians were not spiritually mature even though they possessed the Holy Spirit. A mature person is one who has reached an advanced stage of development, in this case, spiritual development. Paul said that he could not speak to them as he would speak to "spiritual people." They were not demonstrating the discernment that typically marks believers. He explained the reason in verse 3. Instead, he had to address them as fleshly people, even as "infants in Christ." Immaturity is not blameworthy if one is very young. But if a person has been a Christian for some time, and is still immature, his or her condition is blameworthy (cf. 2:6; Eph. 4:14). Such was the condition of the Corinthians.

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

¹Ibid.

"Christians are utterly to blame who do not endeavour to grow in grace and knowledge [cf. 2 Pet. 3:18]."¹

Paul's use of "brothers and sisters," and second person plural pronouns in verses 1 and 2, indicates that he was addressing the whole church, not just a faction within it (cf. 1:10). The actions of many in the congregation had apparently affected the whole body negatively.²

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

Unfortunately many English translations make no distinction between *sarkinos* (v. 1) and *sarkikos* (v. 3) and translate both words with the same English word: "fleshly" or "worldly" or "carnal" or something similar. But these are two different Greek words with two different meanings. The NET2 Bible is better. It renders *sarkinos* "people of the flesh" and *sarkikos* "[people] influenced by the flesh."³ The HCSB also distinguishes between these two Greek words by translating *sarkinos* "of the flesh" and *sarkikos* "fleshly."⁴

Students of this section of the epistle have understood Paul as describing several different kinds of people. Some believe that he saw only a difference between unbelievers (natural) and believers (spiritual).⁵ Others have seen three kinds of

¹Henry, p. 1806.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 123.

³The NET2 Bible refers to *The NET2 (New English Translation) Bible*, 2019 ed.

⁴HCSB refers to *The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible*.

⁵E.g., John F. MacArthur Jr., *Faith Works*, p. 126; Anthony A. Hoekema, "Response to McQuilkin," in *Five Views on Sanctification*, p. 189.

people in view: unbelievers, spiritual believers, and carnal believers.¹ Still others have seen four: unbelievers (*psychikos*), believers (*pneumatikos*), immature believers (*sarkinos*), and carnal believers (*sarkikos*).² I believe the last view is the best.

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

Paul let the Corinthians diagnose themselves: Are not "jealousy and strife" the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20)? Did these qualities not indicate that they were conducting themselves like unbelievers ("walking like ordinary [unsaved] people"), as people who do not possess the Holy Spirit?³ The Corinthians' inability to get along with one another showed that their flesh (sinful human nature) controlled them. So they were not only immature but carnal.

"We may define human nature as the fundamental tendencies and feelings of mankind."⁴

"Being human is not a bad thing in itself, any more than being *sarkinoi* ["infants"] is (v. 1). What is intolerable is to have received the Spirit, which makes one more than merely human, and to

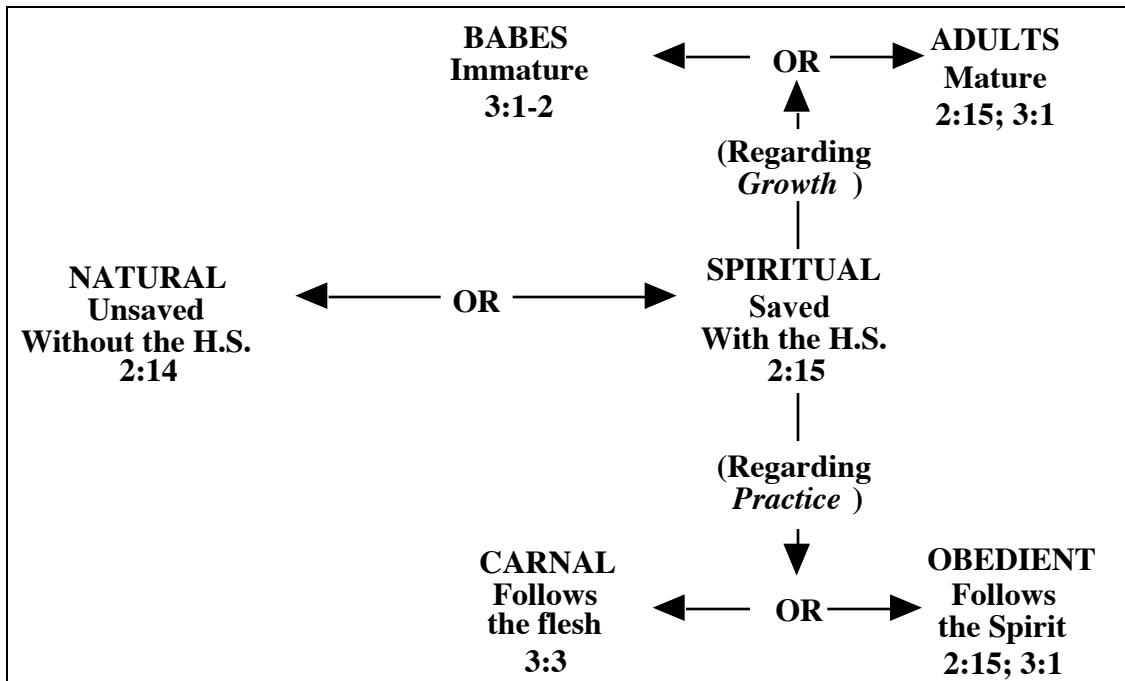
¹E.g., Lewis S. Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, pp. 3-14; Dwight L. Hunt, "The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, 2:719-20.

²E.g., Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Spiritual Man," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:498 (April-June 1968):139-46.

³For an excellent discussion of carnal believers, see Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 311-31.

⁴Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History*, p. 32.

continue to live as though one were nothing more."¹



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

"Besides evidencing a misapprehension of the gospel itself, the Corinthians' slogans bespeak a totally inadequate perception of the church and its ministry."²

"It is sinful for church members to compare pastors, or for believers to follow human leaders as disciples of men and not disciples of Jesus Christ. The 'personality cults' in the church today

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 127.
²Ibid., p. 129. See Jay E. Smith, "Slogans in 1 Corinthians," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:655 (January-March 2010):68-88.

are in direct disobedience to the Word of God. Only Jesus Christ should have the place of preeminence (Col. 1:18)."¹

This section of verses makes it very clear that it is possible for genuine Christians to behave like, and to appear to be, unbelievers (cf. Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). The Corinthians' conduct indicated both their immaturity and their carnality, not their lack of eternal life. Prolonged immaturity as a result of carnality is a condition that is all too common in modern Christianity. Often we mistake carnal Christians for "natural" people: unbelievers. Consequently, we should not pass judgment on a person's salvation on the basis of their conduct (cf. John 7:24; Rom. 2:1; 14:4, 10, 13; James 4:12).

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

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

"At issue is their radically misguided perception of the nature of the church and its leadership, in this case especially the role of the teachers."²

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

Fellow workers under God 3:5-9

3:5 "Apollos," "Paul," and, of course, Cephas (who was mentioned in 1:12) were only "servants" of Christ, each serving in his own way and sphere of "opportunity" under the Master's direction.

¹Wiersbe, 1:569.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 128.

³Johnson, p. 1231.

"What each of us is able to do in the church is an undeserved gift from the Lord's hands. Bend the knee and give him thanks!"¹

3:6-8 Obviously "God" deserved more credit for the church in Corinth than either its planter (Paul) or its nurturer (Apollos). He was the One "causing the growth" of the church. Next to Him the others were as nothing. Human laborers are all equal in the sense that they are all human laborers with human limitations. Nevertheless the Lord will "reward" "each" one at the judgment seat of Christ because of, and in proportion to, his or her work (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27).² Note that it is our "labor" that will be the basis of our reward (or wages), not the fruit of our labor.

"Preoccupation with the servant makes for favorites, for parties, for divisions. Being occupied with the Master draws us together."³

3:9 Paul and Apollos were "fellow workers" for God. Elsewhere Paul spoke of believers as fellow workers with God (2 Cor. 6:1), but that may not have been his point here.⁴

"... they were called co-workers not because they bring anything of themselves, but because God uses their work after he has rendered them capable of it and has furnished them with the necessary gifts."⁵

"Here an extraordinary thing is said about the ministry, that, while God is able to carry things out by Himself, He takes us, insignificant men that we

¹Lenski, p. 127.

²See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 219-26; ; Harlan D. Betz, *Setting the Stage for Eternity*, Rick Howard and Jamie Lash, *This Was Your Life!*

³Constable, devotional 23, p. 2.

⁴See Erdman, p. 40.

⁵Calvin, *Institutes of ...*, 2:5:17.

are, to Himself as helpers, and uses us as instruments."¹

The Corinthians were God's "field," in harmony with the preceding illustration (vv. 6-8). Paul now compared them to God's "building." He proceeded to develop this illustration in the following verses (vv. 10-17). Verse 9 is transitional.

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

"Everything is God's—the church, its ministry, Paul, Apollos—everything. Therefore, it is absolutely not permissible to say 'I belong to Paul,' since the only legitimate 'slogan' is 'we all belong to God.'"²

"A sermon on our text [3:1-9] would focus on the attitudes of preachers and congregations about one another as they relate to the gospel of the cross. Peruse this brief sermon sketch: 'I belong to Paul.' 'I belong to Apollos.' Familiar cries in a world of hi-tech religion. See huge Sunday crowds squint under the glare of spotlights as 'their' preachers dazzle millions of electronic viewers with wisdom and rhetorical charm. Overhear the Christian public admire TV evangelists and big-time clergy: 'Oh, I like to listen to _____. 'Well, he's O.K. but I like _____ better.' You fill in the blanks. Yes, everyone has their favorite preacher nowadays. In spite of all the notorious hucksters, 'preacher religion' is in. The result? An increasingly fragmented church. 'I belong to Paul and you don't.' It is enough to make Corinth look tame by comparison."³

Builders of God's temple 3:10-15

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

¹Idem, *The First ...*, p. 72.

²Smith, p. 134.

³C. Thomas Rhyne, "Expository Articles: I Corinthians 3:1-9," *Interpretation* 44:2 (April 1990):177. Paragraph division omitted.

kind of material you use determines the kind of reward you will get. While this may be a valid *application* of this passage, it is not the basic *interpretation*. Paul is discussing the building of the local church, the temple of God."¹

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

"By laying the foundation he did—Jesus Christ and him crucified—he was the truly 'wise' master-builder in contrast to the 'wise' in Corinth, who are building the church of totally incongenial materials and are therefore in danger of attempting to lay another foundation as well."²

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

3:12-13 Even though "the quality" of a foundation was the best, the condition of a building also depended on what others built on top of the foundation. In Paul's day contractors built buildings of durable and/or combustible materials, as they do today. In the building of the Corinthian church, durable materials ("gold, silver, precious stones") were those activities that sprang from reliance on Christ and Him crucified: the Foundation. These

¹Wiersbe, 1: 579. Paragraph division omitted.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 138.

³See Barrett, pp. 87-88.

works contributed to the permanent spiritual strengthening of the church.

The combustible materials ("wood, hay, or straw") were activities that arose out of merely human wisdom in all its forms. These made no lasting contribution, although they may have served some temporary need. "Wood," for example, has some value and can be used to build and to beautify. "Hay" has less value, but it can be used to feed animals. "Straw" has the least value, but it still can serve a useful purpose by providing heat when it is burned.

Examples of the former materials ("gold, silver, precious stones") pertain to God's wisdom, and include instruction in the Word of God, training in evangelism, and the refutation of error. Illustrations of the latter materials ("wood, hay, or straw") would be the teaching of popular ideas not rooted in Scripture, social work that excluded any Christian witness, and the use of time and money for simply selfish, temporal purposes. However, Paul's main concern in this metaphor was the people doing the building ("anyone," v. 12; "each one's," twice in v. 13) rather than the building itself.

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

activity, motives and character in Christian service."¹

God will expose the work of each of God's servants on "the day" (v. 13). This is a reference to the day when the believer will stand before God and give an account of the stewardship of his or her life at Christ's judgment seat (Gr. *bema*; cf. Luke 19:11-27; 1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8; Rev. 22:12; et al.).² Then "the fire" of God's judgment "will test the quality of each one's work"—but not his person. This is the fire of testing, not the fire of hell. The durability or impermanence of those works will then become evident.

3:14-15 If the servant of the Lord has made a lasting contribution to the building of the church, he or she "will receive a reward." If someone has not done so, because he or she has pursued merely human wisdom, that person will not be rewarded ("suffer loss"), although he or she will retain his or her salvation ("be saved"). Paul likened the unfaithful servant to a man who is pulled to safety through the flames of his burning house (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27; 1 John 2:28).

"As I see it, the Christian position is one of invincible assurance of salvation combined with awesome warnings concerning forfeiture of blessing (but not of salvation itself)."³

The context identifies those who "suffer loss" as being Christians who seek to build the church with materials that fail to withstand God's assessment. They do not refer to all carnal Christians (vv. 1-4), though carnal Christians may fail to make lasting contributions to the church.⁴ Malachi 3:2 and 3 may

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

²See Lewis S. Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, ch. XLVI: "Judgment of the Believer's Works," pp. 283-87; René Pache, *The Future Life*, pp. 220-43; Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*, pp. 31-37; and Arlen L. Chitwood, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, p. 10.

³Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation*, p. 37.

⁴Cf. Carson, pp. 79-80.

have been in Paul's mind when he wrote verse 15.¹ However Malachi predicted a future cleansing of Israel, whereas Paul spoke of a future testing of Christians' works.

"A great deal that is called Christian work may be only the energy of the flesh. It is not done for the glory of God at all. What motives actuate us? How do we feel if others are preferred before us? This is a good way to test ourselves as to whether what we are doing is for the Lord."²

The rewards in view seem to refer to opportunities to glorify God by serving Him in the future (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27). The Christian will have greater or lesser opportunities to serve God—during the Millennium and forever after—in proportion to his or her faithfulness on earth now.³

The New Testament writers spoke of these rewards symbolically as "crowns" elsewhere (cf. 9:25; Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10; 3:11). It is perfectly proper to serve Christ in order to gain a crown to one day lay at the feet of our Savior (cf. Matt. 6:20). The crown is a symbol of a life of faithful service that we performed out of gratitude for His grace to us (cf. Rev. 4:4, 10).

"He [Paul] uses the motivation of rewards [in his epistles] more as an incentive to faithful and effective ministry than to ethical living; but the two cannot be completely separated."⁴

If the idea of serving God for a reward makes you uncomfortable, may I suggest that you read again the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5—7)? There Jesus repeatedly appealed to His hearers to follow His teaching with the prospect of receiving an eternal reward for doing so. Scripture appeals to

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

²Ironside, p. 129.

³See Wall, pp. 112-21, for an explanation of the negative judgment at the *bema*.

⁴George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 521.

us on many levels to serve the Lord. Certainly love for Him should be our primary motivation. However the biblical writers also urged believers to serve the Lord out of love for other people, the fear of the Lord, the prospect of having to give an account of our lives to Him at the judgment seat, and for other reasons.¹

"Throughout the Bible, God motivates us in three primary ways: love, fear, and rewards. You may be surprised to learn which motivator He uses most often. ... When we track those passages where God motivates us, we discover that reward is first, fear second, and love third."²

"After we have been saved, there is superabounding grace for, of course, the reward too is of grace, for we could not have earned anything but by divine power. He enables us and then rewards us."³

"The doctrine of *rewards* to be bestowed at the judgment seat of Christ for faithfulness in life and service is a counterpart of the doctrine of divine grace, and no preacher or layman will be intelligent in his endeavor nor be possessed with one of the greatest divine incentives who is not actuated by these provisions and revelations."⁴

The testing in view in these verses provides no support for the unbiblical doctrine of purgatory. It is the believer's "work" that God subjects to the fires of testing, not the believer personally. God applies the metaphorical fire in order to

¹For a helpful introduction to the study of the Christian's rewards, see Wall, or Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*.

²Mark Bailey, *To Follow Him*, p. 55.

³Ironside, p. 132.

⁴Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:xxvi.

determine "the quality of each one's work" (v. 13), not to purify the believer.¹

"[The] whole subject of rewards for the believer is one, I am afraid, rarely thought of by the ordinary Christian, or even the average student of the Scriptures. But it is both a joyous and solemn theme and should serve as a potent incentive for holiness of life."²

"The Bible describes the judgment seat of Christ for one main purpose: to affect the way we think and live—to motivate us to anticipate with joy His return and to live our lives to please Him, not worrying about the way others treat us or what they may think about us."³

"Though not the only motivating factor, I am convinced that the doctrine of the judgment seat (*bema*) is meant to be one of the major scriptural motivations for godly living."⁴

"It is unfortunately possible for people to attempt to build the church out of every imaginable human system predicated on merely worldly wisdom, be it philosophy, 'pop' psychology, managerial techniques, relational 'good feelings,' or what have you. But at the final judgment, all such building (and perhaps countless other forms, where systems have become more important than the gospel itself) will be shown for what it is: something merely human, with no character of Christ or his gospel in it."⁵

¹For further refutation of the doctrine of purgatory, see Calvin, *Institutes of ...*, 3:5:6-9; and Lightfoot, p. 193.

²Wilbur Smith, "Inheritance and Reward in Heaven," *Eternity*, March 1977, p. 79.

³Wall, p. 19.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵Fee, *The First ...*, p. 145.

A warning against destroying the church 3:16-17

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

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

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

3:17 "If anyone destroys" the church, instead of building it up, "God will destroy that person" (Acts 9:1-4). He usually does this by sending temporal discipline in one form or another (cf. 5:5). The Greek word translated "destroys" (*phtheiro*) also means "defiles." It was a very serious thing to destroy or defile a holy temple, and that is what the local church is (cf. Matt. 16:18).¹ In the ancient world destroying a temple was a capital offense.

¹See James Sweeney, "Jesus, Paul, and the Temple: An Exploration of Some Patterns of Continuity," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46:4 (December 2003):605-31.

The church is "holy" in that God has set it apart to glorify Himself, even though it is not always as holy in its conduct as it is in its calling. Verses 16 and 17 anticipate the discussion of church discipline in 5:1 through 13.¹

"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)."²

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

"... this is one of the few texts in the NT where we are exposed both to an understanding of the nature of the local church (God's temple indwelt by his Spirit) and where the warning of v. 17 makes it clear how important the local church is to God himself."³

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

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

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

3:19-20 Again Paul used Old Testament quotations to give added authority to his statements (cf. 1:19, 31; 2:9, 16). Here he referred to Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11. (This, by the way, is

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

²Johnson, pp. 1234-35. Cf. Lowery, p. 511.

³Fee, *The First ...*, p. 149.

the only New Testament quotation from Job.) The best "wisdom" that the natural man can produce is "foolishness" compared with the wisdom that God has revealed in His Word. Unbelieving humanity cannot avoid God's judgment through its own rationalizing. The reasonings of the wise of this world are useless regarding the most important issues of life. In 1:18 through 25 Paul had said that the wisdom of God, namely, Christ crucified, is foolishness to the world. Here he made the same point in reverse: the wisdom of the world is foolishness in God's sight. Thus these statements form bookends for this section of text (an *inclusio*).¹

3:21a "So then" introduces the apostle's conclusion. It is wrong to line up in cliques behind one or another of God's servants and to boast "in people." By doing so the Corinthians were only limiting God's blessing on them. They were rejecting God's good gifts by not appreciating all the people that God had sent to help them.

"Perhaps we cannot help but have our personal preferences when it comes to the way different men minister the Word. But we must not permit our personal preferences to become divisive prejudices. In fact, the preacher I may enjoy the least may be the one I need the most!"²

3:21b-22 "All" of God's servants ("Paul or Apollos or Cephas") were His gifts to the Corinthians. "The world" (Gr. *kosmos*, universe) belongs to the Christian in the sense that Christians will inherit it and reign over it with Christ one day. "Life" and all that it holds ("things present or things to come") contains much blessing for Christians ("all things belong to you"). Even "death" is a good gift for believers, because it will usher us into the presence of our Savior. This list is similar to the one in Romans 8:38 and 39 and, as there, is a way of saying "everything." The figure of speech here is a merism. In a

¹An *inclusio* is a literary device based on a concentric principle, also known as bracketing, bookending, or an envelope structure, which consists of creating a frame by placing similar material at the beginning and end of a section.

²Wiersbe, 1:581.

merism, objects that are poles apart are intended to encompass everything between them.

"The five things ... represent the fundamental tyrannies of human life, the things that enslave us, the things that hold us in bondage."¹

3:23 All the Corinthians belonged "to Christ," not just those of the Christ party (1:12). They all belonged to Him, not to one of His servants. Even "Christ belongs to God," in the sense of being under the authority and protection of the Father (cf. 8:6; 11:3; 15:28; John 14:28). This is functional rather than ontological (essential being) subordination. All things belong to the Christian because the Christian belongs to Christ, and all things are His (given over to Him; cf. 15:27; Col. 1:16). Thus in Him Christians possess all things, but it is only in Him that we do.

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

"The sovereignty of the Father is the corner-stone of authority in the universe (xi. 3, xv. 28)."²

"On this high note Paul's response to the Corinthian pride in man and wisdom has come to a fitting conclusion. But the problem is larger still; so he turns next to deal with their attitudes toward him in particular."³

7. The Corinthians' relationship with Paul ch. 4

The apostle now returned to the subject of himself and the other teachers of the Corinthians as servants of Christ. He did so because he wanted to

¹Carson, p. 86.

²Findlay, 2:796.

³Fee, *The First ...*, p. 155.

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

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

"What Paul is trying to do above all else is to get the Corinthians to enter his orbit, to see things from his eschatological [end times] perspective. Therefore, it is not simply a matter of his being right and their being wrong on certain specific issues. It has to do with one's whole existence, one's whole way of looking at life, since 'you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.'"²

Judging God's servants 4:1-5

"The first paragraph (vv. 1-5) leads the way by making an application of the servant model and showing how that relates to their treatment of him [Paul]. He changes images from farm to household and insists that he is *God's* servant, not theirs; and they are not allowed to judge another's servant. While on the theme of judgment, he gently broadens the perspective to remind them again of the future judgment that all must experience."³

¹Carson, p. 93.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 157.

³*Ibid.*, p. 156.

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

A "steward" was a special kind of servant whom his master entrusted with the administration of his business or property. His job was to devote his time, talents, and energy to looking after his master's interests, not his own. This figure stresses both the apostles' humble position as belonging to "Christ" and their important trusted, yet accountable, position under "God." The "mysteries of God" refer to the truths of the Christian faith made known through divine revelation. The "stewards of the mysteries" then refers to teachers of these revealed truths.¹

"('Mysteries' appear often in this letter, 2:7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; and perhaps 2:1; this is consistent with their [the Corinthians'] interest in Hellenistic wisdom [cf. Wis 2:22; 6:22; as opposed to pagan mysteries in Wis 14:15, 23].)"²

4:2 The most important quality in a steward is that he manage his master's affairs in harmony with the desires of his lord (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 16:1-13; 19:11-27; 1 Pet. 4:10). He must be faithful to his master's trust ("be found trustworthy"). For Paul this meant remaining faithful to the gospel and his calling from the Lord (cf. 15:1-11).

"... as long as I am faithful in opening up the Word of God I am not concerned whether my sermons particularly appeal to you or not; as long as I know

¹Lightfoot, p. 197.

²Keener, p. 43. "Wis" refers to the apocryphal book *The Wisdom of Solomon*.

that I am pleasing Him that sent me I am not greatly concerned if I displease you."¹

4:3 It mattered little to Paul ("is an insignificant matter") how well the Corinthians or anyone else thought he was carrying out his stewardship from God, or how popular or unpopular he was. His personal evaluations of his own performance were irrelevant too. What did matter to him was God's estimation of his service. Paul did not give much time and attention to introspection ("I do not even examine myself"), though he sought to live with a good conscience before God (Acts 23:1; cf. 1 Tim. 1:5). Rather, he concentrated on doing the job that God had put before him to the best of his ability, since he was accountable to Him (cf. 3:13).

4:4 As far as Paul knew he was serving God faithfully ("I am not aware of anything against myself"). However, he realized that his conscience might not be as sensitive as it should be ("I am not vindicated by this").² Only his Master ("the Lord") had the insight, as well as the authority, to judge (examine) him.

"No servant of God is capable of appraising his own service. That which he might think to be excellent may be so much wasted time. That which he thinks wasted time may have just the message for the moment."³

4:5 Since only one Person has enough insight, and is authoritative enough, to pass final judgment, it is unwise for us to try to do so. Let there be no "pre-judgment seat judgment!"⁴ Of course, we must make judgments from time to time, but we should always do so with the knowledge that our understanding of things is imperfect. The place that God will judge our lives is the judgment seat of Christ. If Paul's references to his judgment by God in his epistles are any measure of how he regarded that event, he took it very seriously and thought

¹Ironside, p. 144.

²See Roy B. Zuck, "The Doctrine of Conscience," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126:504 (October-December 1969):329-40.

³Ironside, p. 145.

⁴Johnson, p. 1235.

about it often (cf. 2 Cor. 1:14; 5:10; Phil. 2:16; 1 Thess. 2:19-20; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8; et al.).

"Paul lives in expectation of the imminent coming again of Christ."¹

The "things hidden in the darkness" probably include the thoughts and motives of God's servants. These "things," in the context, must not refer to hidden sins, which God forgives and forgets (Ps. 103:12). The "darkness" does not necessarily imply evil. It seems rather to imply the realm into which it is presently impossible for us to see, namely, the motives—even the unconscious motives—of our hearts.

"Do we sufficiently realize that the great master force in any life is desire, not intellect, not volition, not emotion, but desire[?]. What do we want? What are we after?"²

Evidently God will find something in every Christian's life for which to "praise" him or her on that day of judgment. Paul did not just say each servant would receive what he or she deserves but that each would receive some praise.

"If you are in Christ, the Holy Spirit of God is dwelling in you, and in that coming day it will be made manifest that every Christian has accomplished something for God for which he can be rewarded."³

Of course, it stands to reason that the more faithful among us will receive more praise than the less faithful.

"He [Paul] says nothing here about those who will receive not praise but blame [cf. 1 John 2:28]; he is still thinking in terms of the Corinthian situation,

¹ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "erchomai," by Johannes Schneider, 2(1964):674.

² Morgan, *The Corinthian ...*, p. 72.

³ Ironside, p. 147.

in which some have praise for Paul, some for Apollos, some for Cephas."¹

"... when we leave the matter of our praise in God's hands, we discount the acclamation of men and the hollow words they use."²

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

Taking pride in the wrong things 4:6-13

"With rhetoric full of sarcasm and irony he [Paul] goes for the jugular. His own apostleship, which he portrays in bold relief, contrasting his own 'shame' with their perceived 'high station,' is alone consonant with a theology of the cross."³

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

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

¹Barrett, p. 104.

²Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 89.

³Fee, *The First ...*, p. 156.

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

4:8 His readers were behaving as though they had already received their commendation at the judgment seat of Christ.

"... spiritual satiety [the feeling of being well or overfed] is a sign of arrested growth: contrast Phil. iii. 10-14, and *cf.* Rev. iii. 17 ..."¹

The Corinthians' behavior was also an indication of their over-realized eschatology. They should have been conducting themselves as under-rowing servants and paying attention to managing God's work faithfully (v. 1). Sarcastically Paul said that he wished the time for rewards had already arrived, so that he could enjoy reigning with his readers. Unfortunately suffering must precede glory.

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

"The irony is devastating: How they perceive themselves, masterfully overstated in vv. 8 and 10, is undoubtedly the way they think *he* ought to be. But the way he actually is, set forth in the rhetoric of vv. 11-13, is the way *they* all ought to be."³

Irony and sarcasm were popular modes of discourse in Greco-Roman antiquity (*cf.* 2 Cor. 11:7).⁴

¹Findlay, 2:801.

²Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 433.

³Fee, *The First ...*, p. 165.

⁴Keener, p. 45.

4:9 Paul may have had the Roman arena contests in mind here, specifically the battles between "condemned" criminals and wild beasts in the coliseums, which were no small "spectacle."¹

"... the victor did not escape with his life, but was only reserved for another combat, so that such wretched criminals might very properly be called *persons devoted or appointed to death*."²

Another view is that Paul was thinking of the Roman triumph (victory procession), which was an illustration that he developed more fully elsewhere (2 Cor. 2:14-16). At the end of that procession came the captives of war who would die in the arena.³

"The Corinthians in their blatant pride were like the conquering general displaying the trophies of his prowess; the apostles were like the little group of captives, men doomed to die. To the Corinthians the Christian life meant flaunting their pride and their privileges and reckoning up their achievement; to Paul it meant a humble service, ready to die for Christ."⁴

In either case, Paul seems to have been thinking of the apostles as the ultimately humiliated group. They were the leaders, and their sufferings for the cause of Christ were common knowledge. How inappropriate it was then for the Corinthians to be living like "kings" rather than sharing in suffering as Christ's followers with their teachers.

The Greek word *theatron*, from which we get the word "theater," which is translated "spectacle" in this verse, may indicate that the Corinthians were viewing the apostles as entertainers. Perhaps the modern term "stage," that is used to describe what was formerly referred to as the "pulpit" or "platform" (in or on which the preacher stands to deliver his

¹Bruce, p. 50.

²Henry, p. 1808.

³Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 174-75; Findlay, p. 801.

⁴Barclay, p. 45.

sermon), may indicate that today some people are viewing our preachers more as entertainers than as heralds of God's Word (cf. 2 Chron. 6:13; Neh. 9:4).

Paul may have meant good "angels" here, since elsewhere he sometimes used "principalities and powers" to refer to what we call bad angels (cf. Eph. 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:15). On the other hand, this may be a general reference to all angels.

4:10 The contrasts in this verse, between the apostles and the Corinthians, clarify the differences in their conditions. People who viewed things from the worldly point of view (i.e., the unsaved and the Corinthian church) thought the apostles were "fools," but they were willing to suffer this dishonor for Christ's sake. The Corinthians and others, on the other hand, regarded themselves as "prudent" (Gr. *phronimos*, wise, intelligent) in their behavior. The naturally wise person thought the apostles looked "weak," but these "wise" people regarded themselves as "strong." The naturally wise looked upon themselves as "distinguished," while the apostles seemed to them to be dishonorable ("without honor").

"... this church is on dangerously good terms with the world (viii. 10, x. 14-33, cf. 2 Cor. vi. 14-vii. 1) ..."¹

4:11 Paul proceeded to detail the dishonor that befalls those who herald the message of the cross faithfully. He himself had experienced hunger, thirst, second-rate clothing, rough treatment, and homelessness for doing so.

4:12 Paul also had to work with his hands to support himself. The Greeks despised people who did manual labor, as Paul had done in Corinth (cf. 9:4-18; Acts 18:3, 5; 2 Cor. 11:9; 12:13-17). They regarded it as the work of slaves.² Paul had been the object of verbal abuse. But he had responded by blessing his abusers (cf. 1 Pet. 3:9). To the world it is foolish for anyone to bless those who curse them, but that is exactly what Paul

¹Findlay, 2:802.

²Morris, p. 81.

did, following the teaching and example of Jesus (cf. Luke 6:28; 23:34). His response to personal persecution was to persevere through it rather than giving up (cf. 2 Tim. 3:10).

4:13 Slander (Gr. *dusphenia*) is character assassination. Paul had experienced this as well, but he had responded by treating his adversaries "as friends." (cf. Matt. 5:43-44)

"Both *perikatharmata* ["scum," off-scouring, refuse] and *peripsema* ["dregs," what is wiped off, dirt rubbed off] were used especially of those condemned criminals of the lowest classes who were sacrificed as expiatory offerings, as scapegoats in effect, because of their degraded life. It was the custom at Athens to reserve certain worthless persons who in case of plague, famine or other visitations from heaven, might be thrown into the sea, in the belief that they would cleanse away, or wipe off, the guilt of the nation."¹

All of these descriptions of the apostle's emphasize the depths to which he and his fellow servants of Christ were willing to stoop in order to proclaim the gospel (cf. Phil. 2). They went to these extremes despite the fact that unbelievers, as well as believers who viewed things naturally, called them "fools."

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

A final appeal and exhortation 4:14-21

Paul concluded this first major section of the epistle (1:10—4:21) by reasserting his apostolic authority, which had led to his correcting the Corinthians' shameful conduct and carnal philosophy. He changed the metaphor again, and now appealed to them as a father to his children. He

¹Lightfoot, p. 201.

ended by warning them that if they did not respond to his gentle approach he would have to deal with them more severely.

4:14-15 It was not Paul's purpose in writing the immediately preceding verses to humiliate ("shame") the Corinthians.¹ Other congregations would read this epistle and the church in Corinth would not look very good to them. Instead Paul wanted "to admonish" them strongly as their father in the faith. They had many "tutors" or guardians (Gr. *paidagogoi*) who sought to bring them along in their growth in grace, but he was their only spiritual "father."

"The *paidagogos* was the personal attendant who accompanied the boy, took him to school and home again, heard him recite his 'lines', taught him good manners and generally looked after him; he was entitled to respect and normally received it, but there was no comparison between his relation to the boy and that of the boy's father."²

"Since Christ forbids us to call anybody father on the earth because we have one Father in heaven (Matt. 23.9), how does Paul dare to apply the name of father to himself? I answer: properly speaking God alone is the Father, not only of our soul, but also of our body. However, in view of the fact that, in so far as the body is concerned, He grants the name of 'father' to those to whom He gives children, but retains for Himself alone the right and title of 'father' in regard to souls, I confess that for this reason He has the special title of 'the Father of spirits', and is to be distinguished from earthly fathers, as the apostle says in Heb. 12.9. However, because He alone begets souls by His own power, then regenerates them and makes them alive, but yet makes use of

¹See Te-Li Lau, "I Write these Things Not to Shame You," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60:1 (March 2017):105-24, for defense of the view that Paul did want to shame the Corinthians.

²Bruce, p. 51.

the ministry of His servants for this purpose, there is no harm in calling them fathers with regard to this ministry, for in doing so God's honour is left intact."¹

4:16 The Corinthians were to learn from Paul like a son learns by observing the example of his father.

"Imitation is the law of the child's life; cf. Eph. v. 1; and for the highest illustration, John v. 17-20."²

Contemporary Greek philosophers of Paul's day also provided moral examples for their followers to imitate, sometimes using themselves as the model.³ Paul was doing that here (cf. 11:1).

"... Paul's actual ethical instruction as it appears in his Epistles rarely uses the language of Jesus as it is recorded in the Gospels; but on every page it reflects his example and his teaching ..."⁴

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

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

¹Calvin, *The First ...*, pp. 98-99.

²Findlay, 2:804.

³Keener, p. 45.

⁴Fee, *The First ...*, p. 187.

only Paul's "beloved and faithful child in the Lord," but he was also one of his closest and most trusted fellow workers.

Paul's way of life ("my ways") here refers to how he lived under the authority of "Christ," specifically the ethical principles that he taught and practiced.

"... the Christian leader today not only must teach the gospel, but also must teach how the gospel works out in daily life and conduct. And that union must be modeled as well as explained. The need is evident even at a confessional seminary like the one at which I teach. Increasingly, we have students who come from thoroughly pagan or secular backgrounds, who have been converted in their late teens or twenties, and who come to us in their thirties. Not uncommonly, they spring from dysfunctional families, and they carry a fair bit of baggage. More dramatically yet, a surprising number of them cannot easily make connections between the truths of the gospel and how to live. A couple of years ago a student who was about to graduate was called in by one of our faculty members who had learned the student was planning to return to computer science and abandon plans to enter vocational ministry. The student was pleasant, with a solid B+ to his credit. But as the faculty member probed, it became obvious that this student had not put it all together. He could define propitiation but did not know what it was like to feel forgiven. He could defend the priority of grace in salvation but still felt as if he could never be good enough to be a minister. He could define holiness but found himself practicing firm self-discipline rather than pursuing holiness. His life and his theological grasp had not come together. Mercifully, this particular faculty member was spiritually insightful. He took the student back to the cross and worked outward from that point. The student began to weep and

weep as he glimpsed the love of God for him.
Today he is in the ministry."¹

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

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

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

Paul knew that all the pretension to superior wisdom in the church was a result of viewing things from a worldly perspective. There was no reality ("power") behind it.

4:20 The apostle returned to his earlier contrast between "words" and true "power" (2:1-5). Real, effective power that brings about change is the power of the Holy Spirit working through humble messengers. "The kingdom of God" may refer to the future millennial kingdom.² But I think that it probably refers to Christ's present rule in the hearts of His people.³

4:21 The Corinthians' response to this epistle would determine whether the apostle would return to them as a disciplining ("with a rod") or as a delighted father ("with love"). Paul's spirit of "gentleness" also marked the Lord Jesus (Matt.

¹Carson, p. 111. Paragraph divisions omitted.

²McClain, p. 435.

³E.g., *The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1919; Hunt, 2:725.

11:29), though it stood in stark contrast to the spirit of arrogance in Corinth.

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

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

"Christian leadership means living life in the light of the cross (4:8-13)."²

"Christian leadership means encouraging—and if necessary, enforcing—the way of the cross among the people of God (4:14-21)."³

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

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

"Even though at times Paul seems to be weaving in and out of several topics, the concern throughout is singular: to stop a current fascination with 'wisdom' on the part of the

¹Carson, p. 94.

²Ibid., p. 103.

³Ibid., p. 108.

⁴Ronald Y. K. Fung, "The Nature of the Ministry according to Paul," *Evangelical Quarterly* 54 (1982):132.

Corinthians that has allowed them not only to 'boast,' but to stand over against Paul and his gospel. With a variety of turns to the argument he sets forth his gospel over against their 'wisdom' and tries to reshape their understanding of ministry and church. ... The changes of tone in this passage reveal some of the real tensions that continue to exist in Christian ministry. How to be prophetic without being harsh or implying that one is above the sins of others. How to get people to change their behavior to conform to the gospel when they think too highly of themselves. There is no easy answer, as this passage reveals. But one called to minister in the church must ever strive to do it; calling people to repentance is part of the task."¹

Some scholars think that Paul originally intended to end this epistle here.² This opinion rests on the fact that the first four chapters could stand alone. This view points out the unity of this section of the letter. However it is impossible to prove or to disprove this hypothesis.

"It becomes evident in chaps. 5 through 14 as specific problems in the Corinthian community are considered and as pastoral directions are given that at the same time something else is going on. With statements here and there, the epistemology [view of knowledge] presented in 1:18—2:16 is kept before the readers. They are nudged into viewing themselves and their congregational life in new and different ways, consistent with the message of the crucified Messiah."³

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

The second need in the Corinthian church that had been reported to Paul that he addressed concerned a lack of discipline (cf. Gal. 5:22-23). This section of the epistle has strong connections with the first major section. The lack of discipline in the church (chs. 5—6) reflected a crisis of authority in the church (1:10—4:21).

¹Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 193-94. Paragraph division omitted.

²Bruce, pp. 52-53.

³Cousar, "The Theological ...," p. 101.

"Unity must be established before drastic action could be urged; otherwise the action would have been that of a party and the division in the church might have been made worse."¹

As we have seen, the Corinthians were arrogant and valued a worldly concept of power. This carnal attitude had produced the three problems in the church that Paul proceeded to deal with next: incest, litigation, and prostitution.

"It is frequently said that the only Bible the world will read is the daily life of the Christian, and that what the world needs is a revised version! The next two chapters are designed by Paul to produce a Corinthian revised version, so that orthodoxy [correct doctrine] might be followed by orthopraxy [correct practice] ..."²

1. Incest in the church ch. 5

The church had demonstrated a very permissive attitude toward a man in the congregation who was committing incest. Paul explained his own reaction to this situation and demanded that his readers take a different view of immorality than the one they held (vv. 1-8). Then he spoke to the larger issue of the Christian's relationship to the immoral, both within and outside the church (vv. 9-13).

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

"The unusual feature of 5:1-13 is the manner in which the community is addressed first and more extensively than the man involved in an incestuous relationship. The congregation is distinguished by its arrogance and boasting and its failure to

¹Erdman, p. 55.

²Johnson, p. 1236.

³Fee, *The First ...*, p. 197.

mourn. At the heart of Paul's rebuke is an urgent plea for a new, communal self-understanding (5:6-8). Mixing the cultic images of unleavened bread and the Passover lamb, the text pushes the Corinthians to think of themselves differently—as an unleavened community that demonstrates honesty and dependability, as a community for whom the paschal lamb has been sacrificed. The crucified Messiah lies at the heart of the new perspective, critically needed by the readers."¹

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

5:1 "Immorality" is a general translation of the Greek word *porneia*, which means fornication, specifically sexual relations (union) with a forbidden partner.

"*Porneia* ["immorality"] signifies any immoral sexual relation, whether including (as in Matt. v. 32) or distinguished from (Matt. xv. 19) *moicheia* ["adultery"]."²

"The word *porneia* ('sexual immorality') in the Greek world simply meant 'prostitution,' in the sense of going to the prostitutes and paying for sexual pleasure. The Greeks were ambivalent on that matter, depending on whether one went openly to the brothels or was more discreet and went with a paramour [lover]. But the word had been picked up in Hellenistic Judaism, always pejoratively [expressing disapproval or contempt], to cover all extramarital sexual sins and aberrations [departures from what is normal], including homosexuality. It could also refer to any of these sins specifically, as it does here. In the NT the word is thus used to refer to that particular blight on Greco-Roman culture, which was almost universally countenanced [accepted as acceptable], except among the Stoics. That is why *porneia* appears so often as the first item in

¹Cousar, "The Theological ...," p. 98.

²Findlay, 2:807.

the NT vice lists, not because Christians were sexually 'hung up,' nor because they considered this the primary sin, the 'scarlet letter,' as it were. It is the result of its prevalence in the culture, and the difficulty the early church experienced with its Gentile converts breaking with their former ways, which they did not consider immoral."¹

The precise offense in this case was sexual union with the woman who had married the immoral man's father (cf. Matt. 5:27-28, 32; 15:19; 19:9; Mark 7:21). Had she been his actual physical mother other terms would have been more appropriate to use than "his father's wife." Evidently the woman was his step-mother. She may have been close to his own age.

"The woman was clearly not the mother of the offender, and probably (although the use of *porneia* rather than *moicheia* [adultery] does not prove this) she was not, at the time, the wife of the offender's father. She may have been divorced, for divorce was very common, or her husband may have been dead."²

The verb translated "has" (present tense in Greek), when used in sexual or marital contexts as here, is a euphemism for a continuing relationship, in contrast to a "one night stand" (cf. 7:2). This man and this woman were, as we say, "living together." Since the man is the sole object of Paul's censure, it seems that the woman was not in the church. She was perhaps not a Christian but was one of "those who are outside" whom God would judge (v. 13).³

The leaders of Israel and the early churches regarded fornication of all kinds as sin to be avoided (Lev. 18:8; Deut. 22:30; 27:20; Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). If the guilty man's father was still alive and married to the woman, adultery would

¹Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 199-200.

²Robertson and Plummer, p. 96. Cf. Barclay, p. 49.

³Lightfoot, pp. 202-203; Findlay, 2:807.

also have been involved. Most interpreters have concluded that this was a case of incest rather than incest plus adultery. If Paul had been living under the Mosaic Law he should have prescribed the death penalty for both the guilty man and the woman (Lev. 18:8, 29). But he lived under the New Covenant and advocated a different penalty (v. 5). As depraved as Greek culture was, even the pagans looked down on incest, and Roman law prohibited it.¹

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

"... Paul is not here dealing with 'church discipline' as such; rather, out of his Jewish heritage he is expressing what should be the *normal* consequences of being the people of God, who are called to be his holy people (1:2). It is this lack of a sense of sin, and therefore of any ethical consequences to their life in the Spirit, that marks the Corinthian brand of spirituality as radically different from that which flows out of the gospel of Christ crucified. And it is precisely this failure to recognize the depth of their corporate sinfulness due to their arrogance that causes Paul to take such strong action as is described in the next sentence (vv. 3-5)."²

Why should the Corinthian Christians have "mourned" over this man's sin? First, because as a fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ, they should have been repulsed by the sin of one of their number. Second, because when one person in the church sins, his or her sin contaminates the whole group. For example,

¹Johnson, p. 1236.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 203. See also Barrett, p. 122.

when one member of a human family disgraces himself, his action disgraces his whole family.¹

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

5:4 The apostle wanted the believers to view his ruling as the will of "our Lord Jesus." He assured them that the Lord would back it up with His "power" as they enforced the discipline that Paul prescribed. The phrase "in the name of our Lord Jesus" probably modifies "I have decided to turn such a person over to Satan for the destruction of his body" (v. 5).² In passing the following judgment Paul was acting in Jesus' "name": with His authority.

"The church's refusal to act against the offender in 5:2 provides the most striking *example* of their arrogance and doubt that Paul would execute discipline (4:18). Here, therefore, he does execute discipline (5:5). They may doubt his 'power' (4:19-21), but he acts by Jesus' power (5:4)."³

5:5 Paul had "decided to turn such a person over to Satan for the destruction of his body." Part of the problem of understanding what Paul meant here involves determining whether he used the word "body" (Gr. *sarx*, lit. flesh) literally (the physical body) or metaphorically (the sinful human nature). The fact that he contrasted the body with the "spirit" seems to me to support a literal understanding of the body. However, Paul could have used *soma* (the Greek word for "body") if that is what he meant. The NASB translators have translated *sarx* as

¹Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 105.

²See Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 206-8, for supporting arguments.

³Keener, p. 48.

"body," which shows their preference for a literal understanding of the Greek word.

Probably Paul meant that he had delivered the man "over to Satan" for physical bodily affliction that might even result in his premature death ("destruction").¹ God had delivered Job over to Satan for bodily affliction, but God specified that Satan was not to kill him (Job 2:6). Premature death was the result of Peter's dealings with Ananias and Sapphira in regard to their sin, though the text does not specifically say that Peter delivered them to Satan for the destruction of their bodies (Acts 5:1-11; cf. Acts 13:8-11). God was bringing premature death on other Corinthians for their improper conduct during the Lord's Supper (11:30; cf. 1 John 5:16). We have no record that this man died prematurely, though he may have. Premature death might be his judgment (the "worst case scenario") if he did not repent.

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

A variation of this view is that the delivery to Satan would result in a wasting physical illness but not death.³ However the

¹Calvin, *Institutes of ...*, 4:12:5-6; Lightfoot, p. 204; Findlay, 2:809; H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 97; S. M. Gilmour, "Pastoral Care in the New Testament Church," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963-64):395; J. C. Hurd Jr., *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, p.137, p. 286, n. 5; G. W. H. Lampe, "Church Discipline and the Interpretation of the Epistles to the Corinthians," in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, pp. 349, 353; Morris, pp. 88-89; Johnson, p. 1237; and Bruce, pp. 54-55.

²See Sydney H. T. Page, "Satan: God's Servant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:3 (September 2007):449-65.

³William Barclay, *By What Authority?* p. 118; M. Dods, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 118; H. Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 90; H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, p. 471; W. G. H. Simon,

phrase "the destruction of the body" seems to imply death rather than simply disease.

A third interpretation understands the word "body" metaphorically as referring to the destruction of the man's sinful nature.¹ "The destruction of the body," in this view, refers to the putting to death of the lusts of the body. Advocates of this view believe that the man was to be excommunicated and, as a result, he would continue to indulge his flesh so that he would eventually become satiated with his sin and give it up.² However it seems unusual that Paul would deliver the man "to Satan" for this purpose. Satan would not normally put the lusts of the flesh to death but would instead stir them up in the man. It is hard to see how handing a person over to Satan would purify him. Job said, "When He [God, not Satan] has put me to the test, I will come out as gold" (Job 23:10b).

Still another view takes the "body" and "spirit" as referring to the sinful and godly character of the church rather than the individual.³ Advocates of this view believe that Paul may have been identifying the sinful element within the Corinthian church that needed destroying. This would result in the preservation of the "spirit" of the church. The main problem with this view is that Paul seems to be referring to an individual rather than to the church as a whole. Certainly the man's actions would affect the church, so it is probably proper to see some involvement of the church here, even though the judgment itself seems to be primarily against the man.

The First Epistle to the Corinthians: Introduction and Commentary, p. 78; and M. E. Thrall, *The First and Second Letters of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 40.

¹F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 123; Lenski, pp. 216-17; J. J. Lias, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 67; Morgan, *The Corinthian ...*, p. 83.

²Ibid.

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

Another interpretation is that Paul was speaking only of the man's excommunication from the church, not any physical punishment.¹ In this view Paul meant that he was turning the man over to live in the sphere of Satan's authority, the world, isolated and cut off from the sphere of the Spirit's authority, the church.

"But there is no proof that such a formula of excommunication existed either in the Synagogue or the early Church; and the added words, *eis olethron tes sarkos k.t.l.* [unto destruction of the body], point to some *physically punitive* and *spiritually remedial* visitation of the sinner."²

"What the grammar suggests ... is that the 'destruction of his flesh' is the anticipated result [Gr. *eis*] of the man's being being [*sic*] put back out into Satan's domain, while the express purpose [Gr. *hina*] of the action is his redemption."³

Some have thought that Paul meant excommunication with the possibility of premature death.⁴ Paul's analogy concerning the Passover, which follows this verse (vv. 6-8), stresses separating what is sinful (the sinner, the "leaven") from what it pollutes (the church, the "lump of dough"). Paul meant that the Lamb (Christ) was already slain on Calvary, but the Corinthians had not yet gotten rid of the leaven (the sinner).

Is this a form of church discipline that Christians can and should practice today? There are no other Scripture passages in which the Lord instructed church leaders to turn sinners over to Satan. Consequently some interpreters believe that this was one way in which the apostles in particular exercised their authority in the early church for the establishment of the

¹Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 108; Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 208-15; Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 50; Robertson, 4:113.

²Findlay, 2:809.

³Fee, *The First ...*, p. 209. See also Craig L. Blomberg's discussion of this verse in William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar: Second Edition*, p. 54.

⁴Cf. Lowery, p. 514.

church (cf. Acts 5).¹ I think modern church leaders can turn people over to Satan by removing them from the fellowship of other Christians and the church, but not by authoritatively calling down physical punishment on them—like Peter did with Ananias and Saphira, and like Paul evidently did here. People may commit sins that may ultimately lead to their premature deaths today, and there are, of course, other biblical examples of excommunication as church discipline (cf. v. 13; Matt. 18:17; 2 Cor. 2:6; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15).

"Somebody might say, 'The way to help him is to keep him in the circle, let him sit down with you at the Communion table; do not be hard on him, try to win him back, throw your arms of love about him and sympathize with him.' The unrepentant man will be more hardened in his iniquity if you do that. Put him outside in the devil's domain, let him know that he has forfeited all title to a place with the people of God—that he has been put back into the world where Satan rules. ... When he finds himself abhorred by men and women who love Christ, when he finds his sin is a stench in the nostrils of Christian people, he may break before God."²

The last part of the verse gives the purpose of Paul's discipline. "Spirit" contrasts with "flesh" (Gr. *sarx*). If "flesh" refers to the body, then "spirit" probably refers to the immaterial part of the man. This is the only place in the Bible where the salvation of a person's spirit (in contrast to his soul or life, Gr. *psyche*) is mentioned.³ "The day of the Lord" probably refers to the day when Christians will meet the Lord: at the Rapture (cf. 1:8).

What would the incestuous man's punishment save his spirit from? It would not save him eternally, since faith in Christ does that. It might save him from physical death if he repented, but

¹E.g., Alford, 2:2:506; Ed Hayes, *The Church*, p. 127..

²Ironside, pp. 169-70.

³Hunt, 2:726.

the reference to his spirit makes this interpretation unlikely. Probably it would guard him from a worse verdict, when the Lord will evaluate the stewardship of his life at the judgment seat of Christ. Evidently Paul regarded it better for this sinning Christian, as well as better for the church, that he suffer punishment—even die prematurely—than that he go on living as he was living, assuming that he would not repent.

Some have interpreted Paul's allusion to "such a person" in 2 Corinthians 2:6-7 as referring to this incestuous man. The text does not warrant so definite a connection. "Such a person" is simply a way of referring to someone, anyone, without using his or her name.¹

The analogy of the Passover 5:6-8

Paul argued for the man's removal from the church with this analogy. It was primarily for the sake of the church that he should be removed, not primarily for the man's sake.

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

"The Church of God is largely afraid to exercise discipline today, but where this is carried out in obedience to the Word of God the Church is kept in a condition where God can work."²

5:7 In Jewish life it was customary to throw away ("Clean out") all the "old leaven" in the house when the family prepared for the Passover celebration (Exod. 12:15; 13:6-7).³ They did this so that the bread they made for Passover, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed, would be completely free of leaven ("unleavened"). The Jews considered Zephaniah 1:12 to be their authority to search for leaven in their homes with

¹Bruce, p. 54.

²Ironside, p. 171.

³Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 220.

candles.¹ This search may have been for hygienic reasons as well as because of the symbolism of the act.

This is what the Corinthians needed to do as a church so that they could worship God acceptably. In one sense they were already free of leaven: their trust in Christ had removed their sins. But in another sense they possessed leaven, since they had tolerated, and were still tolerating, sin in their midst. Paul had described the same situation earlier in this epistle when he said that the Corinthians were saints (1:2) even though they were not behaving like saints. God had sanctified them in their position, but they were in need of progressive sanctification. They needed to become what they were. They needed to grow into the sainthood that God wanted for them ("that you may be a new lump") after sanctifying them when they first believed in Jesus ("just as you are in fact unleavened"). This was Paul's basic exhortation.

"1 Corinthians emphasizes that the gospel issues in transformed lives, that salvation in Christ is not complete without God/Christlike attitudes and behavior."²

"The classic expression of Paul's understanding of the relationship between gospel and ethics (indicative and imperative) is to be found in 5:7."³

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

¹Lightfoot, p. 205.

²Fee, "Toward a ...," p. 51.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 53.

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

5:8 The feast of Unleavened Bread began the day after Passover. The Jews regarded the Passover, combined with the feast of Unleavened Bread, as one festival (cf. Exod. 23:15; 34:18; Deut. 16:6). As believers whose Paschal Lamb ("Christ") had died, it was necessary that the Corinthians keep celebrating "the feast" and worshipping God, free from "leaven," which symbolically represented sin. "The old leaven" probably refers to the sins that marked the Corinthians before their conversion rather than to the incestuous man.¹ "Malice and wickedness" probably stand for all sins of motive and action. "Sincerity and truth" are the proper motive and action with which we should worship God. This verse constitutes a summary exhortation.

Obviously Paul did not mean that Christians are to celebrate the Israelite Passover feast. He was using that feast as an example of the importance of worshipping God free from sin.

"The whole life of a Christian must be a feast of unleavened bread [i.e., free of sin]."²

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

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

¹Findlay, 2:810.

²Henry, p. 1810.

5:9 Paul had written this congregation a previous "letter" that is no longer in existence.¹ In it he had urged the Corinthians to avoid associating with "sexually immoral people." In view of this instruction the Corinthians' toleration of the incestuous man in the church was especially serious.

The Greek word *pornois* occurs here, translated "immoral." A different form of the same word occurs in verse 1, *porneia*, where it is translated "immorality." So Paul's instruction in his former letter, in verses 1 through 8 of this chapter, and in verses 9 through 13 of this chapter, all has to do with sexual immorality in its broadest meaning.

Some interpreters view what Paul wrote about not associating with "sexually immoral people" as encouragement to exclude the offender from the community of believers gathered for worship: excommunication.² Others view it as social ostracism:

"The Apostle is not thinking of Holy Communion, in which case the *mede* ["not even"] would be quite out of place: he is thinking of social meals; 'Do not invite him to your house or accept his invitations.'"³

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

5:10 Paul hastened to clarify that, in writing what he had written, he did not mean that a believer should never associate with "sexually immoral" people outside the church ("people of this

¹See my comments on this letter in the Introduction section of these notes.

²E.g., Fee, *The First ...*, p. 226.

³Robertson and Plummer, p. 107.

world"). Neither did he mean that they should avoid contact with unbelievers who were sinful in their attitudes and actions ("the greedy and swindlers, or with idolaters"). Even our holy Lord Jesus Christ ate with publicans and sinners.

That kind of extreme isolationism would have required that they stop living in the real world and exist in a Christian ghetto, insulated from all contact with unbelievers. This approach to life is both unrealistic and unfaithful to God who has called us to be salt and light in the world (Matt. 5:13-16; 28:19-20). Some Christians today struggle with an unbiblical view of separation that tends more toward isolationism than sanctification.

5:11 Paul now clarified further that he had meant that the Corinthian Christians should not associate with such a person if he or she professed to be a believer. The Greek phrase *tis adelphos onomazomenos* literally means "one who bears the name brother." The translation "so-called brother" implies that the sinner was only a professing Christian and not a genuine believer.¹ However he could be a genuine believer.² Only God and that person would know for sure whether he or she was a genuine Christian. The important point is that this person's behavior threw into question whether he or she was a genuine Christian. The Corinthian Christians were to exclude such a person from table fellowship with the other Christians in the church ("not even to eat with such a person").

In the early history of the church eating together was a large part of the fellowship that the Christians enjoyed with one another (cf. Acts 2:46-47; 6:1; et al.). To exclude a Christian from this circle of fellowship would have made a much stronger statement to him or her, at that time, than it normally does in many parts of the world today where eating together is not as common among Christians.

¹Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 114; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, p. 210.

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

This exclusion was a strong form of discipline that Paul prescribed in order to confront the offender with his or her behavior and encourage him or her to repent. Some modern congregations have adopted the policy of excluding such offenders from participation in the Lord's Supper. However, this form of discipline is quite weak when a congregation observes the Lord's Supper only monthly or quarterly. Modern church leaders need to give careful thought to what form of discipline would have the same impact and effect on such a person in their particular society.

"Church discipline is not a group of 'pious policemen' out to catch a criminal. Rather, it is a group of brokenhearted brothers and sisters seeking to restore an erring member of the family."¹

"A lack of accountability within the church family demonstrates a lack of love and dishonors the lordship of Jesus Christ by honoring man above God."²

Paul's list of sins in this verse seems to be suggestive rather than comprehensive (cf. 6:9-10). It includes fornicators ("sexually immoral"), "greedy" people, idolaters, people who abuse others "verbally," drunkards, and perhaps others addicted to enslaving substances, and swindlers.³ The failure of many church leaders to discipline professing Christians who practice these things today is a sad commentary on the carnality of the modern church. In some cases it is evidence of unwillingness or inability to exercise tough love.

5:12 Paul's authority as an apostle did not extend to judging and prescribing discipline on unbelievers for their sins. He did, of course, assess the condition of unbelievers (e.g., Rom. 1; et al.), but that is not what is in view here. His disciplining ministry, and the ministry of other Christians in judging and

¹Wiersbe, 1:586.

²Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, p. 115.

³See René A. López, "A Study of Pauline Passages with Vice Lists," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:671 (July-September 2011):301-16.

disciplining sin, took place only within church life. Judging here means more than criticizing. It involves disciplining too, as the context shows.

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

The 2020 edition of the NASB identifies "Remove the evil person from among yourselves" as a quotation from the Old Testament. There is no single verse in the Old Testament that reads this way, but the spirit of this command appears in several Old Testament texts in which the Israelites were to judge sin in their midst (cf. Deut. 13:5; 17:7, 12; 21:21; 22:21). So whether Paul was quoting the Old Testament loosely, or simply summing up his own instruction in this chapter, is debatable. But his instruction is clear.

Paul did not explain, in this passage, the objective in view in church discipline. Elsewhere we learn that it is always for the restoration of the offender to fellowship with God and His people (2 Cor. 2:5-11). It is also for the purity of the church.¹

Chapter 5 deals with the subject of immoral conduct by professing Christians.² The first part (vv. 1-8) contains directions for dealing with a

¹For general studies of church discipline, see J. Carl Laney, "The Biblical Practice of Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:572 (October-December 1986):353-64; Ted G. Kitchens, "Perimeters of Corrective Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):201-13; and Dennis Rainey, *Ministering to Twentieth-Century Families*, pp. 261-73. On the subject of lawsuits against local churches and church leaders who practice church discipline, see Jay A. Quine, "Court Involvement in Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:593 (January-March 1992):60-73, and 594 (April-June 1992):223-36.

²See also Timothy D. Howell, "The Church and the AIDS Crisis," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:593 (January-March 1992):74-82.

particular case of fornication that existed in the church. The Corinthian Christians were taking a much too permissive attitude toward sin, which reflects the impact of their culture on their church. The second part (vv. 9-13) clarifies our duty in all instances of immoral conduct inside and outside the church.

2. Litigation in the church 6:1-11

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

"In this section Paul is dealing with a problem which specially affected the Greeks. The Jews did not ordinarily go to law in the public law-courts at all; they settled things before the elders of the village or the elders of the Synagogue; to them justice was far more a thing to be settled in a family spirit than in a legal spirit. ... The Greeks were in fact famous, or notorious, for their love of going to law."¹

"Roman society was notoriously litigious [unreasonably prone to go to a court of law to settle disputes], and Corinth, with its rising class of *nouveau riche* [people who have recently acquired wealth], was even more so."²

"... the congregation's root problem lies in its lack of theological depth. It shames itself by not understanding itself as an eschatological community ('Do you not know that we are to judge angels?') and as a community redeemed by Christ."³

"Paul has not finished with the theme of church discipline in regard to sexual life; see vi. 12 and chapter vii; but in v. 12 f.

¹Barclay, *The Letters ...*, pp. 55, 56.

²Keener, p. 52.

³Cousar, "The Theological ...," pp. 98-99.

he had spoken of judgement [*sic*], and this brings to his mind another feature of Corinthian life of which he had heard ..."1

The shame on the church 6:1-6

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

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

In view of the context, the "neighbor" (someone near at hand) must be a fellow Christian (vv. 6, 8). The "unrighteous" or "ungodly" (NIV) contrasts with the "saints," and refers to an unbeliever (v. 6). When people had disputes with each other in Corinth and wanted official arbitration, they went to the *bema* (judgment seat) in the center of town.

"The phrase translated 'has a dispute ["case"]' is a technical term for a lawsuit, or legal action; and the verb *krino* ('judge') in the middle voice can carry the sense of 'going to law,' or 'bringing something for judgment,' as it does here."²

"He [Paul] does not mean that Christian courts ought to be instituted, but that Christian disputants should submit to Christian arbitration."³

"It [believers quarreling with one another in the world's law courts] is saying to the world, 'We Christians are just as covetous and just as quarrelsome, we are just as much concerned about having our own way and about self-pleasing as you of the world are. We recognize your judges

¹Barrett, p. 134.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 231.

³Robertson and Plummer, p. 111.

as having authority over the Church of God,' and it is degrading to the Christian thus to act."¹

"To take the matter of disputes within the church outside the church and ask the arbitrament of heathen tribunals was to violate the very principles of the Church's life."²

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

The earlier revelation alluded to, that the saints will have a part in judging unbelievers in the future, may be Daniel 7:18, 22, and 27. This judgment will evidently take place just after the Lord returns to earth at His Second Coming to set up His millennial kingdom. We will be with Him then (1 Thess. 4:17). Reigning with Christ (2 Tim. 2:12) evidently involves judging.

Since the Lord will delegate the authority to "judge" unbelievers ("the world") to Christians in the future, Paul concluded that we are "competent" to settle disputes among ourselves now. In the light of future eschatological judgment, any decisions that believers must make in church courts now are relatively trifling. The marginal reading in the NASB "try trivial cases" probably gives the better sense than "form the smallest law courts."³ Obviously some cases involving Christians arguing with one another are more difficult to sort out than some of those involving unbelievers. Paul's point was that Christians are generally competent to settle disputes between people. After all, we have the help and wisdom of the indwelling Holy Spirit available to us as well as the Scriptures.

Earlier Paul wrote that the Corinthians were judging him (cf. 4:3-5, 7), which was inappropriate in view of God's final

¹Ironside, p. 178.

²Morgan, *The Corinthian ...*, p. 86.

³See Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 233-34.

judgment. Now they were "judging" one another in the "law courts," which was also inappropriate.

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

Alford noted that the word "angels," when not otherwise specified, always refers to good angels in the New Testament.¹ But it is difficult to see how Christians could judge good angels since good angels evidently do not sin. Perhaps this is the only place where "angels" refers to bad angels.

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

The second part of the verse is capable of four interpretations. Paul may have been speaking ironically, as the next verse might imply (cf. 4:8). If so, he may have been telling the Corinthians, facetiously, that they should go ahead and select the least qualified people in the church to settle these disputes. His meaning in this case was that any Christian was capable of settling disputes among his brethren. He did not mean that the Corinthians should really choose as judges the most feeble-minded Christians in the church. The statement is ironical. This is the interpretation of the NIV.²

On the other hand Paul may have been asking a question rather than making an ironical statement. This is how the NASB translators took Paul's words. In this case he was asking if the Corinthians selected judges in their church disputes from the members who had the fewest qualifications to pass judgment.

¹Alford, 2:2:512.

²See also Robertson and Plummer, p. 113.

The obvious answer would be no. They would choose the Christians with the best qualifications. This interpretation understands Paul as forthrightly advocating the choice of the best qualified in the church to do the judging.¹

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

"... he [Paul] preferred the meanest among [average] believers to unbelievers, when it was a question of ability to judge."²

A fourth interpretation is that Paul was asking the Corinthians why they were presenting their cases to unbelievers. The ESV translators interpreted Paul's meaning this way: "Why do you lay them [such cases] before those who have no standing in the church [i.e., unbelievers]?"³ This is also the implication of the NKJV, HCSB, NET2 Bible, and *The Message* renderings.⁴ This seems to me to be the best interpretation.

6:5-6 What was to the Corinthians' "shame"? Probably it was that, by going into secular courts to settle their church problems, they seemed to be saying that there was no one in their church wise enough to settle these matters. Certainly they could count on the Holy Spirit to give them both the wisdom and the proper spirit that they needed to accomplish this (cf. John 14:26; 16:13). Of course it was also shameful that Christians would sue one another, since we are commanded to love one another and to sacrifice ourselves for one another, but that does not seem to be the main reason for the shame that was in Paul's mind, in view of the context.

"A church has come to a pretty pass when its members believe that they are more likely to get

¹See Lightfoot, p. 211; and Barrett, p. 137.

²Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 120. See also Robert L. Constable, *Live Saints*, devotional 16.

³ESV refers to *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*.

⁴NKJV refers to *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*.

justice from *unbelievers* than from their own brothers."¹

Clearly this church did not understand its identity as an eschatological community—that they were only temporary residents in Corinth and that their real home was in heaven—nor did the church demonstrate much concern about its witness to the world.

"Every Jewish community throughout the Roman Empire and beyond its frontiers had its own *bet-din*, its own competent machinery for the administration of civil justice within its own membership; the least that could be expected of a Christian church was that it should make similar arrangements if necessary, and not wash its dirty linen in public."²

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

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

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

Christians should be willing to give to one another rather than trying to get from one another. In other words, there should be no going to court against one another at all. Nevertheless,

¹Barrett, p. 138.

²Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 59.

if the Corinthians insisted on going to court, it should be a court of believers in the church, not a court of unbelievers outside the church.

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

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

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

The meanings of most of the sins listed in these verses are clear, but a few require some comment. At the end of verse 9 the Greek text has two different words that the NASB has translated with the one word "homosexuals." The first of these two words is *malakoi*, which refers to the submissive partner in a homosexual relationship. The second word is *arsenokoitai*, which refers to the dominant partner in a homosexual

¹E.g., MacArthur, pp. 127-29; and J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 283.

relationship.¹ David Malick showed that Paul was condemning all homosexual relationships, not just abuses in homosexual behavior.²

"Bisexuality was extremely common among Greeks, especially because of the shortage of available wives, which apparently occasioned the late age of marriage for most Greek men."³

"We can scarcely realize how riddled the ancient world was with it [homosexuality]. Even so great a man as Socrates practised [*sic*] it; Plato's dialogue *The Symposium* is always said to be one of the greatest works on love in the world, but its subject is not natural but unnatural love. Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors practised unnatural vice."⁴

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

"The universality of wine drinking was of course due to the inadequate water-supplies. But normally the Greeks were sober people, for their drink was three parts of wine mixed with two of water."⁵

¹See P. Michael Ukleja, "Homosexuality in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:560 (October-December 1983):350-58; and Sherwood A. Cole, "Biology, Homosexuality, and Moral Culpability," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:615 (July-September 1997):355-66.

²David E. Malick, "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:600 (October-December 1993):479-92. See also J. Kirby Anderson, *Moral Dilemmas*, ch. 13: "Homosexuality."

³Keener, p. 55.

⁴Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 60.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 59.

"The order of the ten kinds of offenders is unstudied. He enumerates sins which were prevalent at Corinth just as they occur to him."¹

What will be true of "the unrighteous"? They "will not inherit the kingdom of God." Jesus explained who will inherit the kingdom of God (Matt. 5:3, 10; Mark 10:14), whereas Paul explained who will not inherit it. In some passages Paul used this expression to describe the consequences of the behavior of unbelievers when he compared it to the behavior of believers (cf. Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5). That appears to be its meaning here as well.² Some interpreters have concluded that Paul meant that carnal believers will not enter the messianic kingdom.³ I do not think that is what Paul meant. There is no other Scripture that supports this view.

"Inheriting the kingdom" and "entering the kingdom" are synonyms in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 19:16; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18). However, some expositors believe that these terms are not equivalent.⁴ Paul was apparently contrasting what the Corinthians did before their conversion with their conduct after their conversion (v. 11). He did not mean that Christians are incapable of practicing these sins but that these practices typically characterize unbelievers. Paul was exhorting the Corinthian believers to live like saints.⁵

6:11 Some of the Corinthian Christians had been unrighteous and had practiced some of the sins that Paul cited before they trusted in Christ. However the blood (sacrificial death) of Christ had cleansed ("washed") them, and God had set them apart ("sanctified" them) to a life of holiness (1:2). God the Father had declared them righteous ("justified" them) by faith "in ... the Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. 1:30) and through the sanctifying work of the Holy "Spirit" who now indwelt them.

¹Robertson and Plummer, p. 119.

²See René A. López, "Views on Paul's Vice Lists and Inheriting the Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:669 (January-March 2011):81-97.

³E.g., D. M. Panton, *The Judgment Seat of Christ*.

⁴E.g., Hunt, 2:729.

⁵See René A. López, "Does the Vice List in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Describe Believers or Unbelievers?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:653 (January-March 2007):59-73.

He had made them saints. Consequently they needed to live like saints.

"The quite unconscious Trinitarianism of the concluding words should be noted: *the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit, our God*. Trinitarian theology, at least in its New Testament form, did not arise out of speculation, but out of the fact that when Christians spoke of what God had done for them and in them they often found themselves obliged to use threefold language of this kind."¹

This verse does not support the idea that once a person has experienced eternal salvation he or she will automatically live a life free of gross sin. Normally this is the consequence of conversion. But believers can grieve and quench the Holy Spirit's sanctifying ministry in their lives (Eph. 4:20; 1 Thess. 5:19). In this letter we have seen that not only were some of the Corinthian saints fornicators before their conversion, but one of them had committed that sin (5:1). Nevertheless it is encouraging to learn that the sins mentioned can be overcome by God's transforming power: "Such were some of you."

Paul's point in this whole section (vv. 1-11) was that genuine Christians should not continue in or return to the sinful practices that mark unbelievers (cf. Rom. 6:15). We should become what we are in our practice because of what Jesus Christ has done for us in our position. This appeal runs throughout the New Testament, and it underlies every exhortation to pursue godliness. It is especially strong in this epistle. Rather than assuming that believers will not continually practice sin, the inspired writers constantly warned us of that possibility.

This passage does not deal with how we as Christians should respond when pagans defraud or sue us. But if we apply the principles that Paul advocated in dealing with fellow believers, we should participate in public litigation only as a last resort. We should make every effort to settle our disputes out of court and even be willing to suffer loss in order to fulfill our calling to love our neighbors as ourselves and to put the welfare of others before our own (cf. Matt. 22:39; Phil. 2:3-4). A good question to ask ourselves is: What

¹Barrett, p. 143.

will people who are observing me conclude about followers of Christ by the way I am conducting myself?

3. Prostitution in the church 6:12-20

The apostle proceeded to point out the sanctity of the believer's body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. He wanted to help his readers realize the seriousness of the sins that marked them to some extent as a church. This pericope also introduces in seed form three important subjects that Paul developed later in this epistle: sexual relationships, food offered to idols, and the resurrection of the body.¹

"The Greeks always looked down on the body. There was a proverbial saying, 'The body is a tomb.' Epictetus said, 'I am a poor soul shackled to a corpse.'"²

"The question is: If there are no restrictions in food, one appetite of the body, why must there be in sexual things, another physical desire?"³

"Apparently some men within the Christian community are going to prostitutes and are arguing for the right to do so. Being people of the Spirit, they imply, has moved them to a higher plane, the realm of the spirit, where they are unaffected by behavior that has merely to do with the body. So Paul proceeds from the affirmation of v. 11 to an attack on this theological justification."⁴

"As before, the gospel itself is at stake, not simply the resolution of an ethical question. The Corinthian pneumatics' [people who emphasize the spirit] understanding of spirituality has allowed them both a false view of freedom ('everything is permissible') and of the body ('God will destroy it'), from which basis they have argued that going to prostitutes is permissible because the body doesn't matter."⁵

¹Alford, 2:2:516

²Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 62.

³Johnson, p. 1238.

⁴Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 250-51.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 251.

This is one of the more important passages in the New Testament that deals with the human body.

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

Paul began by arguing against his recipients' distortion of Christian freedom and their misunderstanding of the nature of the body. The influence of Greek dualism on the Corinthians continues to be obvious.¹ Paul presented his teaching in the form of a dialogue with his readers, the diatribe style, which was familiar to them.

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

Similarly the Protestant reformers fell under the same criticism by their Roman Catholic opponents. The Catholics said that the reformers were teaching that, since Christians are saved by grace, they could live sinful lives. Unfortunately John Calvin's successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza (1519-1605), overreacted to this criticism and argued that a true Christian cannot commit gross sin. This assertion led to the conclusion that the basis of assurance of salvation is the presence of fruit in the life, rather than the promise of God (e.g., John 6:47; et al.). This view, that a true Christian will not commit gross sin, has become popular in Reformed Theology, but it goes further than Scripture does. Scripture never makes this claim but constantly warns Christians against abusing their liberty in Christ and turning it into a license to sin.²

Perhaps those in Corinth who were practicing sexual immorality and suing their brethren in pagan courts appealed to Paul to

¹See my comments on Greek dualism at the end of my discussion of 2:6-16 above.

²See Dillow, pp. 245-69.

support their actions, though they took liberty further than Paul did.¹

"'Everything is permissible for me' is almost certainly a Corinthian theological slogan."²

"It could have been argued in Corinth ... that the right course was for a husband to keep his wife 'pure', and, if necessary, find occasional sexual satisfaction in a harlot."³

In this verse the apostle restated his general maxim but qualified it (cf. 10:23). Legality is not the only test that the Christian should apply to his or her behavior. Is the practice also beneficial (helpful, admirable, profitable, expedient, good)?

"Freedom is not to be for self but for others. The real question is not whether an action is 'lawful' or 'right' or even 'all right,' but whether it is good, whether it benefits. ... Truly Christian conduct is not predicated on whether I have the right to do something, but whether my conduct is helpful to those about me."⁴

Furthermore, even though the Christian has freedom to enjoy some practice, it is wise to avoid it if it might gain control over him or her.

"The reasonable use of my liberty cannot go to the length of involving my own loss of it."⁵

"It is a bad thing to create habits that are not easily broken ..."⁶

¹See Robert N. Wilkin, "Are All Things Lawful for Believers?" *Grace Evangelical Society Newsletter* 4:7 (July 1989):2.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 251. Cf. 10:23.

³Barrett, p. 145.

⁴Fee, *The First ...*, p. 252.

⁵Erdman, p. 63.

⁶Ironside, p. 192.

The Christian should always be able to submit to the Lord's control and not be controlled by some substance or habit ("by anything"). We should give the Lord, not anyone or anything else, primary control of our bodies.

"Addictions have always plagued mankind, but they seem to enslave more today. Satan is wily. When we become wise to his old tricks, he invents new ones. He has more enslaving addictions in his arsenal than ever before. Be careful here. No one intends to become an addict. It all starts innocently. You never expect you will become addicted. But it happens—far too often."¹

"We have no longer any right to do what in itself is innocent, when our doing it will have a bad effect on others. ... We have no longer any right to do what in itself is innocent, when experience has proved that our doing it has a bad effect on ourselves."²

6:13-14 The first part of verse 13 is similar to the two parts of the previous verse. It contains a statement that is true, and it may have been a Corinthian slogan. But a qualifier follows. "Food" is not a matter of spiritual significance for the Christian, except that gluttony is a sin. As far as what we eat goes, we may eat anything and be pleasing to God (Mark 7:19). He has not forbidden any foods for spiritual reasons, though there may be physical reasons that we may choose not to eat certain things.

Both "food" and "the stomach" are physical and temporal. Paul probably referred to food here, not because it was the main issue, but to explain the issue of the body and sexual immorality. However gluttony and immorality often went together in Greek and Roman feasts. So gluttony may also have been an issue.³ As "food is for the stomach," so "the body is ... for the Lord:" it is designed to serve His ends.

¹J. Paul Nyquist, *The Post-Church Christian*, p. 115. Paragraph division omitted.

²Robertson and Plummer, p. 122.

³Keener, p. 57.

"Not only are meats made for the belly, but the belly, which is essential to physical existence, is made for meats, and cannot exist without them."¹

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

Proposition 1:

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

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

Proposition 2:

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

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

One might conclude—and some in Corinth were evidently doing so—that since sex, like food, is also physical and temporal it is also irrelevant spiritually.² However this is a false conclusion. The body is part of what the Lord saved and sanctified. Therefore it is "for" Him, and we should use it for His glory, "not for sexual immorality." Furthermore, the Lord has a noble purpose and destiny for our bodies. He is "for" them in that sense.

"To it [the body] he must give directions for the proper use of all its impulses and powers. Without him it can never attain its true dignity and its immortal destiny."³

The Lord will resurrect and transform the bodies of most Christians in the future—all but those whom He catches away

¹Robertson and Plummer, p. 123.

²Barrett, p. 147.

³Erdman, p. 63.

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

"The body of the believer is *for* the Lord because through Christ's resurrection God has set in motion the reality of our own resurrection. This means that the believer's physical body is to be understood as 'joined' to Christ's own 'body' that was raised from the dead."¹

Arguments against participating in prostitution 6:15-17

Building on the preceding theological base Paul argued against participating in fornication with prostitutes. The Corinthians had not correctly understood the significance of sexual intercourse or the significance of Christian conversion. So he proceeded to instruct them on these subjects.

6:15 Another rhetorical question affirmed the truth: "your bodies are parts of Christ." Since Christians are members of Christ's body, so our "bodies" are also members of Him. This is not just clever wordplay. Our physical bodies are just as much a part of Christ—united with Him in a genuine spiritual union—as the immaterial part of us is united with Christ. We are "in Christ," including our physical bodies. Paul was not speaking here of the believer's union with Christ by becoming a member of His mystical body, the church (12:12-26). He was speaking of our individual union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Since the Christian has been united with Christ, taking a part of Christ (our body) and uniting it with "a prostitute" (in sexual intercourse) is terribly bad. When a Christian has sexual relations with a prostitute he or she takes what is united to and belongs to Christ (his or her body) and gives it to someone else. This is not only being unfaithful to Christ, but it is stealing from God. Paul's revulsion at the thought of this comes through graphically in his characteristic *me genoito* (lit. "Far

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 258.

from it!" or May it never be!). When a Christian marries, this does not happen, because God has ordained and approves of marriage (cf. 7:14). He permits us to share our bodies with our lawful mates.

"Sex outside of marriage is like a man robbing a bank: he gets something, but it is not his and he will one day pay for it. Sex within marriage can be like a person putting money into a bank: there is safety, security, and he will collect dividends. Sex within marriage can build a relationship that brings joys in the future; but sex apart from marriage has a way of weakening future relationships, as every Christian marriage counselor will tell you."¹

"Young folks today think that they can live together without being married. One such couple came to me wanting to talk about going into Christian service. They weren't married, but they were living together! I told them, 'You get married.' They asked, 'Why?' I said, 'Because God commands it. That is the way *God* wants it to be. Until you are willing to do that, you cannot serve Him.'"²

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

¹Wiersbe, 1:589.

²McGee, 5:29-30.

"*Ho kollomenos* ["the one who joins himself"] ... indicates that sexual union constitutes a permanent bond between the parties. What has been done lives, morally, in both; neither is henceforth free of the other."¹

6:17 "But" compared to the union that takes place when two people have sex, the person who trusts Christ becomes united with Him in an even stronger and more thoroughgoing oneness. This is an even stronger spiritual union: we have become "one spirit with Him."² Consequently it is a very serious thing to give to a prostitute what God has so strongly united to Christ.

"Adhesion by the act of faith (i. 21, etc.) to Christ (as *Lord*, cf. xii. 3, etc.) establishes a spiritual communion of the man with Him as real and close as the other, bodily communion ... and as much more influential and enduring as the spirit is above the flesh."³

Paul expressed his argument in a chiasmus:⁴

- A Your bodies are members of Christ's body (v. 15a).
- B So they must not be members of a prostitute's body (v. 15b).
- B' Joined to a prostitute your members become one body with her (v. 16).
- A' Joined to Christ your members become one spirit with Him (v. 17).

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

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

¹Findlay, 2:820.

²See Stewart, p. 147.

³Findlay, 2:820.

⁴A chiasmus is a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form.

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

Sexual immorality is also an especially serious sin because it involves placing the body, which is the Lord's (vv. 19-20), into a spiritual union with an illegitimate partner (cf. 7:4).¹ No other sin has this result. All other sins are outside, or apart from, the body in this sense. "Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body" could be another incorrect Corinthian slogan that Paul proceeded to correct (cf. vv. 12, 13).

One might argue that this "spiritual union" that is set up when people have sex outside of marriage is really insignificant, since there are no lasting ill effects (in many cases, though there are in some cases). But it is significant because God disapproves of it, and whenever people do what God disapproves they set themselves up for divine discipline.

"Does God then forbid the restoration of fallen leaders? No. Does He leave open the possibility? Yes. Does that possibility look promising? Yes and no. If both the life and reputation of the fallen elder can be rehabilitated, his prospects for restoration are promising. However, rehabilitating his reputation, not to mention his life, will be particularly difficult, for squandering one's reputation is 'a snare of the devil' (1 Tim. 3:7), and he does not yield up his prey easily."²

6:19 Another rhetorical question makes a strong important statement: "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you." Previously Paul taught his readers that the Corinthian

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 262.

²Jay E. Smith, "Can Fallen Leaders Be Restored to Leadership? *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:604 (October-December 1994):480.

church was a temple (*naos*; 3:16). The believer's body is also a temple. The Holy Spirit is actually indwelling each of these temples (Rom. 8:9; cf. Matt. 12:6; 18:15-20; 28:16-20; Mark 13:11; John 14:17, 23).¹ He is a gift to us from God (cf. 1 Thess. 4:8). Consequently we have a moral obligation to the Giver: "you are not your own." Moreover, because He indwells us, we belong to Him.

"In the temple of Aphrodite prostitutes were priestesses, and commerce with them was counted a *consecration*; it is an absolute *desecration* of God's true temple in the man himself."²

"What Paul seems to be doing is taking over their own theological starting point, namely, that they are 'spiritual' because they have the Spirit, and redirecting it to include the sanctity of the body. The reality of the indwelling Spirit is now turned against them. They thought the presence of the Spirit meant a negation of the body; Paul argues the exact opposite: The presence of the Spirit in their present bodily existence is God's affirmation of the body."³

6:20 Furthermore, God has "bought" (Gr. *agorazo*) every Christian "for a price": the blood of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24-25; Eph. 1:7; et al.). So we belong to Him for a second reason. In view of this we should "glorify God" in our bodies rather than degrading Him through fornication (cf. Rom. 12:1-2). Usually the New Testament emphasis is on redemption leading to freedom from sin (e.g., Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Rev. 5:9; 14:3), but here it is on redemption leading to faithfulness to God. Even

¹See Sweeney, p. 629.

²Findlay, 2:821.

³Fee, *The First ...*, p. 264. See Nicholas G. Piotrowski and Ryan Johnson, "One Spirit, One Body, One Temple: Paul's Corporate Temple Language in 1 Corinthians 6," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65:4 (December 2022):733-52, for the view that the temple in view here is the universal body of Christ.

our physical bodies are to be faithful to the Lord with whom we are joined.

"The reason to glorify God in the body and not engage in sexual immorality is rooted in a new way of understanding the self."¹

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

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

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

The remainder of the body of this epistle deals with questions that the Corinthians had asked Paul in a letter. Paul introduced each of these with the phrase *peri de* ("now concerning," 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12), which was a phrase commonly used in antiquity.²

"Rather than a friendly exchange, in which the new believers in Corinth are asking spiritual advice of their mentor in the Lord, their letter was probably a response to Paul's Previous Letter mentioned in 5:9, in which they were taking exception to his position on point after point. In light of their own theology of spirit, with heavy emphasis on 'wisdom' and 'knowledge,' they have answered Paul with a kind of 'Why can't we?' attitude, in which they are looking for his response."³

¹Cousar, "The Theological ...," p. 99.

²Keener, p. 62.

³Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 266-67.

A. MARRIAGE AND RELATED MATTERS CH. 7

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

"The transition from chapter 6 to chapter 7 illustrates the necessity Paul was under of waging a campaign on two fronts. In chapter 6 he dealt with libertines who argued that everything was permissible, and in particular that sexual licence [*sic*] was a matter of ethical indifference. In chapter 7 he deals with ascetics who, partly perhaps in reaction against the libertines, argued that sexual relations of every kind were to be deprecated [despised], that Christians who were married should henceforth live as though they were unmarried, and those who were unmarried should remain so, even if they were already engaged to be married."¹

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

"Two other features about the nature of the argument need to be noted: First, along with 11:2-16, this is one of the least combative sections of the letter. Indeed, after the argumentation of 1:10—6:20, this section is altogether placid. Furthermore, also along with 11:2-16, this is one of the least 'authority-conscious' sections in all of his letters. Phrases like 'I say this by way of concession, not of command' (v. 6), 'it is good for them' (vv. 8, 26), 'I have no command, but I give my opinion' (v. 25; cf. 40) are not your standard Paul. Second, in a way quite unlike anything else in all his letters, the argument alternates between men and women (12 times in all). And in every case there is complete mutuality between the two sexes."³

¹Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 66.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 268.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 269-70.

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

Paul proceeded to give guidelines to the married or formerly married. The statement "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (v. 1) may well have been a Corinthian slogan (cf. 6:12, 13, 18).¹ This hypothesis, which seems valid to me in light of Paul's argumentation, results in a different interpretation of the text than has been traditional. The traditional view takes the entire section as explaining Paul's position on marriage in general in response to the Corinthians' question about its advisability.² I, and others, believe that Paul responded to the Corinthians' false view, as expressed in this slogan, in all that follows in this section.

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

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

7:1 Again Paul began what he had to say by citing a general truth. Then he proceeded to qualify it (cf. 6:12-13). The use of the Greek word *anthropos* ("man" generically: people), rather than *aner* ("man" as distinguished from woman) indicates that the statement pertains to human beings generally. To "touch a woman" was a common ancient euphemism for sexual intercourse.³ Evidently the Corinthians' question was something like this: Isn't it preferable for a Christian to abstain from sexual relations with anyone of the opposite sex, even one's own spouse? This would reflect the "spiritual" viewpoint of the Corinthians, which held a negative attitude toward the material world including the body (cf. 6:13; 15:12).

"Some difficulty [in interpreting these verses] is alleviated if these words [the slogan] are regarded as a quotation from the Corinthian letter, and this is a hypothesis that may very probably be accepted [cf. 6:12-13] ..."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 270.

²Advocates of the traditional interpretation include Godet, Lightfoot, Grosheide, Morris, Mare, and Wiersbe.

³Lenski, p. 273; Fee, *The First ...*, p. 275; Lowery, p. 517; Keener, p. 62.

⁴Barrett, p. 154.

Another view is that the phrase "touch a woman" was a euphemism for marrying.¹ However this meaning is difficult to prove, and I do not prefer it. If this is what he meant, Paul's advice was to abstain from marrying, which is not what he advocated. Throughout this passage Paul viewed marriage as God-ordained and perfectly proper for Christians. He also wrote that a single life is not wrong, but good, though not necessarily better than a married life (vv. 28, 36-38). Paul also wrote that his readers would do well to remain in their present marital state (vv. 11-13, 26-27, 39-40).

7:2 This verse probably begins Paul's extended correction of the Corinthians' view of marriage. He proceeded to strongly urge his readers that the type of abstinence that they were arguing for (abstinence from sexual relations within marriage) was totally wrong. Paul urged married couples to have sexual relations with one another because of the prevalence of temptations to satisfy sexual desire inappropriately. Having one's spouse was a common euphemism in non-biblical Greek for having that person sexually.²

Notice the three sets of balanced pairs in verses 2 through 4. What Paul wrote he intended to apply to the "husband" and the "wife" equally. This was counter-cultural; in Paul's day husbands had rights over their wives that wives did not have over their husbands.

The traditional view of verse 1, which understands Paul to be saying that it is better to avoid marrying, sees Paul as making a concession to that statement in verse 2. Those who hold this view believe that Paul was now saying that it is better to marry since many single people cannot live in the single state without eventually committing "sexual immoralities" (Gr. *porneias*). Advocates of this view admit that this is obviously not the only reason to marry (cf. Gen. 2:18-24), but it appears to them to have been an important consideration in Corinth, where

¹Findlay, 2:822; Morris, p. 105.

²Keener, p. 62.

temptations to commit sexual immorality abounded. As noted above, I do not favor this interpretation.

"This [i.e., "each ... each," also] forbids polygamy, which was advocated by some Jewish teachers."¹

7:3 In view of the temptation to commit fornication (sexual immorality), each partner in marriage needs to fulfill his or her sexual duty to his or her spouse. Part of the responsibility of marriage is to meet the various needs of the spouse (Gen. 2:18), including that person's sexual needs.

7:4 Moreover in marriage each partner relinquishes certain personal rights, including the exclusive "authority" over his or her own "body," to which he or she gives the spouse a claim in marriage. Neither person has complete authority over his or her own body in marriage. Here the "authority" in view is the (supposed) right to deprive the spouse of sexual relations. Note again that Paul was careful to give both husband and wife equal rights in these verses. He did not regard the man as having sexual rights or needs that the woman does not have, or vice versa.

7:5 Evidently the Corinthians—at least some of them—had concluded that since they were "spiritual" they did not need to (or should not) continue to have sexual relations as husband and wife. Another less probable situation, I think, is that there were some married Christians in the church who were overreacting to the immorality in Corinth by abstaining from sexual relations with their spouses. For whatever reason, Paul viewed this as "depriving one another" of their normal sexual needs, and he urged them to "stop" doing it. Husbands and wives should commit themselves to honoring the spirit of mutual ownership of one another's bodies that these verses describe.

There are legitimate reasons for temporary abstinence, but couples should temporarily abstain only with the "agreement" of both partners. When there are greater needs, namely

¹Robertson and Plummer, p. 133.

spiritual needs, the couple may want to set aside their normal physical needs. However, they should only do so temporarily ("for a time"). Laying aside eating (fasting) or sleeping temporarily in order to engage in more important spiritual duties (e.g., "prayer") is similar.

"Three conditions are required for lawful abstinence: it must be by mutual consent, for a good object, and temporary."¹

We may think of sexual activity as an indication of lack of self-control, which it often is, but Paul also viewed the failure to engage in sex as a "lack of self-control" for a married person.

7:6 "But this" refers to Paul's preceding "concession" (v. 5). His concession was allowing temporary abstinence from sex. The concession was not permitting them to have sex. Paul never commanded abstinence from sex for married couples in his teaching ("not a command"). He viewed regular marital relations as the norm. Paul was not an ascetic who favored as little sex as possible. Abstinence was the exception to what was normal in his view.

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

To Paul the single state had certain advantages for a servant of the Lord like himself. Paul had to put up with many hardships in his ministry that would have been difficult for a wife to share. Moreover God had given him grace to live as a single person who did not feel consumed by lust (cf. v. 9).

Paul wished everyone could live as he did, but he realized that most could not. Each person has his or her own special "gift" (Gr. *charisma*) from God: some to live single, and some to live married (cf. Matt. 19:12). These are spiritual gifts just as much as the gifts listed in chapters 12 through 14 are. The gift of celibacy is a special ability that God gives to some people. It

¹Ibid., p. 134.

involves feeling free from the desire or need of sexual fulfillment in marriage.¹

The legitimate option of singleness 7:8-9

Paul moved from advice to the married regarding sexual abstinence to advice to the unmarried. His reference to his own singleness in verse 7 introduced this subject. He advised this group, as he had the former one, to remain in the state in which they found themselves. But he allowed them an exception too.

7:8 Who are the "unmarried" (Gr. *agamois*) that Paul had in view? Most interpreters have taken this word in its broadest possible meaning, namely, all categories of unmarried people. Others, however, have taken it to refer to widowers, since Paul mentioned "widows," a specific category of unmarried people, in this verse, and since he dealt with males and females in balance in this chapter. There is a Greek word for widowers, but it does not appear to have been in use in the *koine* period of Greek literature in which Paul lived. *Agamos* served in its place.² I prefer the former view: all unmarried people.

The "unmarried" state has some advantages over the married state even though it is better for most people to marry (Gen. 2:18). Since singleness is not a sinful condition, married people should not look down on single people or pity them because they are unmarried. Sometimes married people tend to do this because singles do not enjoy the pleasures of married life. However they enjoy the pleasures of single life that married individuals do not. Married people should not pressure single people to get married just because they are single. Paul wrote that it was "good for the them if they remain even as I [unmarried]."

7:9 However if a single person cannot or does not control his or her passions ("have self-control"), it would be "better to marry than to burn with passion" (sinful lust, cf. v. 2). "Burning" was

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 284.

²See *ibid.*, pp. 287-88, for additional support for this view.

a very common euphemism for unfulfilled passion in Greek and Roman literature.¹

"... it is one thing to burn, another to feel heat. Accordingly, what Paul calls burning here, is not merely a slight sensation, but being so aflame with passion that you cannot stand up against it."²

If a single person has very strong sexual urges that may very well drive him or her into sexual immorality, Paul advised that he or she would be wise to get married—if possible. Of course a believer should marry a suitable Christian mate (v. 39; 2 Cor. 6:14). This may be easier said than done, especially for a woman. The Lord has promised to provide the basic needs of those who put Him first in their lives (e.g., Matt. 6:33). I believe that He will do so, in answer to prayer, either by providing a suitable mate or by enabling the single person to control his or her sexual passions. In either case, He gives more grace (10:13).

No divorce for Christians whose spouses are believers 7:10-11

Some Corinthian spouses apparently wanted to abstain from sexual intercourse (7:1-7), but some others apparently wanted to end their marriages altogether (7:10-16).³ Again Paul advised remaining as they were, but he also allowed an exception for these people.

"While Paul displays ambivalence toward whether widowers and widows should get married (vv. 8-9), he consistently rejects the notion that the married may dissolve their marriages."⁴

7:10 The Lord Jesus Christ gave instruction concerning what believers are to do in marriage when He taught during His earthly ministry (Matt. 5:27-32; 19:3-12; Mark 10:1-12). Paul cited some of this teaching and added more of his own. This is one of the rare instances in which Paul appealed directly to

¹Keener, p. 63.

²Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 144.

³Keener, p. 64.

⁴Fee, *The First ...*, p. 291.

Jesus' teachings (cf. 9:14; 11:23; 1 Tim. 5:18). Usually he taught in harmony with Jesus without citing Him. Of course God's instructions through Paul are just as inspired and authoritative as His teaching through Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. This is one of Paul's few commands in this chapter (cf. vv. 2-5): "the wife is not to leave her husband" and "the husband is not to divorce his wife" (v. 11).

The main point of Paul's advice is that Christians should not break up their marriages (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:7-9). Leaving and divorcing (vv. 11-13) were virtually the same in Greco-Roman culture.¹ "Leave" (Gr. *chorizo*) was synonymous with "divorce."² In our day one popular way to deal with marriage problems is to split up, and this has always been an attractive option for many people. Nevertheless, the Lord's will is that all people, including believers, work through their marital problems rather than giving up on them and divorcing.³

7:11 Here Paul granted an exception to his rule of no divorce, and he prescribed what to do in such a case. If divorce occurs, the person who leaves (divorces) "must remain unmarried" (i.e., stay as they are) "or else be reconciled" with the former spouse. Paul phrased this as the wife's course of action, but the same procedure would be required of the husband if he divorced his wife. In Greco-Roman culture wives could divorce their husbands, but among the Jews they could not; only the husband could initiate a divorce (Deut. 24:1).⁴

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

Some of the Corinthian Christians appear to have been separating for ascetic reasons, namely, to get away from all sexual activity. In many

¹Ibid., p. 293.

²William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 899.

³See Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, pp. 398-401.

⁴Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 69.

modern cultures the reason is often the opposite: people often divorce to marry someone else. This was probably the reason some in Paul's day divorced as well. Regardless of the reason for divorcing, Paul commanded Christian husbands and wives to stay together—and to share their bodies as well as the other aspects of their lives with each other. It is impossible for a Christian couple to provide a model of reconciliation to the world if they cannot reconcile with each other.¹

No divorce for Christians whose spouses are unbelievers 7:12-16

In the case of Christians who were married to unbelievers, too, Paul granted an exception to his general rule of no divorce, but the exceptional condition is not the ideal. He also reiterated his basic principle of staying in the condition in which one finds himself or herself.

"... one of the great heathen complaints against Christianity was exactly the complaint that Christianity did break up families and was a disruptive influence in society. 'Tampering with domestic relationships' was in fact one of the first charges brought against the Christians."²

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

For his instructions to mixed marriage couples Paul did not cite a teaching of Jesus. We have no record that Jesus addressed the subject of mixed marriages, though He may have. Paul may not have known what He said or knew it and chose not to quote Him. Nevertheless the risen "Lord" inspired Paul's instructions on this subject, so they were every bit as authoritative as the teaching Jesus gave during His earthly ministry.

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

¹See Anderson, ch. 10: "Divorce."

²Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 70.

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

"The point is clear: in a mixed marriage the Christian partner is not to take the initiative ... in a move towards [permanent] separation [i.e., divorce]."¹

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

"Observe the large and liberal view which the Apostle here adopts. The lesser takes its character from the greater, not the greater from the lesser. God does not reject the better because of its alliance with the worse, but accepts the worse on account of its alliance with the better."²

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

Likewise the "children" in such a mixed marriage would enjoy special treatment from God. This special setting apart (sanctification) probably involves their protection in the home and the supply of grace needed for that sometimes difficult situation. "Holy" (Gr. *hagios*) means set apart as different—in this case as the special objects of God's care.

¹Barrett, p. 164.

²Lightfoot, p. 226.

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

"This verse throws no light on the question of infant baptism."¹

The preceding quotation is a response to some interpreters who have assumed that the children in a mixed marriage would have been baptized in water as infants since one of the parents was a believer. But that view is incorrect for two reasons: First, it assumes that the children were baptized as infants, which is very unlikely since infant baptism was not practiced by Christians in biblical times.

"The first reference to the baptism of infants is in a writing of Tertullian in [A.D.]197, in which he condemns the practice beginning to be introduced of baptizing the dead and of baptizing infants."²

Second, it assumes that infant baptism puts children in a specially favored category with God. But there is no scriptural basis for such a view.

7:15 This verse deals with the possibility of the unbelieving spouse departing. It is another of Paul's exceptions to his general rule of maintaining the marriage. If the unbeliever in a mixed marriage wants to break up the marriage, the believing partner should allow him or her to do so. The reason for this is that God wants peace to exist in human relationships. It is better to have a peaceful relationship with an unbelieving spouse who has departed than it is to try to hold the marriage together if holding the marriage together will only result in constant antagonism and increasing hostility in the home. However notice that the Christian does not have the option of departing (vv. 10-11).

¹Robertson and Plummer, p. 142.

²E. H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*, pp. 8-9.

Another view is that Paul meant that separation should be prevented, if at all possible, since that would disrupt the peace of the marriage union.¹ However this view presupposes that peace existed between the husband and wife, which seems unlikely since one of them wanted a divorce from the other.

When the unbeliever departs ("is leaving") the Christian is no longer under "bondage" (Gr. *douleuo*, lit. to be a slave). Does this refer to bondage to hold the marriage together or to bondage to remain unmarried? Many of the commentators believed that it means that the Christian is free to let the unbeliever depart, that he or she does not have an obligation to maintain the marriage.² Among these commentators some hold that the believer is not free to remarry (cf. v. 11).³ Most of these, however, believe that the Christian is free to remarry.⁴ The Greek text does not solve this problem. I think Paul was not addressing the idea of remarrying here.

I would counsel a Christian whose unsaved spouse has divorced him or her to remain unmarried as long as there is a possibility that the unsaved person may return. However if the unsaved spouse who has departed remarries, I believe the Christian would be free to remarry, since, by remarrying, the unsaved partner has closed the door on reconciliation.⁵

7:16 It is possible that Paul meant that Christians should not separate from (divorce) their unbelieving spouses because, by staying together, the unbeliever might eventually become a Christian (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1).⁶ He might have meant that the believer should not oppose the unbeliever's departure because he or she could possibly become a Christian through channels other than the witness of the believing spouse. Both possibilities are realistic. So even though we cannot tell exactly

¹Johnson, p. 1240.

²E.g., Robertson and Plummer, p. 143; Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 302-3.

³E.g., William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce*.

⁴E.g., Barrett, p. 166; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 70; Lenski, pp. 294-95; Lowery, p. 518; Morris, p. 111; and Keener, p. 65.

⁵See Robertson, 4:128. See also Appendix 1 "What ends a marriage in God's sight?" at the end of these notes.

⁶Barrett, p. 167.

what the apostle meant here, what we should do is clear: The Christian can have hope that God may bring the unsaved spouse to salvation. In the meantime the believer should do the Lord's will as Paul directed here. This verse is a positive note on which to close the instructions to Christians who have unsaved spouses.

2. Basic principles 7:17-24

At this point Paul moved back from specific situations to basic principles that his readers needed to keep in mind when they thought about marriage (cf. vv. 1-7). He drew his illustrations in this section from circumcision and slavery.

"Under the rubric 'It is good not to have relations with a woman,' they were seeking to change their present status, apparently because as believers they saw this as conforming to the more spiritual existence that they had already attained. Thus they saw one's status with regard to marriage/celibacy as having *religious* significance and sought change because of it. Under the theme of 'call' Paul seeks to put their 'spirituality' into a radically different perspective. They should remain in whatever social setting they were at the time of their call since God's call to be in Christ (cf. 1:9) transcends such settings so as to make them essentially irrelevant."¹

7:17 Whether a person is unmarried or married, or married to a believer or to an unbeliever, the Christian should regard his or her current state as what God has placed him or her in for the time being. The concept of being "called" is a way of describing Christian conversion (cf. 1:2, 9). He or she should concentrate on serving the Lord in that state rather than spending most of one's time and energy on trying to change it. Paul taught the priority of serving Christ in one's circumstances, over trying to change one's circumstances, "in all the churches."

"Paul's intent is not to lay down a rule that one may not change; rather, by thus hallowing one's situation in life, he is trying to help the Corinthians

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 307.

see that their social status is ultimately irrelevant as such (i.e., they can live out their Christian life in any of the various options) and therefore their desire to change is equally irrelevant—because it has nothing to do with genuine spirituality as their slogan would infer (v. 1b)."¹

This is the second of four instances where Paul appealed to what was customary "in all the churches" in this letter (cf. 4:17; 11:16; 14:33). He never did this in any of his other letters. He was reminding this church that its way of thinking, not his, was off track.

7:18-19 This principle of remaining in one's present state applies to being "circumcised" or "uncircumcised" as well as to being married or unmarried. Both conditions were secondary to following the Lord obediently. God did not command celibacy or marriage, circumcision or uncircumcision (under the New Covenant). These are matters of personal choice among Christians. One's ministry might be one factor, however, in his or her decision (e.g., Acts 16:3; cf. Gal. 5:6; 6:15).

The idea of becoming uncircumcised after one has been circumcised seems strange, but some Jews actually did this to avoid being known as Jews when they participated in activities at the public gymnasiums. They underwent an operation that reversed their circumcision.²

7:20 The "state" or "situation" (NIV; Gr. *klesis*) is the calling (v. 17) in life (station, position, condition) in which a person was at the time God called him or her into His family (cf. 1:2; Eph. 4:1). Our calling as Christians, which is to bear witness to Jesus Christ, is more important than our calling in life, namely, the place that we occupy in the social, economic, political, and geographical scheme of things.

"From this passage comes the common usage of the word 'calling' or 'vocation,' for our profession

¹Ibid., p. 311. Cf. Robertson and Plummer, p. 144.

²Ibid., p. 146. See also Keener, p. 66.

in life regarded as sanctified, as given to us by God."¹

7:21 Paul did not mean that a Christian should take a fatalistic view of life and regard his or her "state" as something he or she should definitely remain in forever. If we have the opportunity to improve ourselves for the glory of God we should do so. If we do not have that opportunity we should not fret about our state but bloom where God has planted us. We should regard our calling by Christ as sanctifying our present situation. In the context, of course, Paul was appealing to those who felt compelled to dissolve their marriages.

Another example of this principle would be if a person became a Christian while uneducated, he or she could still serve Christ effectively without a formal education in a variety of ways. Many outstanding servants of the Lord have done so. If he or she has the opportunity to get an education, and so serve God more effectively (hopefully), he or she should feel free to take advantage of that opportunity. Unfortunately some Christians put more emphasis on getting an education than they do on serving the Lord. This is putting the cart before the horse, and it is the very thing that Paul warned against here.

7:22 Paul's emphasis on the wisdom of the world versus the wisdom of God comes back into view in the section of verses we are considering (vv. 17-24; cf. 1:10—4:21). Priorities are in view. Does the Corinthian "slave" view himself primarily as a slave or as a freedman? (A freedman was a person who had formerly been a slave but had been set free.) The Corinthian slave was both a slave of some other person and the freedman of God. Does the freedman view himself primarily as a freedman or as a slave? The freedman was both a freedman socially but the Lord's slave spiritually.

"This imagery, of course, must be understood in light of Greco-Roman slavery, not that of recent American history. Slavery was in fact the bottom rung on the social order, but for the most part it

¹Lightfoot, p. 228.

provided generally well for up to one-third of the population in a city like Corinth or Rome. The slave had considerable freedom and very often experienced mutual benefit along with the master. The owner received the benefit of the slave's services; and the slave had steady 'employment,' including having all his or her basic needs met—indeed, for many to be a slave was preferable to being a freedman, whose securities were often tenuous at best. But the one thing that marked the slave was that in the final analysis, he did not belong to himself but to another. That is Paul's point with this imagery."¹

It is unfortunate that many Christians today choose to focus on their limitations rather than on their possibilities as representatives of Jesus Christ. We should use the abilities and opportunities that God gives us rather than feeling sorry for ourselves because we do not have other abilities or opportunities.

7:23 Paul's thought returned to the Cross again (cf. 6:20). God has set us free from the worst kind of slavery having purchased us with the precious blood of His Son. How foolish then it would be for us to give up any of the liberties that we enjoy that enable us to serve Jesus Christ. How ridiculous it would be to place ourselves back into a slave relationship to anyone or anything but Him ("do not become slaves of people"). This applies to both physical and spiritual bondage.

7:24 For the third time in this pericope (vv. 17, 20, 24) Paul stated the basic principle that he advocated. Evidently there was much need for this exhortation in the Corinthian church.

In our day, upward mobility has become a god to many Christians, and its worship has polluted the church. We need to be content to serve the Lord, to live out our calling, whether

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 319.

in a mixed marriage, singleness, a white collar or blue collar job, or whatever socioeconomic condition we may occupy.

In this section, Paul chose his examples from circumcision and uncircumcision, slavery and freedom. However the larger context of the chapter is singleness and marriage. His point was that those who were single, when God called them to follow Him, should be content to remain single, and that those who were married should stay married. Faithfulness to God or effectiveness for God do not require a change. Yet if opportunity for more effective service of Christ presents itself, one should feel free to take advantage of it.

3. Advice concerning virgins 7:25-40

The second occurrence of the phrase *peri de* ("Now concerning") occurs in verse 25 and indicates another subject about which the Corinthians had written Paul (cf. v. 1). This was the subject of single women. This section belongs with the rest of chapter 7 because this subject relates closely to what immediately precedes. Paul continued to deal with questions about marriage that the asceticism of some of the Corinthians raised.

The advantage of the single state 7:25-28

In view of what Paul wrote in this section it seems that the question the Corinthians had asked Paul was: Should an engaged girl get married or remain single? One might understand verses 17 through 24 as saying that no unmarried person should change her or his single state and get married (cf. v. 8). But this was not necessarily what Paul advocated.

7:25 The "virgins" (Gr. *parthenoi*) were a group within the "unmarried" (*agamoí*) group mentioned in verse 8. Paul used the feminine gender in five out of the six uses of this noun in verses 25 through 38. So it seems clear that he was speaking of female virgins in particular.

There are three major views about the identity of these virgins: One view is that they were the virgin daughters of men in the Corinthian church, and that these fathers had questions about giving their daughters in marriage. A second view is that the virgins were both men and women who were living together in a "spiritual marriage" (i.e., without sexual relations). A third

view is that the virgins were females who were engaged, or thinking of becoming engaged, but were experiencing pressure from the "spiritual" people in the church to forgo marriage. I believe the text supports the first and third views best.

The Lord Jesus had not given a "command" during His earthly ministry concerning this situation as far as Paul knew (cf. v. 12). So he gave his inspired "direction" as a "trustworthy" steward of "the Lord" who had received "mercy" to be such (4:2). Note that Paul appealed to the Lord's mercy, not His command. As in the first part of this chapter, Paul was offering good advice, pastoral council if you will, but he was not commanding that everyone do what he advised. Therefore to choose not to follow Paul's advice did not amount to sinning.

7:26 What was "the present [or "impending"] distress" or crisis (Gr. *anagke*) to which the apostle referred? It may have been a crisis in the Corinthian church or in Corinth about which we have no specific information. However in view of Paul's description of this distress (vv. 29-31), it seems as though he was speaking of the fact that we live in the last days ("the present form of this world is passing away," v. 31).¹ They are last days because the Lord's return for us could end them at any time.

If this is "the present distress" that Paul had in mind, we live in the same "present distress" as the Corinthian believers did. It is a time of distress because of the hostility of unbelievers and increasing apostasy (cf. 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3). Committed Christians constantly face opposition, antagonism, and stress because they hold values, morals, and priorities that the world rejects. The Apostle Paul consistently viewed the inter-advent age as a time of crisis and distress that is building to the climax of the Lord's return.

The last part of this verse restates Paul's basic principle of abiding in one's calling (vv. 17, 20, 24). "Man" (the NIV has

¹Barrett, p. 175; Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 77; et al.

"you") translates the Greek word *anthropos*, meaning "person."

7:27 Paul thought it prudent to stay married rather than to "seek" a life of singleness with a view to serving the Lord more effectively as a single person. Obviously it would be wrong to split up a marriage for this purpose. If an unbelieving spouse had abandoned the Christian, or if he or she had lost his or her spouse to death, a single life would normally provide greater opportunity for Christian ministry.

7:28 Nevertheless remarrying in such a case is not sinful. This statement seems to allow a believer whose unbelieving spouse divorced him or her to remarry. It also seems to allow widows and widowers to remarry. If a young woman ("virgin") decides to marry, rather than staying single, "she has not sinned." However the decision to marry may result in "trouble in this life."

For example, suppose a single woman gets into a position where an adversary may torture her for her faith. She could face that possibility more easily than a married woman could who has a husband and perhaps children for whom she has a responsibility. It is that kind of trouble that Paul evidently had in mind.

"One of the unfortunate things that has happened to this text in the church is that the very pastoral concern of Paul that caused him to express himself in this way has been a source of anxiety rather than comfort. Part of the reason for this is that in Western cultures we do not generally live in a time of 'present distress.' Thus we fail to sense the kind of care that this text represents. Beyond that, what is often heard is that Paul prefers singleness to marriage, which he does. But quite in contrast to Paul's own position over against the Corinthians, we often read into that preference that singleness is somehow a superior status. That causes some who do not wish to remain single to become anxious about God's will in their lives. Such people need to hear it again: Marriage or singleness per se lies totally outside the category of 'commandments' to be obeyed or 'sin' if one indulges; and Paul's preference here is not

predicated on 'spiritual' grounds but on pastoral concern. It is perfectly all right to marry."¹

Reasons for remaining single 7:29-35

Paul next called his readers to take a different view of their relationship to the world, since they lived in distressing times, and the form of the world was passing away. We too need this view of the world because we also live in distressing times, and the form of the world is still passing away.

7:29a While it is true that the time that a person has to serve Christ grows shorter with every day that he or she lives, Paul probably meant that the Lord's return is closer every day. However it is not the amount of time that we have left that concerned Paul but the fact that we need to know that our time is limited. Christians should live with a certain perspective on the future and, therefore, we should live with eternity's values consciously in view. We should be ready to make sacrifices now in view of the possibility of greater reward later (3:14; cf. Matt. 6:19-21).

7:29b-31a Married men should live as soldiers of the cross and be willing to forgo some of the comforts and pleasures of family life, but not its responsibilities, since we are in a spiritual battle. "Those who weep" should remember that present sorrow will be comparatively short (cf. Luke 6:21). Likewise "those who rejoice" should bear in mind that we have a serious purpose to fulfill in life now (Luke 6:25).

When we make purchases ("those who buy") we need to consider that we are only stewards of God and that everything really belongs to Him ("as though they did not possess"). The Christian should use the world and everything in it to serve the Lord, but he or she must not get completely wrapped up in the things of this world ("as though they did not make full use of it"). Therefore, whether a person is single or married, he or she should live with an attitude of detachment from the world. We should not let it control us, but we should control our use of it.

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 334. See also Lenski, p. 315.

- 7:31b The reason for viewing life this way is that earthly life ("this world") as we know it is only temporary and "is passing away." As the song goes: "This world is not my home; I'm just a passing through."¹
- 7:32a Paul wanted his readers to be "free from concern" about this present life so that their devotion to the Lord would be consistent (v. 35; cf. Matt. 6:25-34; Phil. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:7). He wanted us believers to live as eschatological people: people who live with our end in view. Our new existence in Christ should determine our lives, not the world in its present form. Buying and marrying should not determine our existence. A clear view of the future should do that.
- 7:32b-34 Comparing two equally committed Christians, an unmarried man (single or widower) can give more concentrated attention to the things of the Lord than a married man can.² A married man needs to also be concerned about his family responsibilities. This is true of women, and particularly virgins, as well as men. Queen Elizabeth I said that England was her husband.³ Some interpreters put more emphasis on the negative anxiety feeling ("concern") while others stress the positive caring feeling ("concern") that each person needs to show. Both aspects of concern are probably in view. Even though the unmarried state is in one sense preferable, it is not intrinsically better.⁴ Unfortunately some single people, who have more time to devote to serving the Lord, choose to live for themselves. But others, including some friends of mine, have chosen to remain single so that they can serve the Lord without marital distractions—and they are doing just that.
- 7:35 Paul did not want his readers to regard his preceding comments as an attempt to build too strong a case for celibacy, as ascetics do. He wanted to help his readers appreciate the realities of the single and married states so that they could express unhindered ("undistracted") devotion to

¹Jim Reeves, *This World Is Not My Home*.

²See Charles B. Williams, *A Commentary on the Pauline Epistles*, p. 125.

³Robertson and Plummer, p. 158.

⁴Barrett, p. 181.

the Lord. Christians have genuine freedom under the Lord to choose to be single or married. Similarly, believers have freedom to choose how many children to have, and when to have them, assuming that they are able to have them. There is no New Covenant legislation in this regard. However we need to consider life in view of the "present distress": the short time that we have left, as we consider our options.

In this section Paul counseled, not commanded, single women to remain unmarried for three reasons: the present difficult time for Christians (vv. 26-28), the imminent return of Christ (vv. 29-31), and the opportunity to serve Christ without distraction (vv. 32-35). Nevertheless single women have freedom to choose whether they want to get married, as do single men. Yet the realities of life in Christ, which Paul outlined in this pericope, need to inform that decision.

The legitimacy of marriage 7:36-40

This section concludes Paul's entire teaching on marriage in this chapter.¹ Some English translations reflect the belief that in these verses Paul was giving advice to fathers concerning their virgin daughters.² Other translations indicate belief that Paul was giving advice to men who were thinking about marrying virgins.³ I prefer the first view.

7:36 Paul urged "anyone" (father or fiancé) not to feel that he must keep his daughter or betrothed from marrying. "Let them marry." He might have been reluctant to let her marry because of what Paul had written about the single state being preferable (vv. 8, 28-34). Or he might have hesitated because of ascetic influences in the church that were due to a false sense of "spirituality," and possibly an overreaction to the fornication in Corinth. Or he might have felt that remaining single would be better for her in light of the "present distress" (v. 26). "Past her youth" means past puberty. In other words, she is of marriageable age. "And it ought to be so" means: since she is of marriageable age it would be normal for her to marry.

¹See R. C. Sproul, *God's Will & the Christian*, pt. 2, ch. 2: "God's Will in Marriage,"

²E.g., NASB; See also Robertson and Plummer, p. 158; Lowery, p. 520.

³E.g., NIV; NEB: *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*. See also Barrett, p. 184.

"Roman and Greek fathers had the control of the marriage of their daughters."¹

7:37 Likewise the man who decided to keep his daughter or betrothed single ("stands firm in his heart") should feel at peace about his decision. External pressure from the ascetic Corinthians, or from what Paul himself had just written, need not constrain him. "If he is not under constraint" in this context means "since he is not under constraint." He should follow his own convictions about allowing her to marry or not marry—guided, of course, by the Holy Spirit.

7:38 The decision in view is one involving a choice between the good and the better, rather than right versus wrong, or not sinning versus sinning. This is a good example of a non-moral situation. Paul addressed other non-moral situations later in this epistle (cf. 8:1—11:1).

"So at the end Paul has agreed, and disagreed, with the Corinthians in their letter. They prefer celibacy for 'spiritual' reasons; he prefers it for pastoral and eschatological ones. But quite in contrast to them, he also affirms marriage; indeed, he does so strongly: Such a man 'does well.' But there is one final word. These verses are addressed to the man; but in keeping with his response throughout, there is a final word for married women as well [in verses 39 and 40]."²

7:39 The remaining two verses conclude Paul's discussion of marriage by repeating that wives should not separate from their husbands (cf. v. 10). This concluding reminder is especially important for virgins who are considering the possibility of marrying. Again Paul referred to marriage as a binding relationship (cf. vv. 15, 27): "A wife is bound" (Gr. *deo*) to her husband "as long as her husband lives." Does this mean that even if he leaves (divorces) her the marriage tie is unbroken? That is what many interpreters have concluded. If

¹Robertson, 4:135.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 355.

that is the case, remarriage after a divorce or permanent separation, except for sexual immorality, would constitute adultery (cf. Matt. 19:9; Mark 10:11-12). In that case, one should avoid remarriage before the death of the spouse.

Another possibility is that Paul conceded, but did not restate, the fact that desertion by an unbelieving spouse freed the Christian, and he or she was no longer under bondage to the mate (v. 15). This applied only to mixed marriages, however.

Paul regarded death as the only thing that always breaks the marriage bond. This may imply that present marital relationships will not continue in heaven in their current form (cf. Luke 20:34-36). Jesus taught that divorce, except for sexual immorality, may lead to adultery if the marriage partners do not reunite but remarry someone else (Matt. 19:9). God may permit divorce in certain circumstances (cf. Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:15), but remarriage sometimes results in adultery.

When a Christian woman's husband dies she is at liberty to marry "whom she wishes," provided he is a believer (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14). The same freedom would apply to a Christian man whose wife dies.

"Long, long ago Plutarch, the wise old Greek, laid it down, that 'marriage cannot be happy unless husband and wife are of the same religion.'"¹

Surprisingly, Lightfoot took a different view:

"This expression ["only in the Lord"] is generally interpreted to imply that she must marry a Christian husband, if she marry at all. But the expression cannot be so pressed. It will only signify that she must remember that she is a member of Christ's body; and not forget her Christian duties and responsibilities, when she takes such a step. Marriage with a Christian only does not seem to be contained in the words,

¹Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 79.

though that might be the consequence of her attempt to fulfill those duties."¹

7:40 Paul expressed his "opinion," that a widow would probably be better off to remain unmarried, with a very light touch, one that he used throughout this chapter. This decision, as well as all decisions about whether to marry or not marry, pivots on a delicate balance. Paul later acknowledged that, given certain conditions, some widows would usually be better off to remarry (cf. 1 Tim. 5:9-13). For example, faced with the prospect of choosing between a fine Christian husband and a life of destitute poverty, it would probably be better for her to remarry. However if all other things were equal, the single state seemed preferable to the apostle. Notice that the issue is the widow's happiness ("in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is"), not her obedience. She will have "fewer distractions, and more freedom from worldly cares."²

Paul undoubtedly knew that he represented the mind "of God" in what he said. He simply expressed himself as he did in order to avoid putting too much weight behind his preference.

This chapter is one of the central passages on the subject of marriage in the Bible (cf. Deut. 24; Matt. 5; 19; Mark 10).³ It reveals that Paul was not a hard-nosed bigot and advocate of celibacy as some have accused him of being. He was extremely careful to distinguish his personal preferences and recommendations in non-moral aspects of this subject from the Lord's will. Even when the will of God was unequivocal (e.g., vv. 10-11, 39) he did not "pound the pulpit" but simply explained God's will objectively. May all of us who preach and teach on this sensitive subject follow his example.

B. FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS 8:1—11:1

The Corinthians had asked Paul another question, evidently in a combative spirit, judging by the apostle's response. It involved a practice common in their culture.

¹Lightfoot, p. 235.

²Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 168.

³See the bibliography of these notes for other helpful resources on this subject.

The commentators understand the situation that Paul addressed in two different ways. Some of them believe that the eating of marketplace food that pagans had previously offered to idols was non-moral (not a moral issue) in itself, but it was controversial enough to cause division among the church members. If this was indeed the issue that Paul addressed, it is only one of many similar "doubtful things." Advocates of this view believe that the apostle's directions to his readers here give us guidance in dealing with contemporary doubtful (non-moral, neither right nor wrong, good nor bad in themselves) matters.

Other interpreters believe that eating food sacrificed to idols involved a specific form of idolatry and was therefore not non-moral but sinful (cf. 5:10-11). They assume that Paul was responding to the Corinthians' objection to his prohibition of this practice that he had written in his former letter to them. This view sees 8:10 and 10:1 through 22 as expressing the basic problem to which Paul was responding. I believe the text supports this interpretation better than the former one.

"That going to the temples [the second view above] is the real issue is supported by the fact that the eating of cultic meals was a regular part of worship in antiquity. This is true not only of the nations that surrounded Israel, but of Israel itself. In the Corinth of Paul's time, such meals were still the regular practice both at state festivals and private celebrations of various kinds. There were three parts to these meals: the preparation, the sacrifice proper, and the feast. The meat of the sacrifices apparently was divided into three portions: that burned before the god, that apportioned to the worshipers, and that placed on the 'table of the god,' which was tended by cultic ministrants but also eaten by the worshipers. The significance of these meals has been much debated, but most likely they involved a combination of religious and social factors. The gods were thought to be present since the meals were held in their honor and sacrifices were made; nonetheless, they were also intensely social occasions for the participants. For the most part the Gentiles who had become believers in Corinth had probably attended such meals all their lives; this was the basic

'restaurant' in antiquity, and every kind of occasion was celebrated in this fashion."¹

"The problem, then, is best reconstructed along the following lines. After their conversion—and most likely after the departure of Paul—some of them returned to the practice of attending the cultic meals. In his earlier letter Paul forbade such 'idolatry'; but they have taken exception to that prohibition and in their letter have made four points: (1) They argue that 'all have knowledge' about idols [i.e., that there are no such things, so participation in these meals was not an issue, cf. vv. 1, 4]. ... (2) They also have knowledge about food, that it is a matter of indifference to God (8:8) ... (3) They seem to have a somewhat 'magical' view of the sacraments; those who have had Christian baptism and who partake of the Lord's Table are not in any danger of falling (10:1-4). (4) Besides, there is considerable question in the minds of many whether Paul has the proper apostolic authority to forbid them on this matter. In their minds this has been substantiated by two factors: first, his failure to accept support while with them; and second, his own apparently compromising stance on idol food sold in the marketplace (he abstained when eating with Jews, but ate when eating with Gentiles; cf. 9:19-23)."²

1. The priority of love over knowledge in Christian conduct ch. 8

The amount of corrective instruction concerning knowledge in this epistle makes it clear that the Corinthian Christians valued knowledge too highly. Paul wrote that the real aim of the faith should not be knowledge but love.

Knowledge and love compared 8:1-3

Paul began by comparing the way of love and the way of knowledge in order to show their relative importance.

¹Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 360-61.

²Ibid., pp. 361-62. Paragraph divisions omitted.

8:1 The key phrase *peri de* ("Now concerning"), as well as a change in subject matter, mark off a new section of this epistle.

Traditional interpreters of this passage have pointed out that in the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day pagan Gentiles offered sacrificial animals daily to various pagan gods and goddesses in their temples. Only a token portion went to the deity and was burned up on the altar. The temple priests, attendants, and their families ate most of the meat, but frequently they could not eat all that the worshippers brought. So they sold what remained to the meat market operators in the *agora* (marketplace).

There, in the open marketplace, the general public purchased the portion of meat left over from the idol sacrifices. This meat was very desirable and popular because the pagans usually offered only the best animals in sacrifice. However the butchers did not usually identify it as meat that someone had offered to an idol. Traditional interpreters believe that this is the meat in view in the discussion.¹ As mentioned above, I think eating in an idol temple is the main issue.

In dealing with this subject Paul began, as he customarily did in this epistle, by identifying common ground of belief with his readers (cf. 6:2; 7:1). "We all have knowledge" may have been another Corinthian slogan. All the believers knew that there were no other gods besides the one true God. This knowledge was leading some in the church to think that eating in an idol temple was insignificant. It probably led others to make no distinction between the kinds of meat they bought in the market. This was perfectly proper, as Paul pointed out later. Nevertheless knowledge that idols are nothing was not the only factor that his readers needed to consider in their relationship to eating this food.

The apostle established at the beginning of his discussion of this important subject that knowledge by itself "makes one conceited" (lit. puffs up). We have already seen that arrogance was one of the Corinthians' major weaknesses (4:6, 18-19;

¹E.g., Barrett, pp. 188-89; and Wiersbe, 1:594.

5:2). In contrast to knowledge, "love edifies." Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (13:4). Paul did not mean that his readers should abandon the knowledge that was foundational to their correct conduct. He meant that knowledge without love is incomplete, and by itself it will not lead to correct conduct.

"Knowledge operating alone makes it an engine of destruction (11 f.)."¹

8:2 Paul warned that "if anyone thinks" he or she has fully mastered any subject ("knows anything"), that person can count on the fact that he or she has not. The reason for this is that there is always more to any subject than any one person can ever learn or know. There is always another facet to it, another point of view that one has not considered when examining it, or more information about it that one is unaware of.

This person's knowledge is deficient in another sense: His attitude toward his knowledge is wrong. He arrogantly and unrealistically claims to have exhausted his subject rather than humbly realizing that he has not done so. To think one has fully comprehended any subject is the height of arrogance. Paul said what he did here in order to humble some of his readers. Some of them claimed that, since there are no such things as idols, it was perfectly obvious what the Christian's relation to eating meat in an idol's temple should be: one could do it or not do it; it did not matter.

"True *gnosis* ["knowledge"] consists not in the accumulation of so much data, nor even in the correctness of one's theology, but in the fact that one has learned to live in love toward all."²

"The distinction which it seems that these rather cumbersome clauses seek to express is between, on the one hand, the collection of pieces of

¹Findlay, 2:839.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 368.

information (*gnosis*) about God, and, on the other, the state of being personally, and rightly, related to him."¹

"A famous preacher used to say, 'Some Christians grow; others just swell.'"²

8:3 Paul chose one subject to illustrate the proper view of knowledge. Accumulating all the facts about God that one possibly could will not result in the most comprehensive knowledge of Him. One must also love God. If a person loves God, then God knows (recognizes) him in an intimate way and reveals Himself to him (2:10; Matt. 11:27). Consequently it is really more important that God knows us than that we know Him. When He knows us intimately He can enable us to know Him intimately. And an intimate knowledge of God is the greatest knowledge that a person can have.

Logically not only will God enable those who love Him to know Him better, but He will also enable those who love Him to understand other subjects as well. Paul said this in order to establish the priority of love over knowledge in determining our choices and behavior in various situations.

"... If a man loves God, this is a sign that God has taken the initiative."³

The content of the way of knowledge 8:4-6

Paul resumed his discussion of knowledge here after digressing briefly in verses 2 and 3 to comment on the importance of loving God more than loving knowledge.

8:4 In this verse Paul returned to the original subject of "the eating of food sacrificed to idols" in idol temples. Unquestionably idols are not spirit beings like God is, who is real. They are "nothing at all in this world." There is only "one" true "God" (Deut. 6:4).

¹Barrett, p. 190.

²Wiersbe, 1:595.

³Barrett, p. 190.

Every Christian should know that, and the Corinthians did. "We know that" affirms what they all knew as true.

8:5 Nevertheless for many people, the pagans and even Christians who do not have a correct concept of deity, there are many beings that they regard as "gods" and "lords" over various areas of life. The Greeks applied the term "gods" to their traditional deities, and the term "lords" to the deities of their mystery cults.¹ Today many people believe that various beings other than God control life.

8:6 For instructed Christians there is "only one God, the Father, from whom are all things," and "one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things." Paul of course did not mean that there are two separate God-beings or two Gods: the Father and Jesus Christ. These are two names for the one true God, who exists as Father and Son. The Scriptures establish the deity of Jesus Christ elsewhere (e.g., John 1:1, 14; 10:30; Col. 1:15-19; et al.). Paul did not argue that point here but simply stated the Son's equality with the Father within the triune Godhead.

The difference within the Godhead is this: The Father is the source ("from whom") and goal ("for" whom) of all things, including human beings ("we"), whereas the Son is the agent ("by whom" and "through" whom) all things and people exist. Since Paul's point was that there is only one true God, there was no need to complicate matters by referring to the Holy Spirit here. He mentioned the Son because He is the Christian's "Lord."

The criterion of care for a brother 8:7-13

"He [Paul] develops an airtight case based on a solid theological foundation (8:6). But then comes the *alla* ('however' [v. 7]), and the argument moves in an entirely different direction. At issue is the nature of the community. Is it a community where those with a correct theology can ignore others who have an aversion to eating the idol-consecrated food? What must prevail is not the principle of superior

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 373.

knowledge but the realization that those who lack knowledge are those 'for whom Christ died' (8:11). Edification takes precedence over freedom; the other person's advantage takes precedence over one's own (10:23-24). The christological epistemology [view of knowledge] of 1:18—2:16 applied to the controversy over eating food offered to idols calls for a community of sensitivity and love."¹

8:7 The traditional interpretation of this verse is as follows: Whereas every Christian should know that there are no other gods but the one true God, some of the Corinthians, because of their previous belief in idols, had difficulty shaking that belief. They still had needless false guilt ("their conscience, being weak, is defiled") about eating meat that someone had previously dedicated to a heathen deity. They thought that they were doing something wrong, even though they were not. This false guilt created a problem for them in their relationship with God.²

A modern equivalent might be a Christian who gets saved out of a pagan background in which he was spending all of his free time and money on recreation of various kinds. He becomes a Christian and realizes that recreation had been his god. As a conscientious Christian, he wants to avoid slipping back into that trap, so he avoids recreation. He may even become critical of other believers who enjoy the forms of recreation to which he considers himself previously enslaved. He has trouble accepting recreation as a legitimate activity for Christians. When he sees other Christians enjoying recreation, he tends to look down on them as carnal. He has false guilt about participating in recreation.

Probably Paul was describing a Corinthian Christian who would attend a feast in an idol temple in the same way that he or she had done before conversion (he or she eats meat "as if it were sacrificed to an idol"). That person would have pangs of true guilt, because by participating he or she was tacitly approving the worship, and consequently the existence, of the idol. Paul

¹Cousar, "The Theological ...," p. 99. Paragraph division omitted.

²See Frank Minirth, Paul Meier, et al., *The Workaholic and His Family*, ch. 7: "The Guilt Trip."

said the person's "conscience" was "weak" because, even though he or she intellectually believed that there was only one God, his or her emotions had not fully assimilated that truth. Evidently this was Peter's problem when he compromised by withdrawing from eating with Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-14).

"When Paul speaks of a weak brother, he does not mean one who might easily be influenced to do wrong, but one who is weak in faith, who is overscrupulous, who does not understand the meaning of Christian liberty, and who does not see that the eating of food which has been offered in the worship of false gods is a matter of moral indifference."¹

"In this passage, Paul is not dealing with people who are being legalistic. He's dealing with brothers and sisters who are weaker than other members of the body. There's a difference. A legalist may be well taught and, out of pride, may wish to squeeze weaker believers into a mold in an attempt to make them more spiritual. But weak brothers and sisters are not yet well taught. They lack deep knowledge of the faith. As a result, they are often horizontally oriented and are constantly in touch with the temporal. In the situation Paul addresses, the weaker brothers and sisters see idols the same way most people in the culture around them do (rather than as the vain and worthless nothings that God sees them to be). That shapes their perspective about how to behave around idols."²

8:8 "Food" does not make us more or less pleasing ("does not commend us") to God. In our relationship to Him we are no better or worse whether we participate or abstain from eating

¹Erdman, p. 79.

²Charles R. Swindoll, *The Swindoll Study Bible*, p. 1418.

food. However eating food in a pagan temple was something else.

"It is the clean heart, and not clean food, that will matter; and the weak brother confounds [confuses] the two."¹

8:9 The knowledge that some food is all right in itself—Paul was speaking of food that had been offered to an idol—is not the only factor that should determine whether we eat it or not. Love for a brother that our consumption of it bothers is also important. The weak brother is weak because his emotions have not caught up to his intellect. He may have been taught that all foods are legitimate for Christians to eat, but he has not yet really believed that. In this context "a stumbling block" is any barrier to another individual's personal relationship with God. The Corinthian Christians who had returned to the pagan temples for their feasts were disregarding how their participation was affecting their brethren who still viewed participation in those meals as worship of, or at least approval of, the idol.

In the United States the law permits a driver to turn right at most stoplights, provided there is no oncoming traffic. Turning right into oncoming traffic would pose a danger to others. The driver must make his or her decision to turn right, or to wait, on the basis of the welfare of everyone concerned. Just so, Christians must choose to exercise their liberty on the basis of the welfare of everyone concerned—as best we can determine that. Some Christians have found it helpful to remember the acronym JOY: **J**esus first, **O**thers next, **Y**ourself last.

8:10 In verses 10 through 12 Paul proceeded to appeal on behalf of the rights of the weak. Suppose a Corinthian Christian appreciated the fact that eating meat offered to an idol was insignificant in itself. He might accept an invitation from friends to share a meal in a pagan temple if he saw another Corinthian believer there. He would observe the cultic leader, who was conducting an idolatrous ritual, serving sacrificed meat.

¹Robertson and Plummer, p. 170.

Undoubtedly some of the believers in Corinth were attending these feasts and were encouraging other Christians to take this "knowledgeable" stand. This verse is one of the clearest evidences that participating in feasts in idol temples was the issue that Paul was addressing, rather than simply eating marketplace meat.

Some have argued that the meals referred to were spiritually harmless temple meals.¹ But this seems indefensible to me. They may have been spiritually harmless to the Christian who ate the food, but Paul's point was that they may not have been spiritually harmless to the "weak" Christian who observed and was stumbled by what he saw.

8:11 Paul explained what had taken place in such a situation. The knowledgeable Christian had, by his knowledge of what he considered legitimate, and by acting on the basis of that knowledge alone, "ruined" his brother's relationship with God. The word "ruined" seems strong, but Paul evidently anticipated the possibility of the weaker brother returning to idolatry, which might be the next step after participating in a feast in an idol temple. The apostle stressed the value of the weaker brother by referring to the fact that "Christ died" for him. Therefore the stronger brother dare not view him and his scruples as insignificant or unimportant.

"For one can imagine nothing more despicable than this, that while Christ did not hesitate to die so that the weak might not perish, we, on the other hand, do not care a straw for the salvation of the men and women who have been redeemed at such a price. This is a memorable saying, from which we learn how precious the salvation of our brothers ought to be to us, and not only that of all, but of each individual, in view of the fact that the blood of Christ was poured out for each one."²

¹E.g., Bruce K. Fisk, "Eating Meat Offered to Idols: Corinthian Behavior and Pauline Response in 1 Corinthians 8—10 (A Response to Gordon Fee)," *Trinity Journal* 10 NS:1 (Spring 1989):49-70.

²Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 179.

8:12 We Christians enjoy many freedoms in Christ, but we are not free to damage another person's relationship with God. By doing so we "sin against Christ" as well as another person when we put an occasion for stumbling before him or her. This is the very opposite of what God has called us to do, namely, love God and other people (cf. Matt. 22:37-39). The ultimate wrong of the person who lives only by his knowledge is not just that he lacks true knowledge, or that he causes a brother to stumble. It is that he sins against Christ.

8:13 Paul drew a conclusion about his own behavior from what he had said on this subject. And he undoubtedly said what he did in this verse to provide a model for his readers to follow. He would make love for his brethren the governor over his knowledge of what was permissible.

The Greek word translated "causes ... to sin" is *skandalidzo*. A *skandalon*, the noun form of the word, described the trigger on a trap in Greek literature. Paul viewed eating in an idol temple as a kind of trigger that might set off a trap that could ensnare a fellow believer. It could retard his progress and cause him pain. Paul was willing to forgo all such eating if, by doing so, he could avoid creating problems for other Christians in their relationships with God (cf. Rom. 14:13-23).

"You place a high value on relationships. You have a passion to engage culture. But should engagement with an unbeliever take precedence over love for another believer? I understand your heart. Make sure you understand God's heart. Weak believers exist everywhere. It takes time to develop maturity. Strong believers have a responsibility to them."¹

Causing someone to stumble ("to sin") in his or her journey to come to faith in Christ, or to grow in Christ, is not necessarily the same as doing something that others do not like. Someone may not like your choice of clothing, for example. But Paul did not mean that we should always try to please everyone by

¹Nyquist, pp. 115-16.

what we do. He meant that we should be careful that what we are doing does not hinder someone else from coming to know Christ or keep him or her from growing in Christ. Inviting an observant Muslim to dinner, and then feeding him pork, would be a modern example of what Paul warned against.

"I read an interesting story after the Texas Rangers won the American League championship title in 2010. Their all-star outfielder, Josh Hamilton has a history of drug and alcohol abuse. Now a Christian, he knows he cannot even sniff the stuff or he will be pulled again into its clutches. As you may know, it's traditional for a baseball team to celebrate after clinching the pennant by drinking champagne in the clubhouse. Hamilton's teammates knew this would be disastrous for him. So, in an intentional break from tradition, and perhaps contrary to most of their deep desires, they celebrated in the clubhouse with ginger ale."¹

The issue in this chapter is not that of offending someone in the church. Paul dealt with that subject in 10:31 through 11:1 and Romans 14. It is, rather, doing something that a fellow believer might repeat to his or her own hurt. Paul dealt with an attitude in the Corinthians. They were arguing for a behavior on the basis of knowledge—what they knew to be true. Paul said the proper basis was love—consideration for the welfare of others.

"Love is the solution, not knowledge, in all social problems."²

Our culture, wherever we may live, promotes our personal rights very strongly. This emphasis has permeated the thinking of most Christians. We need to remember that there is something more important than our freedom to do as we please. That something is the spiritual welfare and development of other people. As those to whom other Christians look as examples, it is especially important for you and me to recall this principle as we live. Our willingness to accept this standard for ourselves will reveal

¹Ibid., p. 114.

²Robertson, 4:137-38.

our true love for God and people. Our failure to do so will reveal not only our lack of knowledge, but more importantly our lack of love.

"As a final note to this chapter it should be understood that Paul did not say that a knowledgeable Christian must abandon his freedom to the ignorant prejudice of a 'spiritual' bigot. The 'weak brother' (v. 11) was one who followed the example of another Christian, not one who carped and coerced that knowledgeable Christian into a particular behavioral pattern. Also it was unlikely that Paul saw this weak brother as permanently shackling the freedom of the knowledgeable Christian. The 'weak brother' was no omnipresent phantom but an individual who was to be taught so that he too could enjoy his freedom (Gal. 5:1)."¹

2. Paul's apostolic defense ch. 9

The absence of the key phrase "now concerning" is the clue that this chapter does not deal with a new subject. It is a continuation of the discussion of eating in idol temples that Paul began in 8:1. Subjecting our freedom for the welfare of other people is not something that any of us does naturally. Paul knew that his readers would profit from more instruction on this subject. He used himself as an illustration of the proper attitude toward one's freedom and responsibility in Christ.

Evidently the Corinthian Christians had misunderstood Paul's policy of limiting the exercise of his activities in order to help others (8:13). Some in the church had apparently concluded that because he did not exercise his rights, he therefore did not have them, for example, his right to material support (cf. 2 Cor. 12:13). His apparently vacillating conduct also raised questions in their minds about his full apostolic authority. For example, he ate marketplace food with Gentiles but not with Jews (9:22;10:33). Paul responded to this viewpoint in this chapter. There have been evidences of the Corinthians' unwillingness to yield to Paul's authority throughout this letter (4:1-5; 5—6; cf. 14:36-37). This was an appropriate place for him to confront the issue.

¹Lowery, p. 522.

Apostolic identity 9:1-2

- 9:1 The apostle's four rhetorical questions in this verse all expect a positive answer and they become increasingly specific: "Am I not free?" Certainly Paul enjoyed the liberty that every other believer had. "Am I not an apostle?" More specifically, he possessed the rights and privileges of an apostle. The proof of his apostleship was twofold: "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" "Are you not my work in the Lord?" He had seen the risen Christ (Acts 1:21-22) on the Damascus road (Acts 22:14-15; 26:15-18), and he had founded the church in Corinth, which was his apostolic work (cf. Rom. 15:15-21). Clearly Paul's apostleship was being challenged in Corinth (cf. 1:1, 12; 4:1-5, 8-13, 14-21; 5:1-2).
- 9:2 Other people might have doubts about Paul's apostleship, but the Corinthian Christians certainly should not in view of his ministry among them. They themselves were the proof that he was an apostle. They were "the seal" that authenticated his apostleship. As the wax seal on a document, stamped with the mark of its sender, is the sure sign that the document did indeed come from the one who sent it, so the Corinthian believers' existence as believers testified that an apostle of Christ had been at work among them.

Apostolic rights 9:3-14

The issue of Paul's right to the Corinthians' material support underlies this whole pericope.

"Philosophers and wandering missionaries in the Greco-Roman world were 'supported' by four means: fees, patronage, begging, and working. Each of these had both proponents and detractors, who viewed rival forms as not worthy of philosophy."¹

Paul did not begin by justifying his renunciation of his apostolic rights but by establishing that he had these rights. He evidently had to begin there because the Corinthians were challenging those rights. They believed that

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 399.

Paul had worked with his hands because he lacked apostolic rights, not because he had chosen to forgo them.

- 9:3 Paul announced that he was going to defend himself against those who challenged his practice of forgoing his rights as an apostle ("those who examine me").
- 9:4 Paul used the series of rhetorical questions that begins here in order to force the Corinthians to recognize—they should already have known—that he possessed all the rights of an apostle. In view of the other rights that follow, Paul's reference to eating and drinking here probably means "to eat and drink" at the expense of others. It means to accept material support in his ministry.
- 9:5 Evidently it was customary for the other "apostles," and the Lord Jesus' physical "brothers," to take their wives with them when they traveled to minister. Apparently the churches that they served typically covered the expenses of these women as well as those of their husbands. Paul may have mentioned Peter ("Cephas") in particular because he had a strong following in Corinth (1:12). His references to "the Lord's brothers" in this verse, and to Barnabas in the next, do not necessarily mean that these men had visited Corinth. Perhaps the Corinthians knew second-hand about their habits of ministering.
- 9:6 The Corinthians had acknowledged the right of the other apostles to refrain from "working" to support themselves. Paul and "Barnabas" had chosen to work with their hands, at times, so that their material needs would not burden their converts (4:12; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-9; Acts 20:34). This is the only reference to Barnabas in this letter, so evidently the practice of Barnabas was well known in Corinth. Paul had stooped to the demeaning work (in the Corinthians' eyes) of making tents while he ministered in Corinth (Acts 18:3). Apparently some of the Corinthian Christians took Paul's action as an indication that he did not think of himself as worthy of support, because he was not equal with the other apostles.

9:7 Paul used six arguments in the following verses to support his point that those who work have a right to receive pay. First, it is customary. Three illustrations support the fact that Paul, as a servant of the Lord, had a right to accept support from those to whom he ministered. The Lord's servants are certainly not inferior to soldiers, vintners, and shepherds in terms of their right to receive compensation for their work.

9:8-9 Second, the Old Testament supported paying those who work. God made provision in the Mosaic Law even for the "oxen" that served people by "threshing" their grain (Deut. 25:4). In so doing, Paul said, God was teaching His concern for the maintenance of all who work and serve others, not just oxen.¹

"I heard a story about a preacher in Kentucky who drove a very fine, beautiful horse, but the preacher himself was a very skinny fellow. One day one of his church officers asked him the question (which had been a matter of discussion), 'How is it, preacher, that your horse is so fine looking and you are such a skinny fellow?' The preacher answered, 'I will tell you. I feed my horse, and you are the ones who feed me.'"²

"Keep in mind that, for the most part, the Greeks despised manual labor. They had slaves to do manual labor so that the citizens could enjoy sports, philosophy, and leisure. The Jews, of course, magnified honest labor."³

9:10 God meant to encourage human laborers with His command concerning animals that labored. He wanted human laborers to work with the "hope" (expectation) of pay. The people who profited from those services should consider those who served them worthy of support.

¹See Jan L. Verbruggen, "Of Muzzles and Oxen: Deuteronomy 25:4 and 1 Corinthians 9:9," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49:4 (December 2006):699-711, for a study of various ways Paul may have understood and used Deut. 25:4.

²McGee, 5:41-42.

³Wiersbe, 1:599.

"Not muzzling an ox ... was probably a proverbial expression concerning just remuneration, properly understood and interpreted as such by Paul. A modern parallel would be the adage, 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks,' which is commonly applied in contexts other than canine obedience."¹

"I heard Torrey Johnson down in Bibletown in Florida say several times—and I think it is a good principle—that you ought to support the place where you get your blessing. Suppose you go down to eat at a certain restaurant. You don't walk down the street and around the corner into another restaurant to pay your bill; you pay the restaurant that fed you. Yet many people do that sort of thing with their spiritual food. They get their spiritual blessings in one place, and they give their offerings in another place."²

- 9:11 Third, the basic principle of community reciprocity (the practice of exchanging things with others in our group for mutual benefit) supports Paul's point. Spiritual things are intrinsically more important than material things. The former will last forever, whereas the latter are only temporary. How much more then should those who benefit from spiritual ministry support physically those who minister to them (cf. Gal. 6:6). The question "is it too much" reveals that Paul was contending with the Corinthians, not just exhorting them.
- 9:12 Fourth, the fact that Paul had had a more important ministry in Corinth than other apostles did supported Paul's point. As the planter of the Corinthian church, Paul had a right to the support of the Corinthians "more" than any of their other ministers did. Yet he did not insist on ("use") this right. He chose rather to support himself ("endure all things") so his work of establishing the church might not suffer from the criticism that he was serving for the material benefits that he

¹Lowery, p. 523.

²McGee, 5:42.

derived from his converts and therefore hinder "the gospel of Christ."

9:13 Fifth, the usual practice involving priests further supported Paul's point. Paul appealed to the common Jewish practice, which was also prevalent in pagan religions, of allowing those who minister in spiritual matters to gain physical support from those they serve. The priests "eat the food of the temple" and "have their share from the altar." It is not just those who labor in physical matters that are entitled to compensation (soldiers, vintners, shepherds, oxen, plowmen, threshers), but those who labor in spiritual matters, as Paul did, are also entitled.

9:14 Sixth, Paul appealed to the teaching of Jesus to support his point: "Those who proclaim the gospel" should "get their living from the gospel" (cf. Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:7). That is, they should be materially compensated by those who hear the gospel.

"All too often, one fears, the objective of this text [vv. 3-14] is lost in concerns over 'rights' that reflect bald professionalism rather than a concern for the gospel itself."¹

Apostolic restraint 9:15-18

Having argued vigorously for his right to the Corinthians' material support, Paul now proceeded to argue just as strongly for his right to give up this right, which was his main point from the beginning of this discussion ("Am I not free?" v. 1). He explained why he had deliberately not accepted their material support. This pericope gives the reader a window into the apostle's soul. We see here what made him tick.

9:15 Paul had "used none of" the foregoing reasons to get the Corinthians to support him materially. And he did not want his readers to interpret what he had said on this subject as a veiled request for support. "For it would be better for me to die than that." He had made his decision to support himself, while he preached in Corinth, on his own accord; the Lord did not require this of him. Consequently he could take justifiable pride in his decision, as anyone who makes a sacrifice for the welfare

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 414.

of others can. "No one shall make my boast an empty one!" means: No one can take away my freedom to refuse payment for my services.

- 9:16 However Paul could not take justifiable pride in the fact that he preached "the gospel." He had no choice (freedom) about doing that. He felt compelled to do it (cf. Rom.1:14), because proclaiming the gospel was his calling (cf. 1:1; Rom. 1:1). Indeed he would be in serious trouble with his Lord ("woe is me") if he did not proclaim the gospel (Acts 26:16-18; cf. Matt. 28:19-20). And so will we, since our calling is to proclaim the gospel as well (Matt. 28:19-20).
- 9:17 If Paul preached the gospel willingly, he would receive "a reward" (pay) from the Lord. If he preached unwillingly, he would not receive a reward, because he would only be doing his duty as a steward (manager of a household, "entrusted with a commission"; cf. 4:1-2; Luke 17:7-10).
- 9:18 Paul's "reward" for preaching the gospel willingly was the privilege of preaching it without charge to his hearers. His highest pay was the privilege of preaching without pay.¹ This choice may seem as though it was Paul's decision rather than a reward from the Lord, but he viewed it as a privilege (reward) that came to him from the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 11:7-12).

Paul had all the rights of an apostle, and he was free to insist on them if he chose to do so. But he also had the freedom not to demand them. Relinquishing his right to support corresponds to giving up his right to eat in a pagan temple (8:13). In both cases it was the welfare of others that led him to forgo the right.

"Just as he has been willing to sacrifice his salary for the sake of the gospel, so these Christians must be willing to refrain from the use of such meat, should their partaking of it in any case lessen their influence with their fellow Christians."²

"In the previous chapter Paul was insisting that one must refrain from some things which are morally indifferent for the

¹Morris, p. 137. See also Barrett, p. 210.

²Erdman, p. 81.

sake of his weaker brother; here he insists that one must at times refrain for the sake of his work."¹

Apostolic freedom 9:19-23

The extent to which the apostle was willing to lay aside his rights comes out in this pericope. Since Paul chose not to receive pay for his ministry in Corinth he was free from the restrictions that their material support might impose. This left him free to become the slave of all.

9:19 Paul was a "free" man, not the slave of any other human being (cf. v. 1). Nevertheless, as the Lord's servant, he had made himself subject to every other human being so that he might win more people to Christ. Serving people rather than commanding them is the way to win them (cf. Mark 10:45).

9:20 It was the apostle's custom to follow Jewish ways when he was in the company of Jews. He did so in order to make them receptive to him and his message rather than antagonistic (cf. Acts 21:20-26). He did not do this because he felt obligated to keep the Mosaic Law ("not being under the Law myself"; cf. Rom. 6:14). The salvation of Jews was his objective in observing Jewish laws and customs, many of which dealt with abstaining from certain foods (cf. 8:13). He had circumcised Timothy at Lystra for this purpose, namely, more effective ministry to and among Jews (Acts 16:3).

9:21 Likewise when Paul was with Gentiles ("to those who are without the Law"), he behaved like a Gentile. This would have involved eating what they did, among other things.

The references to "law" in this verse may be confusing. In describing Gentiles as being "without the Law" Paul did not mean that Gentiles are totally lawless (cf. Rom. 2:14). He meant they were not under the Law of Moses like the unsaved Jews were (v. 20). Paul wanted his readers to understand that even though he did not observe the Mosaic Law when he was with Gentiles (Gr. *anomos*, lit. without law) he was still under God's authority (*ennomos*).

¹Ibid., p. 84.

As a Christian Paul was not under the Law of Moses, but he was "under the Law of Christ" (cf. Gal. 6:2). The law of God for Jews, before the Cross, was the Law of Moses, but His law for Christians, in the present age, is "the Law of Christ." The Law of Christ is the code of responsibilities that Christ and His apostles taught, which the New Testament contains. Some of the same commands are in the Mosaic Law, although the codes—the Mosaic Law and the Law of Christ—are not the same.¹

"This is one of the most difficult sentences in the epistle, and also one of the most important, for in it Paul shows how the new relation to God which he has in Christ expresses his debt of obedience to God."²

9:22 "The weak" are those who have extremely sensitive consciences in the area of non-moral practices (cf. 8:9). Here the apostle meant unbelievers, as is clear from what he said about them. Paul accommodated himself to their scruples. This policy undoubtedly led some people to conclude that Paul was inconsistent. His superficial inconsistency really manifested a more fundamental consistency: He did everything non-moral with a view to bringing people to the Savior.³

"By this phrase Paul means exactly the opposite of what it means in common speech to-day [*sic*]. He does not signify any weak compliance with the wrong actions and immoral practices of others. He is not approving the maxim: 'When in Rome do as the Romans do.' Paul is referring to matters of moral indifference, to weak prejudices, and to foolish scruples."⁴

¹Femi Adeyemi, "The New Covenant Law and the Law of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:652 (October-December 2006):438-52, correctly equated the Law of Christ with the New Covenant Law (cf. Jer. 31:31-34).

²Barrett, p. 212.

³See H. Chadwick, "'All Things to All Men' (1 Cor. IX. 22)," *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954-55):261-75.

⁴Erdman, p. 86.

9:23 The work of the gospel (the message of the Cross) was the great axis around which everything in Paul's life revolved. He made it such, in part, so that he might share in its blessings ("become a fellow partaker of it"). He proceeded to explain what this involves in the following verses.

Apostolic exhortation and example 9:24-27

This passage is transitional. It concludes Paul's defense of his apostolic authority (9:1-23) and returns to the argument against participating in cultic meals (ch. 8). Metaphors from the athletic games fill this pericope. Philosophers and other orators in Paul's world frequently used athletic metaphors to describe their labors.¹

9:24 The Corinthians were familiar with athletic contests. The Isthmian Games took place in a nearby town every two or three years.² They were second only to the Olympic Games in importance in all of Greece.³ The Greek word translated "race" is *stadion*, the word used to describe the standard 600-foot Greek footrace.⁴

Paul's emphasis in this verse was on the last statement in it: "Run in such a way that you may win." We should run our race in such a way that we will receive a reward from the Judge. In the Christian race we do not compete with one another for the prize. We compete with ourselves. The emphasis is on self-discipline, not competition. In a foot race only one person is the winner, but in the Christian race all who keep the rules and run hard will receive a reward (cf. Matt. 6:19-21; 2 Tim. 2:5).

9:25 The word "competes" is a translation of *agonidzomai*, from which we get the English word "agonizes." To receive the prize of our Lord's "Well done" (Matt. 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17) we need to give all our effort. We also need to exercise "self-control." Competitors in the Isthmian Games had to train for

¹Keener, pp. 81-82.

²See O. Broneer, "The Apostle Paul and the Isthmian Games," *Biblical Archaeologist* 25:1 (Feb. 1962):2-31; J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, pp. 14-17.

³Morris, p. 139.

⁴Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 89.

10 months.¹ An athlete in training denies himself or herself many legitimate pleasures in order to gain an extra edge of superiority. Likewise, as spiritual athletes, we may need to limit our liberty and exercise self-control for a higher goal.

"I think every Christian ought to work for a reward. We do not work for salvation; that is a gift given by the grace of God. My friend, if you are going to get a reward, you will have to work for it. If you are going to get a reward, then you had better get out on the racetrack and start moving."²

Winners in the Isthmian Games received a perishable "wreath" of parsley, wild celery, or pine.³ In the Olympian Games, the prize was a wild olive "wreath."⁴ In contrast, the victorious Christian's reward is "imperishable" (cf. 2 Tim. 4:8) and it lies in the future.⁵ How much more important it is to be willing to forgo our rights for the spiritual advancement of others, than it is to train for a physical footrace (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17-18).

BELIEVERS' CROWNS		
Title	Reason	Reference
An imperishable crown	For leading a disciplined life	1 Cor. 9:25
A crown of pride	For evangelism and discipleship	1 Thess. 2:19
A crown of righteousness	For loving the Lord's appearing	2 Tim. 4:8

¹See Findlay, 2:855-56; Morris, p. 139.

²McGee, 5:43.

³Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 89.

⁴Robertson, 4:149.

⁵See Wall, pp. 79-89.

A crown of life	For enduring trials	James 1:12; Rev. 2:10
A crown of glory	For shepherding God's flock faithfully	1 Pet. 5:4

9:26 In view of the comparative value of these rewards, Paul ran the Christian race purposefully, not "aimlessly" or halfheartedly. He wanted to gain a prize at the judgment seat of Christ. To use a different figure and make the same point: like a boxer he did not throw wild punches but sought to make every punch score. Christian service is not just activity. It is activity focused on a target, namely, the building of the church and the defeat of the enemy who wants to destroy people. It is the work of the gospel.

Good parents adapt their behavior to the limitations of their small children. For example, they often walk more slowly with a toddler in hand than they would normally. So Paul adapted his behavior to the needs of others, and we should too.

9:27 In another sense Paul viewed his "body" as his enemy. Our bodies are our enemies in the sense that the temptations to be lazy and to indulge ourselves come to us through our bodies. Paul recognized the need to exercise strict self-discipline. Obviously Paul was not speaking of self-discipline in the physical realm alone. He also had in mind moral discipline, and discipline in the non-moral areas of his life, including voluntary curtailment of personal rights and liberties if necessary (cf. ch. 8; 1 Tim. 4:8).¹

We must be careful not to confuse the fear of disqualification with the fear of damnation. Paul had no fear that he would lose his salvation (Rom. 8:1, 29-39). In the context what he could lose would be a reward.² How ironic and pathetic it would be for Paul to forfeit a crown by his own lack of self-discipline, or

¹See Jerry M. Hullinger, "The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:643 July-September 2004):343-59.

²See J. Smith, "Can Fallen ...," pp. 466-67.

by breaking the Judge's rules, since he had instructed others concerning how to win one.¹

This whole chapter is an explanation of the last verse of the preceding chapter. More generally it clarifies the importance of limiting our legitimate liberty as Christians for higher goals, namely, the glory of God and the welfare of other people.

"Almost in reaction against ... globalization, many people are responding with increasing nationalism, sometimes with almost frightening ethnocentrism. Christians are not immune to these sweeping currents of thought. They, too, can be caught up in flag-waving nationalism that puts the interests of my nation or my class or my race or my tribe or my heritage above the demands of the kingdom of God. Instead of feeling that their most important citizenship is in heaven, and that they are just passing through down here on their way 'home' to the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22-23), they become embroiled with petty priorities that constitute an implicit denial of the lordship of Christ."²

3. The sinfulness of idolatry 10:1-22

Paul continued to deal with the subject of going to idol temples to participate in pagan feasts in this section. In it he gave a warning to the believer who considered himself strong: the individual who understood and practiced his or her liberty in Christ. Such a person felt free to accept the invitation of a pagan neighbor to dine in a pagan temple (8:10). The apostle cautioned this group in the Corinthian church because, even though there are no gods but the one true God, the possibility of participating in idolatry was very real. He drew his lesson from the experience of Israel during the wilderness wanderings (cf. Exod. 13—17; Num. 10—15).

The tragic example of Israel 10:1-5

The point of this example is that God's people can practice idolatry, and persisting in idolatry has dire consequences. Paul stressed the similarity of

¹See Charles R. Swindoll, *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*, ch. 12: "Defection: Final Stage of Compromise," pp. 169-83.

²Carson, p. 116.

experience that the church, the Corinthian church particularly, and Israel shared by pointing out that each group had its own baptism and remembrance meal. The Israelites had five advantages, according to the following verses, that should have prevented their practicing idolatry.

10:1-2 Paul did not want his readers to overlook a very important possibility as they thought about eating meals in idol temples. He reminded them that their "fathers" in the faith, Israelite believers, were also "all under" the protective influence of God, which "the cloud" in their wilderness wanderings represented. The Corinthians knew these facts from the Old Testament, but they did not appreciate their significance sufficiently. So Paul proceeded to enlighten them.

First, "the cloud" that led them in their wilderness wanderings symbolized God's loving care and evidenced His prolonged supernatural guidance. Second, "they all" experienced a supernatural deliverance when they "passed through the sea" (the Red Sea). Third, "all" of them identified with ("were baptized into") "Moses," who was their leader and God's instrument in their redemption. Moses provided supernatural leadership for them under God.

Baptism is the outward expression of the believer's identification with the object of his or her faith (cf. Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). Consequently Paul could say the Israelites "were baptized into Moses," even though they did not undergo literal water baptism in the name of Moses. By following him and submitting to his authority they expressed their identification with him. The parallel with water baptism was most vivid when they went under the cloud and passed through the Red Sea. These experiences constituted a dry baptism for the Israelites.

10:3-4 Fourth and fifth, "all" the Israelites, not just some of them, ate the manna and drank water from a rock. They ate manna throughout their wilderness sojourn (Deut. 8:2-4), and they drank water from a rock at the beginning (Exod. 17:1-7) and at the end of it (Num. 20:2-13). This is a way of saying that God provided water for them throughout their wilderness experience. It is a kind of historical merism: a figure of speech in which two similar events separated by time and space—here

drinking water from a rock—represent the whole period that they enclose.

Paul called the manna and water "spiritual food" and "spiritual drink" because God provided them supernaturally, and because they have spiritual significance. They represent all that the Israelites needed to sustain them. Both the food and the drink came from "Christ" and point to Christ, who is the real Sustainer of His people (cf. John 6:35, 48-51; 7:37-38). The Israelites thought of God as a rock (Deut. 32: 4, 15, 18, 30-31; et al.). Christ, as "a spiritual rock," not some physical rock, accompanied them in the wilderness.¹ The Israelites' eating and drinking is similar to and anticipated the Christian Lord's Supper. In both events the participants are reminded of God's provision of salvation by partaking of food and drink that He has provided and that symbolize His adequate provision for them.

The Israelites were the chosen people of God in that past, just as Christians are the chosen people of God now. Not that the Israelites have ceased to be God's chosen people, but God has temporarily set aside Israel and is presently working with a new chosen people: Christians (cf. Rom. 9—11). God accompanied the Israelites and provided for them faithfully in the past just as He does for all Christians now.

10:5 In spite of these five blessings, which are similar to those that Christians enjoy, God was not well-pleased "with most of" the Israelites. He permitted none of the adult generation of military age, 20 years old and older, to enter the Promised Land—except Caleb and Joshua—not even Moses (Num. 20:12). All but Caleb and Joshua, from the generation that left Egypt, died "in the wilderness."

The application of Israel's example 10:6-13

Paul reviewed how the majority of Israelites displeased God and lost their privileges next. Though idolatry was the main cause of Israel's failure, as well as the focus of Paul's warning to this church, four other evil

¹See Findlay, 2:858.

characteristics of Israel also seem to have marked the Corinthians. These characteristics also resulted in the Israelites dying in the wilderness.

10:6 The experiences of the Israelites provide "examples for us." Their baptism and partaking of spiritual food and drink did not protect them from God's discipline when they craved "evil things." Participation in baptism and the Lord's Supper will not protect Christians either. We should never regard participation in these ordinances as immunizing us against God's discipline if we sin against Him. The Israelites had sometimes felt immunized against God's judgment because they were His chosen people.

The Greek word translated "examples" is *typos*, from which we get the English word "type." The experiences of the Israelites in the wilderness are types. They were early examples of situations that would recur later in history that God designed to teach His people lessons.¹

10:7 In verses 7 through 10 Paul cited four practices that got the Israelites into trouble with God. All of them were hazards for the Corinthians as well, since they fraternized with unbelievers by participating in their pagan feasts. They are all possible pitfalls for us too.

First, the Israelites participated in idolatry when they ate and engaged in "lewd behavior" in the presence of the golden calf (Exod. 32:6; cf. Gen. 26:8; Num. 25:1-3).² The emphasis is probably not on sexual immorality here, since that was Paul's second example (v. 8). By "lewd behavior" I mean behavior that involved idolatry that was inappropriate for the people of God. The scene on that occasion could well have been similar to what happened at the feasts that some of the Corinthians attended. There is a danger that we believers may compromise

¹For further information on types, see Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 196-219; Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 334-46; Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, and Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, pp. 126, 208-9.

²See Jerry Hwang, "Turning the Tables on Idol Feasts: Paul's Use of Exodus 32:6 in 1 Corinthians 10:7," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:3 (September 2011):573-87.

our commitment to God, like the Israelites did, when we participate in sinful pagan celebrations—including perhaps some forms of entertainment. We can make an idol out of just about anything (e.g., time, money, attention, etc.) by giving it too much emphasis in our lives.

10:8 Second, the Israelites practiced "sexual immorality" when they participated in one of the Moabites' religious feasts (Num. 25:1-9). Paul said that on that occasion "23,000" Israelites died "in one day." Moses, in Numbers 25:9, wrote that 24,000 died as a result of the plague that God sent to judge the people. There is, therefore, no conflict between the numbers, since they describe somewhat different groups of people.

Another explanation of this difference in these numbers is that the larger number included Israel's leaders and the smaller one did not. If immorality is only implicit in the record of the Golden Calf incident (v. 7), it is explicit in the account of the Baal Peor incident. Clearly this was taking place in the Corinthian church (5:1-5, 10-11; 6:9-10, 12-20). Some modern Christians have participated in sexual immorality that unbelievers have lured them into.

10:9 Third, the Israelites tested Christ by taxing His patience. The best manuscript evidence suggests that "Christ" rather than "Lord" is the correct word here, but the difference is not that significant. If so, Paul again stressed that it was Christ Himself whom both the Israelites and the Corinthians were testing (cf. v. 4). The Israelites dared God to live up to His promise to discipline them if they doubted His word. They continued to complain even though He faithfully provided for them. His provision of manna and water was not adequate from their point of view, and they despised it (Num. 21:5). So many of them "were killed by the snakes" (Num. 21:6). The Corinthians had given evidence of being dissatisfied with God's prohibition of participation in pagan feasts by opposing Paul's teaching on this point.

Likewise contemporary Christians are in danger of failing to appreciate God's provisions for them in Christ and thus despising Him. We can become dissatisfied rather than thankful

and content. Evidence that this attitude existed in the Corinthian church surfaces in 1:12 and 11:17 through 34. Perhaps the fact that some of the believers were participating in pagan feasts also indicated their dissatisfaction with the Christians' special feast: the Lord's Supper. We can also test the Lord by demanding that He perform for us, on our timetable and in the way that we want, rather than waiting for Him to work in His own time and way. "Name it and claim it" theology tends to encourage people to put God to the test.

"Indulgence in some forms of amusement, not in themselves sinful, and in practices which other persons regard as harmless, may make us discontented with our lives of more rigid morality, until continued dissatisfaction deepens into disloyalty and ends in actual defiance of God."¹

10:10 Fourth, the Israelites grumbled frequently against Yahweh during the wilderness wanderings. Moses recorded 10 separate instances of their grumbling in Exodus and in Numbers. However the occasion that Paul had in mind was when God sent fire that consumed some of the people at the outer edge of their camp (Num. 11:1-3). "The destroyer" that God used may have been an angel. The Septuagint translators used the same term, "the destroyer" (Gr. *olothreutes*), to describe the angel who executed the Egyptians' first-born on the night of the Exodus (Exod. 12:23; cf. Heb. 11:28).²

Many instances of the Corinthian Christians' dissatisfactions with God's provisions for them come out in this epistle. Not the least of these was their rejection of some of the Lord's servants who had come to minister to them. They looked down on some of them because they preferred some others (1:10—4:21). They did not appreciate Paul's earlier instruction to break off company with idolaters and the sexually immoral (5:9-11). Another example is the impatience of the "strong"

¹Erdman, p. 91.

²The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) that was made in the third century B.C. It was the version of the Old Testament that most of the Greek-speaking Christians used in the first century A.D.

in the church with the "weak" (8:1-3). Grumbling is a telltale sign of selfishness and discontent with what God has given us. Yet we too often grumble about our church leaders, what a preacher says, or our lot in life.

10:11 Having cited four specific examples of Israelite failure (vv. 7-10), Paul restated the general principle (cf. v. 6).

This verse testifies to the historical reality of Israel's experiences: "these things happened to them." These are not mere stories or legends; they are the factual records of real events.

The last phrase in this verse ("upon whom the ends of the ages have come") refers to the present age as the time of fulfillment about which the Old Testament prophet had spoken (cf. 7:29). We should be careful that we do not overlook the lessons of history, since we live in the last days.

10:12 Paul concluded with a word of warning to those who were overconfident that they were all right with God (cf. vv. 1-4; 8:4-6). The strong, who felt free to participate in pagan feasts, seem to be those that he had in mind particularly. Self-confidence could lead to a spiritual fall, as it had so often done in Israel's history.

10:13 But the apostle did not want his readers to overreact and become paranoid either, as they considered Israel's record of failure. Failure was not inevitable. The temptations that the Corinthians faced were not unique, and the Lord would give them grace to handle any "temptation" that they might face.¹ In the context, the temptations that Paul had just mentioned were idolatry, immorality, testing the Lord, and grumbling. Perhaps these were still in his mind, though the promise in this verse covers more temptations than these. This is a general promise of victory over any temptation ("No temptation has overtaken you").

¹For other verses dealing with God's part in temptation, see Exod. 16:4; Deut. 8:2; 1 Chron. 21:1; Job 1:12; 2:6; Matt. 6:13; and James 1:13. See also Swindoll, *Three Steps ...*, ch. 7: "Temptation: Vulnerable Flaw of Weakness," pp. 85-102.

God has promised to enable us to do His will in any and every situation, and He will stand true to His promise (cf. Matt. 28:20; et al.). He provides "the way of escape" with every temptation that He allows to touch us, namely, the divine power to overcome every temptation.¹ The use of the definite article "the" with both "temptation" and "way of escape" suggests a particular way of escape that is available in each temptation, namely, God's enabling grace. Paul did not mean that there is only one path out of a given temptation that is available to us whenever we are tempted. There may be several different actions that we can take to get away from a temptation. If we deliberately position ourselves so that we encounter temptation, and so put God to the test (v. 9), we are not taking advantage of "the way of escape." We may fall. Therefore we should "flee from idolatry" (v. 14; cf. 1 John 5:21).

"One of the reasons we yield to temptation is that we are like the little boy in the pantry. His mother heard a noise because he had taken down the cookie jar. She said, 'Willie, where are you?' He answered that he was in the pantry. 'What are you doing there?' He said, 'I'm fighting temptation.' My friend, that is not the place to fight temptation! That is the place to start running."²

The Corinthians were putting themselves in danger by continuing to attend cultic meals, which they needed to stop doing. Nevertheless God had made a way of escape open to them, as He had with Israel. The Lord's Supper, and the Christian fellowship connected with it, were His divine replacement for this idolatrous activity (v. 16).

This whole section (vv. 1-13) deals with the dangers involved in participating in pagan activities. Some of these activities are wrong in themselves because they involve idolatry, and Christians should not participate in them. If we do participate we need to be aware that in doing so we are walking on the edge of a precipice over which many other

¹Lenski, p. 405.

²McGee, 5:46.

believers have fallen, including the Israelites in the wilderness. We dare not underestimate the danger of the situation, or overestimate our own ability to handle it. We need to walk closely with God every day.

The incompatibility of Christianity and idolatry 10:14-22

The apostle proceeded to further warn his readers of the danger of idolatry (cf. v. 7). This paragraph concludes the long argument that Paul began in 8:1 concerning going to pagan temple feasts.

10:14 Formerly Paul urged the Corinthians to flee fornication (6:18; cf. v. 8). Now he concluded all that he said in verses 1-13 with the charge to "flee from idolatry," which is the worship of idols (cf. 1 John 5:21). He commanded his readers to use "the way of escape" (v. 12), God's enabling grace, immediately. He softened his strong command with an affectionate address ("my beloved"). Non-moral activities are all right for the Christian, but if they involve or lead us into idolatry we should avoid them.

10:15 This statement prepares for what follows. The apostle was confident that the Corinthians had the wisdom to understand the correctness of what he was about to tell them. He believed that they could make correct judgments about what they should do. Still, in order to follow his logic, they would need to use their minds. As we have seen, the Corinthians considered themselves very "wise." They therefore should "judge" for themselves that Paul was right in what he wrote. Note that Paul did not say that he spoke to "wise people" but "as to wise people." The Corinthians were not truly wise, as we have seen, but Paul spoke to them as though they were wise.

10:16 The apostle employed rhetorical questions again to make his point. He was setting the Corinthians up for what he would say in verses 19 through 21.

Most New Testament references to "the bread" and "the cup" in the Lord's Supper occur in that order. Here Paul reversed the normal order. He probably turned them around because he wanted to give more attention to the bread in the verses that follow. "The cup" may focus on the vertical dimension of

fellowship between the believer and the Lord, whereas "the bread" may focus on the horizontal dimension (cf. v. 17).¹ The pagan feasts also emphasized both dimensions of fellowship: with the god and with the fellow-worshippers.

"The cup of blessing" was a technical term for the third of four cups of wine that the Jews drank in the Passover celebration. At the Last Supper, the drinking of this "cup" preceded the giving of thanks for the bread (cf. Luke 22:17-20). However the Lord's Supper after this event only involved eating bread and drinking only one "cup" (cf. 11:23-29). "The cup of blessing" was also a common Jewish expression for the last cup of wine drunk at many meals. The Jews used it as a kind of toast to God for His goodness.² However Paul turned this around by saying that "we bless" the cup, meaning: we give thanks to God for the cup because of what it symbolizes, namely, our sharing in the benefits of Christ's shed blood (death; cf. 11:25).

"Therefore 'blessing the cup' means setting it apart for this one purpose, that it might be for us a sign of the blood of Christ."³

Likewise "the bread" used at the Christian feast, the Lord's Supper, symbolizes our sharing in the effects of Christ's sacrificed body (cf. 11:24). The Greek word here translated "sharing" or "participation" (NIV; *koinonia*) has been translated "fellowship" or "communion" in other places. This is why another name for the Lord's Supper is "the communion service."

"... eating from the common loaf attests and seals the union of the participants in Christ."⁴

"Baptism speaks of my death with Christ; the Lord's Supper speaks of Christ's death for me as

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 467.

²Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 94.

³Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 215.

⁴Findlay, 2:864.

the only ground of approach to and fellowship with God."¹

10:17 When Christians take communion they all eat from one piece of bread, which is symbolic of the physical body of Christ. In the early church believers apparently used "one loaf," the literal meaning of the Greek word translated "bread" in this verse (*artos*). Paul stressed that many people eating from one loaf symbolized the solidarity of our relationship as a redeemed community ("we who are many are one body") in Christ. (Paul developed the idea of the unity of the body more fully in 12:14 through 27 in his explanation of the diversity that exists within the unity of the spiritual body of Christ: the church.) The emphasis here is on the solidarity of believers, and the implication is that this solidarity rules out all other solidarity with idols and idolaters.

10:18 We can see the partnership of those who eat the sacrifices with everything that the altar stands for in the people of Israel (cf. Deut. 14:22-27). Paul's line of reasoning was proceeding as follows: Christians who eat the bread at the Lord's Supper thereby express their solidarity with one another and with Christ. Likewise, Jews who ate the meat of animals offered in "the sacrifices" of Judaism, expressed their solidarity with one another and with God. Therefore Christians who eat the meat offered to pagan gods, as part of pagan worship, express their solidarity with pagans and with the pagan deities.

"As in the Holy Communion, therefore, so also in the Temple services, participating in sacrificial feasts is sacrificial fellowship with an unseen power, a power that is Divine. There is something analogous to this in the sacrificial feasts of the heathen; but in that case the unseen power is not Divine."²

The "wise" person in Corinth (v. 15) could have replied to Paul's conclusion as follows: Yes, Paul, but you agreed before

¹Ironside, p. 295.

²Robertson and Plummer, p. 215.

that idols have no real existence, and there is only one true God. So why is going to a pagan temple and eating food offered to a non-entity bad?

10:19 Paul proceeded to clarify what he meant. He was not saying that sacrifices to idols, or idols themselves, were anything. That is, the animal sacrifices to idols were not in themselves sinful, nor were idols genuine entities. On this point he and the Corinthians agreed. Idols were only pieces of wood or stone, not gods with supernatural powers.

10:20 However the power behind idolatry is demonic (cf. Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37).¹ Consequently people who sacrifice to idols are really sacrificing "to demons and not to God." By eating the food that had been offered to idols in the pagan temples the Christians became "partners with demons." The cultic feasts were really sacrifices to demons, so they involved the worship of demons.

10:21 It is inconsistent for a Christian to partake in both the Lord's Supper and in pagan religious feasts. In the former, the Christian eats and drinks in union with Christ, and in the latter, he or she is in union with demons, who direct the devotees to worship idols. What the Lord promotes and what the demons promote are opposite. This inconsistency must certainly be obvious to "wise people" (v. 15). Christians have a unique relationship with the Lord and with fellow believers that the Lord's Supper symbolizes. It is therefore inappropriate for Christians to have a similar association with demons and unbelievers (vv. 20-21), which participation in pagan cultic events involves.

This verse, by the way, gives the name "The Lord's Table" to the Lord's Supper, "the table" being a symbol of fellowship.

"A table is the expression of fellowship, there is no place where we enjoy one another's companionship so much as there. We sit down to partake of the good things provided, and there is

¹See Merrill F. Unger, *Demons in the World Today*, pp. 147-73.

a feast of reason and a flow of soul, and we find ourselves enjoying fellowship together."¹

10:22 The Israelites provoked the Lord to jealousy when they joined in Moabite worship (Num. 25; cf. Deut. 32:17, 21-22). We are to learn from their experiences. It would be folly to "provoke the Lord" unless we were stronger than He is. If we provoke Him, and are not stronger, we can count on His chastening, since He is a jealous God.

The Corinthians were arguing for the right to attend pagan religious meals. They even viewed pagan temple attendance as a way of strengthening their weaker brethren. Paul responded that attending pagan meals was wrong on two counts: it was unloving (because it led weaker believers into sin), and it was incompatible with their solidarity with Christ, which their participation at the Lord's Table symbolized. He forbade any relationship with the demonic. The demonic is not as remote as some modern Western Christians would like to believe.²

4. The issue of marketplace food 10:23—11:1

As with the issue of marriage, however, Paul granted that there are some matters connected with idolatrous practices that are not wrong. He next gave his readers some help in making the tough choices needed in view of the non-moral nature of some practices connected with pagan worship and the immoral nature of others. Paul suggested applying a test to these decisions. He proceeded to explain that food, including food that had been offered to idols but was sold in the marketplace, was all right for Christians to eat at home. He himself had eaten such food (9:19-23), and the Corinthians had challenged him for doing so (10:29).

"But the real issues seem to lie deeper than the mere question of eating food. Both the nature of their argument for eating at the temples (8:1, 4, 8) and their criticism of Paul (9:1-3, 19-23) have revealed a basic confusion between absolutes and *adiaphora* (nonessentials). They had tried to make temple attendance an *adiaphoron*; for Paul it was an absolute because it was idolatry. At the same time they had confused the true

¹Ironside, p. 305.

²See Raphael Gasson, *The Challenging Counterfeit*.

basis for Christian behavior. For them it was a question of knowledge and rights (*gnosis* and *exousia*). For Paul it is a question of love and freedom (*agape* and *eleutheria*).¹

This section's chiasmic structure reflects Paul's alternating concern for personal freedom and love for others.

- A The criterion stated: the good of others (10:23-24)
- B Personal freedom explained (10:25-27)
- C The criterion illustrated: love governing liberty (10:28-29a)
- B' Personal freedom defended (10:29b-30)
- A' The criterion generalized: that all may be saved (10:33—11:1)

10:23 Earlier Paul had addressed the issue of Christian liberty and had said that "all things" were permitted for him but not all things were beneficial (6:12). Now he went further and clarified that "of benefit" means beneficial for others, not just for oneself. Thus he sought to bring the rights-conscious Corinthians to their knees.

10:24 The well-being of one's "neighbor" is of primary importance. The exercise of all one's liberties is of secondary importance (cf. Rom. 15:2; Phil. 2:4). The Corinthians viewed their freedom as an opportunity to pursue their own interests. Paul viewed it as an opportunity to benefit and build up others.

"Let's be honest. The exercise of your Christian freedom can be all about your own 'good.' It is something you want to do. And you know there are no biblical prohibitions against it. So, why not enjoy? Answer: it's not all about you. You have other believers around you. Will the exercise of your liberty build them up? Will they be edified? Think about that before you make a decision."²

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 477.

²Nyquist, p. 116. Paragraph division omitted.

10:25 It was not wrong in itself to eat the meat that pagans had offered in sacrifice to an idol. Any food "sold in the meat market" for which one thanks God thereby becomes acceptable for human consumption, assuming it is wholesome (healthful; v. 30; cf. 1 Tim. 4:3-5). This was a very un-Jewish viewpoint coming from a Jew.

We must remember that Paul was talking about distinctions based on spiritual issues. In Christianity there is no distinction between kosher (fit) and non-kosher (unfit) food (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:15). Paul was not talking about distinctions in food based on physical factors such as fat content, calories, nutritional value, and the like. The issue was whether certain foods commend us to or condemn us before God. They do not.

10:26 As he did earlier in this epistle and elsewhere in his writings, Paul appealed to Scripture for a supporting summary statement (Ps. 24:1; 50:12). This verse puts everything that God has created and owns on the same level. Paul applied this truth to the subject of food: no distinction between foods.

10:27 The invitation in view must be to the home of an unbeliever for a meal rather than to a pagan temple for participation in a religious feast. This seems clear from the next verse. This freedom to eat any kind of food must have been hard for many Jewish Christians to accept (cf. Acts 10:28; 11:2-3). Nevertheless this freedom belonged to them. It was wise not to ask the host if someone had offered the meat to an idol. A Christian might have naturally posed this question in the home of a pagan host or in the marketplace (v. 25). Not inquiring would remove the possibility of unnecessary guilt arising in the mind of an overly scrupulous believer.

10:28-29a A pagan host might warn his Christian guest that the food before him had been offered in an idol temple. The context (v. 27) and the terminology (Gr. *hierothyton*, "sacrificial meat", rather than *eidolothyton*, "idol meat," the standard Jewish and Christian designation) present a situation in which a Christian is eating privately with a pagan, but not in a temple, as in 8:10. Only in verse 32 does the broader principle of not giving offense to fellow believers arise.

The pagan's "conscience" ("the other person's") is not a reference to his convictions about what is right and wrong for himself but his moral consciousness.¹ He does not want his Christian guest to be unaware that he is being served food that the Christian might object to and might choose to abstain from eating. Another view is that the pagan host is trying to test the Christian's commitment to Christ, but this seems less probable. Pagans often associated Christians with Jews at this stage of church history, and many pagans would have assumed that Christians observed the same dietary restrictions as the Jews.

We might think that in such a situation Paul would have advocated exercising Christian liberty and eating the meat, but he did not. He advocated abstaining, not because such meat was out of bounds for believers. It was not out of bounds. Normally Christians could eat such meat. He advocated abstaining for the sake of the pagan's moral consciousness. Specifically, if the Christian ate the meat, the pagan might conclude that his guest was doing something Christians should not do. He would be wrong, of course. Yet Paul advocated not violating the pagan's understanding of what Christians should or should not do rather than have the Christian instruct the pagan about Christian freedom at the table.

"A present-day analogy may be imagined if someone with strong principles on total abstention from alcohol were the guest of friends who did not share these principles. He would be well advised not to enquire too carefully about the ingredients of some specially palatable sauce or trifle, but if someone said to him pointedly, 'There is alcohol in this, you know', he might feel that he was being put on the spot and could reasonably ask to be excused from having any of it."²

10:29b This question resumes the thought of verses 26 and 27. Verses 28 and 29a are somewhat parenthetical, being an

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 485.

²Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 100.

illustration. We could restate Paul's thought this way: Why should another person's scruples determine my liberty? The answer is: They should because his spiritual welfare is more important than your Christian freedom.

10:30 Paul brought into the picture his own conduct in similar situations. He had eaten non-kosher food with Gentiles, but in the argument preceding this verse he advocated abstaining from such food when eating with pagans (if the pagan identified the food as sacrificial to his Christian guest). The key, of course, is that sacrificial meat was only off limits for Paul when it offended the moral consciousness of the pagans that he was with, not all the time.

"The blessing offered at one's meal, predicated on God's prior ownership of all things, means that no fellow Christian may condemn another on this question."¹

The Christian can "give thanks" to God for whatever he or she eats but should limit his or her own liberty out of consideration for what other people think is proper. We do not need to alter our convictions for the sake of others, even if they speak evil of us, like the Corinthians slandered Paul (cf. 9:19-23). Nevertheless we should be willing to change our behavior for the sake of unbelievers.

10:31 What glorifies God? Consideration for the consciences of other people and promotion of their well-being does. This contrasts with the observance of distinctions between foods, the satisfaction of one's personal preferences, and insistence on one's own rights. What glorifies God is what puts His preferences, plans, and program first (cf. Col. 3:17). Paul not only advocated asking: Is this non-moral activity edifying? (vv. 23-30; cf. 6:12) but: Will it glorify God?

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 488.

"It is not what a man does that determines whether his work is sacred or secular, it is *why* he does it. The motive is everything."¹

"... God's own glory is the ultimate foundation of Pauline ethics (10:31)."²

10:32 To give no offense means to put no obstacle in the path of a person, be he Jew (cf. 9:20) or Gentile (cf. 9:21), that would hinder him from coming to faith in Christ. If the person is already a believer it means putting nothing in his way that would hinder his growth in Christ (cf. 9:22). It is not a matter of simply refraining from some non-moral thing that another person dislikes or disapproves of or of hurting someone's feelings.

Paul regarded three groups ("Jews," "Greeks," and "the church of God," i.e., Christians) as separate entities in this verse. He was probably thinking of three cultural groups rather than two cultural or racial groups and one religious group. (When Paul used the terms "Greeks" and "Jews" together, he was usually distinguishing them in term of their culture or language.) Paul probably meant that we should not offend unsaved Jews, unsaved Greeks, or Christians (i.e., saved Jews and Greeks). This covers everybody.

10:33 If we took the first part of this verse out of context we might conclude that Paul was a people pleaser (cf. Gal. 1:10). Obviously he meant that he did not allow any of his own attitudes or activities in non-moral areas to create barriers between himself and those whom he sought to help spiritually.

Paul tried to practice what he preached about putting the welfare of others first (cf. v. 24). "Saved" in this context probably includes Christians, and means saved in the wide sense of delivered from anything that keeps someone from advancing spiritually (cf. Rom. 15:1-3). Paul may have asked

¹A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, p. 127.

²Fee, "Toward a ...," p. 40.

himself: Will this non-moral activity profit others and possibly lead them closer to God?

"If you're seeking to engage the unbelieving world, you want to avoid offending them. Could the exercise of your Christian freedom offend an unbeliever? Possibly. Don't immediately assume they will embrace all you plan to do. Some may be unsaved but still have very conservative values. Would your actions offend them? If so, you've not moved them closer to Christ. You've nudged them further away."¹

"Christian freedom is not given to us for our own sake but for the sake of others."²

11:1 Paul recommended that his readers follow his example of exercising and limiting their Christian liberty, glorifying God, and giving no offense, as well as in other areas of their lives (cf. 4:16).³

All of chapters 8, 9, and 10, including 11:1, deal with the subject of the Christian's relationship to food sacrificed to idols. In summary, Paul prohibited going to pagan temples for cultic meals. However, he permitted the eating of meat bought in the marketplace under normal circumstances. If something is not sinful, it is permissible for the believer. But even if it is permissible it may be wise to avoid it for the sake of the spiritual welfare of others. The Christian should be willing to limit the exercise of his or her Christian liberty because of love for others.

The four principles that Paul taught were these: Balance your knowledge with love (ch. 8). Balance your authority with discipline (ch. 9). Balance your experience with caution (10:1-22). And balance your freedom with responsibility (10:23-33).⁴

¹Nyquist, p. 117.

²Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 105.

³See Robert L. Plummer, "Imitation of Paul and the Church's Missionary Role in 1 Corinthians," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:2 (June 2001):219-35.

⁴Wiersbe, 1:594.

C. PROPRIETY IN WORSHIP 11:2-16

This section and the next (11:17-34) deal with subjects other than meat offered to idols, but Paul did not introduce them with the phrase "now concerning." These were additional subjects about which he wanted to give the Corinthians guidance. He had evidently learned of the Corinthians' need for instruction in these matters either through their letter to him, from the messengers that brought that letter to him (cf. 1:11), or from other sources.

1. The argument from culture 11:2-6

Paul introduced the first of the two subjects he dealt with in this chapter, namely, the Corinthian women's participation in church worship, by praising the Corinthians. He did not introduce the second subject this way (vv. 17, 22). As with the other sections of this epistle, we can see the influence of Corinthian culture and worldview in this one, particularly in the behavior of the women in the church.

11:2 Paul commended his original readers for remembering his teaching and example. This chapter deals primarily with things that were going on in the meetings of the church, as the context shows (cf. v. 16). "The traditions" were "teachings" (NIV; Gr. *paradoseis*) that the Corinthians had received from the apostle. Some of these involved divinely inspired revelations, and others were just prudent advice (cf. 2 Thess. 3:6-10). The Corinthians seem to have been following his instructions, but not in the proper ways, as his following discussion makes clear.

"The traditions (as the other references show) were the central truths of the Christian faith, handed on at this stage (before the emergence of Christian literature) orally from evangelist and teacher to convert."¹

¹Barrett, p. 247.

Of course there were already a few inspired New Testament documents circulating among the churches by the time that Paul wrote this letter.

11:3 "But" indicates that things were not quite as Paul thought they should be. He began dealing with his subject by reminding the Corinthians again (cf. 3:23; 8:6) of God's administrative order. This is the order through which God has chosen to conduct His dealings with people and the order in which He wants people to conduct their dealings with each other.

"Christ" is "the head of every man" (male human being, Gr. *aner*). Second, "the man is the head of a woman." This Greek word for "woman" (Gr. *gune*) is very broad and covers women of any age, virgins, married women, and widows. Paul used it earlier in this epistle of a wife (7:3-4, 10-12, 14, 16). In this chapter it evidently refers to any woman who was in a dependent relationship to a man, such as a wife to a husband or a daughter to a father. The NASB translators interpreted Paul's meaning in a footnote as: "the head of a woman is her husband."

Paul probably did not mean every woman universally, since he said the male is the head of woman, or "a" woman," but not "the" woman. He was evidently not talking about every relationship involving men and women; for example, the relationship between men and women in the workplace. He was probably talking about male female relationships in the church. Third, "God [the Father} is the head of Christ" (God the Son). This shows that headship exists even within the Godhead.

"Submission in office, whether of woman to man or Christ to God, consists with equality of nature."¹

The New Testament uses the term "head" (Gr. *kephale*) to describe headship in two ways. Sometimes it describes origin (source), but more often it describes authority (leader), especially when it is used in the context of human

¹Findlay, 2:872.

relationships.¹ Some scholars favor one interpretation (source) and others the other (leader).² Both meanings are true to reality, so it is difficult to decide what Paul meant here.

In favor of the origin view, it is true that Christ created mankind (Gen. 2:7; Col. 1:16), Eve came from Adam (Gen. 2:22), and Christ came from the Father—in the Incarnation to provide redemption (John 16:27-28). In favor of the authority view, humanity is under Christ's authority (John 17:2), God created woman under man's authority (Gen. 2:18), and the Son is under the Father's authority (John 8:29). The idea of origin is more fundamental than that of authority. Also the word "head" occurs later in this passage with the idea of origin (vv. 8, 12), so origin may be the preferable idea here too.³ This could be a situation in which Paul had both ideas in mind.⁴

11:4 In this verse Paul used the word "head" twice. In the first instance he clearly meant the man's physical head (his skull). In the second instance he could have meant his physical head again. However, in view of what he just said (v. 3) and would say, he probably meant spiritual head: Jesus Christ.⁵

In Roman, Greek, and Jewish cultures men did not normally cover their heads, but women did. However in Roman and Greek cultures both men and women covered their heads as signs of shame and mourning.⁶ It was later, in the Rabbinic

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 1928.

²For helpful studies, see Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of *kephale* in the Pauline Epistles," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS5 (1954):211-15; Paul S. Fiddes, "'Woman's Head Is Man:' A Doctrinal Reflection upon a Pauline Text," *Baptist Quarterly* 31:8 (October 1986):370-83; Wayne Grudem, "Does *kephale* ('Head') Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A survey of 2,336 Examples," *Trinity Journal* 6NS (1985):38-59; idem. "The Meaning of *kephale*: A Response to Recent Studies," *Trinity Journal* 11NS (1990):3-72; and idem, "The Meaning of *kephale* ('head'): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:1 (March 2001):25-65.

³Barrett, p. 248.

⁴See Lucy Mabery-Foster, *Women and the Church*, pp. 37-40, for defense of the authority view. Her chapter 5: "What Is the Role of Women according to the New Testament?" deals with all the relevant texts.

⁵Alford, 2:2:565.

⁶Keener, p. 91.

Period (roughly from the first century A.D. to A.D. 500), that many Jewish men began to cover their heads when praying, and in fact, most of the time.¹ In Christian worship, the men did not wear head-coverings in Paul's day, but the women normally did.

Paul's reference to "praying or prophesying" seems to set his instructions in the context of the church at public worship.

"The words 'praying and prophesying' include all the ordinary parts and acts of *public* worship."²

Others have argued that 11:2 through 16 does not address congregational settings.³

"Praying" involves expressing one's thoughts and feelings to God and, in a more restricted sense, asking things of God.⁴ "Prophesying" might involve any of four things: Prophets (and prophetesses) led God's people in worship (cf. Exod. 15:20-21; 1 Chron. 25:1). Second, they foretold future events pertaining especially to the kingdom of God (Matt. 11:13; Acts 2:17-18; 21:9). Third, they declared new revelation from God, though not necessarily having to do with future events (Matt. 26:68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:64; cf. 7:39; John 4:19). Fourth, they could, under divine impulse, utter some lofty statement or message that would glorify God (Luke 1:67; Acts 9:6; cf. 1 Chron. 25:1), or a word of instruction, refutation, reproof, admonition, or comfort for others (1 Cor. 13:9; 14:1, 3-5, 24, 31, 39). This last type of prophecy did not contain a new revelation or a prediction involving the future. It was what we call "preaching" today—though not expository teaching, which

¹Victor S. Appell, "Why do Jews wear head coverings?" <https://reformjudaism.org/learning/answers-jewish-questions/why-do-jews-wear-head-coverings>.

²W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 1:34.

³E.g., Harold R. Holmyard III, "Does 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Refer to Women Praying and Prophesying in Church?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:616 (October-December 1997):461-72; J. N. Darby, *Notes of Readings on the Epistles to the Corinthians*, pp. 85-87; Olshausen, p. 174; C. T. Ellicott, *St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 202; W. E. Vine, *1 Corinthians*, p. 147; J. A. Beet, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 181; Lenski, pp. 436-37; Grosheide, pp. 341-42; and J. MacArthur Jr., *1 Corinthians*, p. 256.

⁴See Thomas L. Constable, *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer*.

involved explaining Scripture. This the New Testament calls "teaching."¹ The fourth activity is what seems to be in view in other references to prophesying in this epistle, and it suits the context here as well.

"Ministers ... are not prophets. A broad distinction is made both in the Old and New Testaments between prophets and teachers. The former were inspired, the latter were not. Any man receiving a revelation from God, or inspired in the communication of it, is, in the Scriptures, called a prophet."²

Praying and prophesying were two major features of Christian worship services in Paul's day (cf. Acts 2:42).

11:5a The opposite condition from that described in verse 4 existed when women prayed or prophesied in the church meetings. "Every woman" who had her physical "head" uncovered thereby disgraced her spiritual "head," namely, her husband (if married) or her father (if single; v. 3).

What did Paul mean when he described a woman's head as "uncovered"? There have been three major explanations: First, he may have meant that her head lacked some type of external cover, such as a birka or a shawl. Second, he could have meant that she had short hair that did not cover her head as completely as long hair. Third, he may have meant that she had let her hair down rather than leaving it up on her head. In Corinthian culture it was customary for women to wear their

¹A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "propheteuo," p. 553. See also Wayne A. Grudem, "Prophecy—Yes, But Teaching—No: Paul's Consistent Advocacy of Women's Participation Without Governing Authority," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30:1 (March 1987):11-23; and idem, "Why Christians Can Still Prophesy," *Christianity Today*, September 16, 1988, pp. 29-31, 34-35. Grudem sought a middle position between the charismatic and non-charismatic interpretations of the gift of prophecy. See his *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* and *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Robert L. Thomas, "Prophecy Rediscovered? A Review of *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:593 (January-March 1992):83-96, gave a helpful critique of Grudem's views.

²Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:462.

hair up (carefully arranged on top or down the back) when they went out in public.

Probably Paul meant that she did not have an external covering on her head (view one).¹ The woman would dishonor her man by participating in public worship as he did, namely, with head uncovered.

Christian women typically wore a head-covering in the church meetings. This was not a stylish hat, skullcap, veil, shawl, or inconspicuous doily, as some western women do today in church. It was a cloth that covered her entire head and concealed her hair.² Some scholars believe that it even covered her face.

"Her face was hidden by an arrangement of two head veils, a head-band on the forehead with bands to the chin, and a hairnet with ribbons and knots, so that her features could not be recognized."³

This would have been similar to what some modern Islamic women wear: a head-covering (Arabic *hijab*) and a face-veil (Arabic *niqab*). Conservative Islamic women still veil themselves similarly when they go out in public by wearing a *birka*. In Paul's culture most women, Christians and non-Christians alike, wore some kind of head-covering whenever they went out in public.

Probably the issue in the Corinthian church that Paul was addressing was that certain "wise," "spiritual," so-called liberated women had stopped wearing this covering in the church meetings. Paul had previously written that in Christ, males and females are equal before God (Gal. 3:28). He meant they are equal in their standing before God. This teaching, combined with the Corinthians' carnal tendencies, were evidently the root of the problem.

¹See Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 495-97, 509-10.

²Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 104.

³Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 359.

"It seems that the Corinthian slogan, 'everything is permissible,' had been applied to meetings of the church as well, and the Corinthian women had expressed that principle by throwing off their distinguishing dress. More importantly they seem to have rejected the concept of subordination within the church (and perhaps in society) and with it any cultural symbol (e.g., a head-covering) which might have been attached to it. According to Paul, for a woman to throw off the covering was an act not of liberation but of degradation."¹

In 1 Timothy 2:12 Paul wrote, "I do not allow a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet." In that passage I believe he meant that women should not take the role of primary teacher in the church. The preceding verse says, "A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness." Paul allowed women to pray and prophesy, but he wanted the men to be the main teachers in the assembly.

11:5b-6 A woman who cut her hair short ("whose head is shaved") in Greco-Roman culture usually did so because she wanted to look like a man. This resulted in the blurring of the relationship between men and women, particularly the sexual distinctions. Men typically wore their hair shorter, and women wore theirs longer. If a woman cut her hair short, it indicated that she wanted to be regarded as and treated as a man. Not covering her head made the same statement in that society, or at least that she wanted to be recognized as a "liberated" woman.

"The prostitutes wore their hair very short, and they did not wear a head-covering in public. Their hairstyle and manner announced to others just what they were and what they were offering. ... In

¹Lowery, p. 529. See also H. Wayne House, "Should a Woman Prophecy or Preach before Men?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:578 (April-June 1988):141-61, who concluded that she should not.

Jewish law, a woman proved guilty of adultery had her hair cut off (Num. 5:11-31)."¹

"As far as prostitutes are concerned, all the evidence that has been discovered proves that only a few of the very lowest type had shorn or shaven heads. As a class these women endeavored to make themselves as attractive as possible and did their utmost to beautify also their hair."²

It was a "disgraceful" thing for a woman not to cover her head in the early New Testament churches. Such an act made a statement that she was repudiating her position as a woman. It was not so much a repudiation of her submission to her husband or father as it was a repudiation of her origin—as being a woman who had come from man (v. 3). The issue again appears to be primarily origin throughout the passage, not primarily authority. Obviously a woman who repudiated her origin as a woman might also repudiate her authority to function under her male head. However in this passage Paul seems to have been dealing with the more fundamental issue of origin. He argued for authority on the basis of origin.

"The veil is, in fact, the beautiful ladies' strength and defense. Modestly veiled, she appears any where and every where in perfect safety. She is held inviolate by a sensitive and most jealous public sentiment, and no man insults her but at the risk of being torn in pieces by an infuriated mob; but without the veil she is a weak, helpless thing, at the mercy of every brute who may choose to abuse her. The veil is therefore the virtuous woman's 'power [authority],' and whenever she appears in public she ought to have this 'power on her head;' in church, 'because of

¹Wiersbe, 1:604. Paragraph division omitted.

²Lenski, p. 439.

the angels;¹ that is, the messengers and ministers, as I suppose."¹

Today it is not shameful for a woman to have short hair, but it was in Paul's day. There are many short hairstyles that no one regards as disgraceful. However in Paul's culture short hair for a woman represented rebellion, and people considered it "disgraceful." Paul used the common reaction to women's short hair in his day to urge his female readers to wear a head-covering. His point was that, since it was shameful for a woman to have short hair, it was also shameful for her to have her head uncovered when she prayed or prophesied in church meetings.

"To sum up, the one guiding principle is *to prepon*, propriety; if that is preserved, Paul asks for no more."²

Must a Christian woman cover her head in church meetings today? I think not. Covering the head and wearing short hair do not normally mean the same thing in modern times, at least in the West, as they did in Paul's culture. If he were writing to a western church today, for example, I do not believe Paul would have said it is a shameful thing for a woman to have short hair. Therefore I do not think he would have said she ought to cover her head.³

Covering the head was a sign of acknowledgement of origin in Paul's day, which implied some acknowledgement of authority, but it is not today typically. Today there is no item of clothing that makes such a statement, nor does the length of a woman's hair necessarily. Perhaps her willingness to take her husband's family name when she marries does.⁴ Or her willingness to wear a wedding ring might, or the way she

¹Thomson, 1:35.

²Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 231.

³See Williams, p. 140; G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 474; idem, *The Corinthian ...*, p. 136. On the subject of whether biblical directives are limited to the culture addressed or are transcultural, see Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, pp. 90-97.

⁴See Ironside, pp. 330-31.

speaks about her husband to others, or her modest dress, but not necessarily. A woman's whole personal demeanor, especially how she views herself as a woman, reveals this about her.¹

"Although various Christian groups have fostered the practice of some sort of head covering for women in the assembled church, the difficulties with the practice are obvious. For Paul the issue was directly tied to a cultural shame that scarcely prevails in most cultures today. Furthermore, we simply do not know what the practice was that they were abusing. Thus literal 'obedience' to the text is often merely symbolic. Unfortunately, the symbol that tends to be reinforced is the subordination of women, which is hardly Paul's point. Furthermore, it would seem that in cultures where women's heads are seldom covered, the enforcement of such in the church turns Paul's point on its head."²

2. The argument from creation 11:7-12

Paul proceeded with a second supporting argument in order to correct the Corinthians' perversion regarding women's head-coverings.

11:7 Men "should not" cover their heads in Christian worship because they are "the image and glory of God." Even though Paul referred to man being the image and glory of God, his primary point was that man is the glory of God. His reference to man as the image of God clearly goes back to Genesis 1:26 through 28, but there "glory" does not appear. "Glory" is

¹For defenses of the view that women should wear head coverings today in church meetings, see Bruce K. Waltke, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:537 (January-March 1978):46-57; Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Annotated Bible*, 3:2:120; Ironside, pp. 323-40; and S. L. Johnson Jr., pp. 1247-48.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 512. See also David K. Lowery, "The Head Covering and the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:2-34," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:570 (April-June 1986):159; Kenneth T. Wilson, "Should Women Wear Headcoverings?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:592 (October-December 1991):442-62; and Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 110.

Paul's word, his reflection on the creation of man. This is the word that he proceeded to use to contrast man and woman.

Notice that Paul did not say that the woman is to cover her head because she is the glory of man. Instead he proceeded to describe what being man's glory means. A subordinate glorifies the one responsible for originating him or her just by being in a subordinate position. Today we might say that a newborn child brings glory to his or her parents, because they are the individuals through whom the child came into existence.

"... he [Paul] says that woman is the glory of man—not his image, for she too shares the image of God, and is not (as some commentators have thought) more remote from God than is man."¹

11:8 Woman is the glory of man, first, because she came (originated) from him in creation. As Adam glorified God by being the product of His creation, so Eve glorified Adam because she came from him. The female sex did not produce the male sex, but the first woman came from the first man. God formed Eve out of a part of Adam whom He created first (Gen. 2:21-22).

11:9 Furthermore woman is the glory of man because God created Eve to complete Adam. God did not create the man as a companion for the woman, but He created the woman for the man's sake (Gen. 2:18, 20).²

"Man, then, was God's authoritative representative who found in woman a divinely made ally in fulfilling this role (Gen. 2:18-24). In this sense she as a wife is the glory of man, her husband."³

¹Barrett, p. 249.

²See Benjamin L. Merkle, "Paul's Arguments from Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 and 1 Timothy 2:13-14: An Apparent Inconsistency Answered," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49:3 (September 2006):527-48.

³Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 529.

When Adam saw Eve for the first time, he gloried in her (Gen. 2:23). Neither verse 8 nor verse 9 refers to the subordination of woman under man, though many interpreters have read this into the text. Rather they refer to her origin as being from man.

11:10 Paul drew a conclusion ("Therefore") from what he had already said in verses 7 through 9, and he gave a supporting reason for his conclusion.

The NASB, NKJV, and ESV translators have added "a symbol of" to the original text, thus implying that the head-covering is what women ought to wear on their heads. The NIV translators added "a sign of." The Greek text simply says "the woman ought to have authority on her head." In the preceding verses the reason given is that she is the man's glory. In light of verse 7 we might have expected Paul to say that because the woman is the glory of the man she should cover her head. But that is not what Paul said.

What is this "authority" that women ought to have on their heads? Some interpreters believe it refers to the man in her life who is in authority over her. The covering is the sign that she recognizes him in this role. *The Living Bible* gives this interpretation by paraphrasing the verse: "So a woman should wear a covering on her head as a sign that she is under man's authority."¹ This view lacks support because of its passive use of *exousia* ("authority"). Furthermore the idiom "to have authority over" never elsewhere refers to an external authority different from the subject of the sentence.

Other interpreters view "authority" as a metonym for "veil." A metonym is a figure of speech in which one word appears in place of another associated with or suggested by it (e.g., "the White House says" for "the President says"). The RSV translation gives this interpretation: "That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head."² This view is unlikely because "authority" is an unclear word to use if Paul really meant veil.

¹See also F. Godet, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2:122; and Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 211.

²RSV refers to *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*.

It would have been more natural for him simply to say veil or covering.

A third view is to take "should have authority" as meaning "a means of exercising her authority." Advocates of this view believe Paul meant that women were to have authority to do things in worship previously forbidden, such as praying and prophesying along with men. Her covering would serve as a sign of her new liberty in Christ.¹ There does not seem to be adequate basis of support for this view in the passage or elsewhere.

The fourth major view takes having "authority" in its usual meaning of having the freedom or right to choose. The meaning in this case would be that the woman has authority over her head (man) to do as she pleases.² Obviously this view seems to run contrary to what Paul taught in the passage and elsewhere.

A fifth view is that the head-covering symbolized both the woman's subordinate position under the man and the authority that she had to pray and prophesy in public.³

I think probably Paul meant that the women were to cover their heads because the head-covering was a visible sign that they were submitting to God's authority over them. Specifically, they were not rebelling against their position as women.

The other major interpretive problem in this verse is "because of the angels." Why did Paul introduce angels into this discussion? Perhaps the Corinthian women needed to wear a head-covering because angels observe with great interest what is taking place among God's people as they worship (cf. 4:9; Eph. 3:10; 1 Tim. 5:21). Angels are the guardians of God's created order, they are submissive to God, and they too praise God. For other people to see Christian women unveiled was bad enough, because it was a sign of insubordination, but for

¹Baxter, 6:114; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 106; M. D. Hooker, "Authority on Her Head: An Examination of I Cor. XI. 10," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963-64):410-16.

²William M. Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul*, pp. 202-5; Morris, p. 154.

³See Barrett, p. 255.

angels to see it would be worse.¹ They would really be offended.

There may also be something to the suggestion that these Corinthian women, and some of the men as well, may have been exalting themselves to the position of angels (cf. 7:1; 13:1).² Paul may have mentioned the angels to remind these Corinthians that they were still under angelic scrutiny.

Other less acceptable interpretations of "because of the angels" are these: Women should cover their heads because evil angels were lusting after women in the church (cf. Gen. 6:2). If this were the reason, should not all women wear veils at all times, since angels apparently view humans elsewhere than in church meetings? Or women should wear a head covering because the word "angels" (lit. messengers) refers to pastors of the churches who might lust after them. Or they should wear head-coverings because good angels learn to be submissive to authority from the women's example. Or, finally, they should wear head-coverings because a woman's insubordination would tempt good angels to be insubordinate.

Is observance by angels not a reason that Christian women should cover their heads in church meetings today? Again I think not. In that culture a woman's appearance in public unveiled was a declaration of her rejection of her God-given place in creation. The angels would have recognized it as such and it would have offended them. However today a woman's decision to appear unveiled does not usually make that statement. Consequently her unveiled condition probably does not offend the angels.

11:11 Even though the positions of man and woman differ in God's administrative order, this does not mean they can get along without each other. They are mutually dependent on each other, and they complement one another. They are interdependent, even as the Son and the Father are. Paul's main point was that woman is not "independent of man." This

¹Robertson and Plummer, p. 233.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 522.

is further evidence that he was countering an illegitimate spirit of independence among some Corinthian women.

In a family, companionship should replace isolation and loneliness. There must be oneness in marriage for a husband and a wife to complete one another. Self-centered individuality destroys unity in marriage. If you are married, you need your husband or wife. Your spouse is necessary for you to be a more well-rounded person.

11:12 Even though God created Eve from Adam, now every male comes from a female ("has his birth through the woman"). This fact illustrates male/female interdependence, and it balances Paul's emphasis in verse 11. Together verses 11 and 12 form a chiasm structurally. Husbands and wives have equal worth. Still, God originates both of them, and both are subordinate to Him.

The apostle's emphasis in this section was on the position in which God has placed men and women in relation to each other. Women must not abandon their divinely appointed identity, which was determined in creation, by seeking to function as men, and by reflecting this attitude in how they dressed in church worship. Furthermore they must maintain a healthy appreciation for the opposite sex, as should the men.

3. The argument from propriety 11:13-16

Paul now appealed to the Corinthians' own judgment and sense of propriety. He raised two more rhetorical questions. The first question (v. 13b) expects a negative answer, and the second one (vv. 14-15) expects a positive one. The apostle appealed to the nature of things. His points were that nature itself distinguishes between the sexes and that a woman's naturally longer hair reinforces the propriety of covering her head in worship.

11:13 In Paul's culture it was not proper for "a woman" to act as a spokesman for people with God by praying publicly "with her head uncovered." To do so would be equivalent to claiming the position of a man in God's order. The apostle did not think it wise for Christian women to exercise their liberty in a way that would go against socially accepted behavior, even if they were

personally submissive. Today what is socially accepted is different, but a woman's attitude is still crucial. Notice the similarity of what Paul advocated here with what he advocated in 8:1 through 11:1, namely, doing what is generally perceived as appropriate (as well as what is morally correct).

- 11:14-15 Generally speaking women's hair naturally grows longer than men's hair. Paul reasoned from this fact that God intended for women to have more head-covering than men. People generally regard the reverse of what is natural as dishonorable. In the man's case this would be long hair, and in the woman's case short hair. By "nature" Paul evidently meant how his culture felt about what was natural.¹ "Glory" means "honor."

The fact that some acceptable men's hairstyles are longer than some women's does not mean that these styles are perversions of the natural order. Men are usually taller than women, but this does not mean that short men or tall women are dishonorable. I understand that women's hair generally grows fuller and faster due to the amount of estrogen in women, whereas men's hair tends to become thinner and to fall out faster because of the amount of testosterone in men.

- 11:16 If any of his readers still did not accept Paul's reasoning and were "inclined to be contentious," he informed them that the other churches of God followed what he had just explained. This is one of four similar statements in this epistle that served to inform the Corinthians that they were out of step with the other churches in their conduct (cf. 3:18; 8:2; 14:37). Some women were evidently discarding their head-coverings in public worship because they were repudiating their place in God's administrative order.

This section contains five arguments for women wearing head-coverings in that culture. First, Paul referred to the divine order (God, Christ, man, and woman; vv. 3-6), second, creation (vv. 7-9), third, the angels (v. 10), fourth, nature (vv. 13-15), and fifth, common church practice (v. 16).

¹Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 235; Barrett, p. 257.

As with the issues of eating in idol temples and eating meat offered to idols, Paul dealt with a cultural practice when he dealt with head-coverings. As should be clear from his argumentation, he did not believe that covering the head in worship was a major issue. He appealed to his readers to understand God's intention for men and women, and to maintain a custom, not to obey a command of God. And he used shame, propriety, and custom to urge the Corinthians to cooperate, not Scriptural imperatives or apostolic authority. The rituals we employ as we worship, including what we wear when we worship, are not as important as the reality of our worship: that we are truly worshipping God (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; John 4:23).

Nonetheless important issues lay behind the practices. In the case of head-coverings the issues are women's position in God's creative order and in the life of the church, in particular their relationship to the men. In modern society no item of clothing consistently identifies a woman's acceptance or rejection of her role in God's administrative order. At least none does in western culture. It is usually her speech and her behavior that do. The important thing is her attitudes toward her womanhood and toward God, and how she expresses them, not whether she wears a particular item of clothing.

This passage has much to say to participants in the LGBTQ movement.¹ They have expressed preference for a different sexual identity than the one they were born with and want to live with. Paul's main point in this passage was that Christians should appreciate the sexual identity with which they were born (male or female) and abide in it rather than seeking to change it and live like a member of the opposite sex. In Corinth the fact that some of the women were not covering their heads in worship indicated to everyone that they wanted to be treated like men. Earlier Paul wrote, "Brothers and sisters, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called" (7:24). He could have repeated that here. In chapter 7 he was dealing with one's social position, but here he was dealing with one's sexual identity.

D. THE LORD'S SUPPER 11:17-34

Most of the Corinthians had been following Paul's instructions regarding women's head-coverings, so he commended them for that (v. 2). But he

¹LGBTQ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer.

could not approve of their behavior at the Lord's Supper. They needed to make some major changes there. What they were doing cut at the heart of both the gospel and the church. This was the one certain situation in the Corinthian church, among those that Paul addressed in chapters 7 through 16, that the Corinthians themselves had not asked him about. He wrote that he had heard about it (v. 18).

By way of background, we need to remember that in antiquity meals typically accompanied public worship. This was true in the early church, in Judaism, and in the pagan world. The early Christians normally observed the Lord's Supper as part of such a meal, which was often called "the love feast." Paul's concern was that the love feast had become an occasion, not of love for fellow believers, but of selfishness.

1. The abuses 11:17-26

The first abuse reflects a problem on the horizontal level: between believers in the church. The second, more serious abuse, was vertical: involving the church and its Lord.

Abuse of the poor 11:17-22

This aspect of the problem of misbehavior at the Lord's Supper involved showing disregard for the poorer members of the church.

"Because there was no landed aristocracy in the new Corinth, there arose an aristocracy of wealth."¹

11:17 The Corinthians' behavior at the Lord's Supper was so bad that Paul could say they were "worse" off for observing it as they did, rather than "better" off. Their failure was not that they failed to observe the Lord's Supper. It was that when they gathered they did not behave as the church—in which there is no distinction between Jews or Greeks, slaves or free (12:13). In the unsaved Gentile culture of Paul's day it was typical for hosts to give preferential treatment to persons of status (cf. James 2:2-4).²

¹Carson and Moo, p. 420.

²Keener, p. 98.

11:18 "In the first place" evidently refers to all that follows in verses 18 through 34. Paul decided to wait to deal with other similar matters until he arrived in Corinth (v. 34).

The context of the occasion in view was the assembling of the whole church family (cf. 14:23). When Paul later wrote his epistle to the Romans from Corinth, the Corinthian church was meeting in the home of Gaius (Rom. 16:23). If there were several house-churches in Corinth at this time, probably several of them, if not all, were guilty of this abuse.

The "divisions" (Gr. *schismata*, dissensions) to which Paul referred here were social groupings within the church, cliques, not differences involving loyalty to leaders (1:12).

Evidently those who had reported this abuse in the Corinthian church to Paul had given him much detail about what was going on (cf. 1:11). Paul said that he believed enough of this information to conclude that there was a serious problem.

11:19 "Factions" (Gr. *haireseis*, cliques) of this type, as bad as they are, do have a positive aspect: They clarify whom God approves as faithful and trustworthy and those who are not (cf. Matt. 10:34-37; 18:7; 24:9-13). God's approval of the faithful ("those who are approved," Gr. *dokimoi*) contrasts with what Paul wrote earlier about being disapproved ("disqualified," *adokimos*; 9:27) by God.

11:20 In the Christian church's early years "the Lord's Supper" occupied a more central position in the life of local assemblies than it does in most churches today. The early believers often celebrated it daily or weekly (cf. Acts 2:42-46; 20:7). However it was just as impossible to observe this feast properly in an atmosphere of social discrimination as it was to do so while also attending feasts that honored idols (10:21).

11:21 The Lord's Supper was usually part of a meal ("his own supper") that the Christians shared together, the so-called "love feast." In Corinth, instead of sharing their food and drinks (like at a potluck supper), each family was bringing its own meal and eating what they had brought by themselves. The

result was that the rich had plenty and even got "drunk," but the poor had little and were "hungry" and embarrassed. This was hardly a picture of Christian love and unity (cf. Acts 2:44-46; 4:32, 34-35). In short, they were eating their own private meals rather than sharing a meal consecrated to the Lord.

11:22 This verse contains some of the apostle's most critical statements in this epistle ("In this I do not praise you"). If his original readers chose to behave in such a selfish way, they should stay home and eat there rather than shaming their less fortunate brethren. Such conduct showed disrespect for the church as the temple of God (cf. 3:17).

"The early Church was the one place in all the ancient world where the barriers which divided the world were down. The ancient world was very rigidly divided; there were the free men and the slaves; there were the Greeks and the barbarians—the people who did not speak Greek; there were the Jews and the Gentiles; there were the Roman citizens and the lesser breeds without the law; there were the cultured and the ignorant. The Church was the one place where all men could and did come together. ... A Church where social and class distinctions exist is no true Church at all. A real Church is a body of men and women united to each other because all are united to Christ.¹

"A Church is not true Church where the art of sharing is forgotten."²

Abuse of the Lord 11:23-26

There was an even more serious dimension to this problem. The Corinthians were sinning against the Lord as well as one another.

¹Barclay, *The Letters ...*, pp. 112-13.

²*Ibid.*, p. 113.

11:23 What Paul taught here came ultimately "from the Lord" Jesus Christ Himself. This reminder stresses the importance of this revelation.

"The verbs 'received' and 'passed on,' which occur again in combination in 15:3, are technical terms from Paul's Jewish heritage for the transmission of religious instruction. His present concern is to establish that the tradition about the Supper they had received from him came from Jesus himself: 'I received [it] from the Lord.'"¹

The terminology used here ("I received from the Lord") does not require us to understand that the Lord Jesus communicated this information to Paul personally. Paul's wording suggests that he may have been repeating exactly what others had taught him. What follows is not a verbatim quotation from one of the Gospel accounts.²

Paul described "the night" when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as "the night when He was betrayed." This draws attention to the Savior's great love for His own. The Lord was graciously providing for His disciples while one of them was plotting to do away with Him.

11:24 The Greek word *eucharisteo*, which means "to give thanks," accounts for the fact that another name for the Lord's Supper is "the Eucharist." Some Christians call it "the Breaking of Bread" because Jesus "broke" the "bread," as Paul stated here.

There have been various interpretations of what Jesus meant when He said, "This is My body." There are four main views: First, Roman Catholics take it as a literal statement, meaning that they believe the bread really becomes the physical body of Christ and the contents of the cup become the physical blood of Christ. They believe this is true only when duly authorized representatives of the Roman Catholic church

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 548.

²See David Lincicum, "Paul and the *Testimonia*: Quo Vademus?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:2 (June 2008):297-308.

conduct the service properly. This is the *transubstantiation* view. Adherents believe God transfers the actual body and blood of Christ into the substance of the elements. Whereas the outward form of the elements still appear to the senses as bread and wine, a metaphysical change takes place in them so that the bread and wine actually become the physical body and blood of Christ, according to this view.¹ So a priest actually performs a sacrifice every time he conducts a mass (the celebration or service of the Eucharist).

"About 831 Paschasius Radbertus [or Radbert], a monk in the monastery of Corbie near the city of Amiens [in northern France], began to teach that by a divine miracle the substance of the bread and the wine was actually changed into the body and blood of Christ."²

"...in 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council expressly declared transubstantiation to be the teaching of the [Roman Catholic] Church."³

"He [Augustine], beyond others, formulated the doctrine of salvation by the Church only, by means of her sacraments."⁴

A second view is not quite so literal. It is the *consubstantiation* view and, as the word implies, its advocates see the body and blood of Christ as present "in, with, and under" the elements. In contrast to the transubstantiation view, the bread and wine do not change into the actual body and blood of Christ. Christ is genuinely present, though not physically present, in this Lutheran view.

"Just as iron remains iron but becomes cherry red when it is heated, so he [Luther] contended that the substance of the bread and wine do not

¹See Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, pp. 371-87.

²Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, p. 216.

³Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, p. 531.

⁴Broadbent, pp. 25-26.

change but that around and under the symbols there is a real physical presence of Christ."¹

Lutheran commentator Richard Lenski wrote the following:

"We refuse to answer the question regarding the *how* [how the Lord could give His body to His disciples by means of bread] because the Lord withholds the answer. We could probably not have understood the real answer if it had been given because the giving of his body in the Sacrament is a divine act of omnipotence and of grace which is beyond mortal comprehension. The Lord declares *the fact*: 'This is my body,' and we take him at his word."²

The third major view is the *spiritual presence* view, which most Presbyterians and some other followers of John Calvin hold. For them, the spiritual presence of Christ is in the participants and, as in the former views, God ministers grace to the communicant in a concrete way through participation.³ This is a mediating view, between the two former ones, that was promoted by Calvin.

The fourth view is the *memorial* view. Advocates of this interpretation believe that when Jesus said, "This is My body," He meant: This represents My body. In other words, they understand His statement as completely metaphorical. They view the elements as pictures or emblems of the body and blood of Christ. In contrast to the first two views, this one does not see Christ present in any special sense in the elements. Ulrich Zwingli, the Swiss reformer, promoted this view. Today most of the churches from the Anabaptist branch of Protestantism (i.e., Baptists, Methodists, independent Bible churches, et al.) follow this interpretation. As the following quotation clarifies, this view expresses how Jesus' Jewish disciples probably first understood His words.

¹Cairns, pp. 319-20.

²Lenski, p. 467.

³Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 250; William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:565-74.

"The identification of the bread with the body is semitic imagery in its heightened form. As in all such identifications, he means 'this signifies/represents my body.' It lies quite beyond both Jesus' intent and the framework within which he and the disciples lived to imagine that some actual change took place, or was intended to take place, in the bread itself. Such a view could only have arisen in the church at a much later stage when Greek modes of thinking had rather thoroughly replaced semitic ones."¹

Jesus invited His disciples to take the bread that represented His body. He thus gave them a share in His body, and He invited them to participate in the meaning and benefits of His death. His body was for them in a double sense: It was what secured atonement on their behalf (cf. 15:3; Rom. 5:6, 8), and it was a body offered in their place (e.g., Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:21).

The Lord's request that His disciples remember Him by partaking of bread and the fruit of the vine is rich with significance. Many followers remember their leaders by erecting stone monuments to their memories and making pilgrimages to these sites. In contrast, the Lord Jesus made remembering Him easy yet profound. Partaking of the elements helps us Christians appreciate the fact that Christ is really within us, and eating together reminds us of our unity with other believers in Christ's body: the church.

Remembering, in biblical terminology, does not mean only calling to memory. It includes realizing what the event remembered involved (cf. Exod. 13:3; 20:8; Deut. 5:15; 7:18; et al.). The Lord's Supper is not just something that Christians do in order to bring the memory of Jesus back into fresh view, though it does that too. It is a memorial of the salvation that He accomplished by His death and resurrection. First Corinthians 11:24 contains the Lord's command ("do this") to

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 550. For more information on these views, see articles on the Lord's Supper and synonymous terms in Bible encyclopedias. See also Preserved Smith, *The Reformation in Europe*, pp. 91-93.

observe the Eucharist, as do the Gospel accounts of the institution of this ordinance.¹ Therefore it is impossible to be an obedient Christian without observing the Lord's Supper.

Some Christian groups refer to the Lord's Supper as one of the "sacraments." They mean by this that the elements minister grace (God's divine enablement) to the participant in a more direct and physical way than those who speak of it as an "ordinance," assuming they are using these terms properly. An ordinance or a sacrament is a rite that the Lord commanded His followers to observe.

Most Protestants believe that there are two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper. A few Protestant groups include foot-washing as a third ordinance on the basis of John 13:12-17 (e.g., the Grace Brethren, some Mennonites, et al.).

11:25 As Jesus had taken the bread and given thanks for it, so "He also took the cup" and gave thanks for it (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20).

When Jesus shed His blood on Calvary, that blood ratified (gave formal sanction to and authoritative approval of) the New Covenant that Jeremiah had predicted (Jer. 31:31-34, cf. Exod. 24:8). The New Covenant replaced the old Mosaic Covenant (Heb. 8:8-13; 9:18-28). Even though the Jews will be the major beneficiaries of the benefits of this covenant in the Millennium, all believers began to benefit from the death of Christ when He died.²

This arrangement resembles one that is possible to set up in a Charitable Lead Unit Trust under the Internal Revenue Code of the United States. Suppose that there was a vastly wealthy and generous philanthropist of the magnitude of a John D. Rockefeller. As he prepared his will, he bequeathed millions of dollars to various charitable causes that would benefit millions of people all over the world when he died. He also wrote into his will that when his only son reached the age of 21, the son

¹For further study of the ordinances, see Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 421-27.

²See Rodney J. Decker, "The Church's Relationship to the New Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):290-305.

would inherit billions of dollars. When the man died, his son was only five years old, so for 16 years he did not enter into his father's inheritance. However, as soon as the philanthropist died, the millions of dollars that he had bequeathed to charity went to work immediately to help many people.

This illustration shows how the church enters into the blessings of the New Covenant. When Christ established the Lord's Supper it was as though He notarized His will. It became official right then. The will in this illustration is the New Covenant. When Jesus died, His "estate" immediately became available to those that He chose to profit from it. Soon many people around the world, Jews and Gentiles alike in the church, began to benefit from the blessings of His death. However His chosen people, His "son" Israel, will not enter into his inheritance until the appointed time, namely, the Millennium. Blessings for the church began almost immediately after Christ's death. Blessings for Israel as a nation will not begin until Christ's appointed time arrives.

Whenever the Jews celebrated the Passover the father who was conducting the service would explain the significance of each part to the rest of the family (cf. Deut. 16:3). Jesus did the same for His disciples when He instituted the Lord's Supper.

"Our Lord prescribed no set times: P. [Paul] assumes that celebration will be frequent, for he directs that, *however frequent*, it must be guided by the Lord's instructions, so as to keep the remembrance of Him unimpaired."¹

"In the Lord's Supper the heart is brought back to a point in which it is entirely dependent, in which man is nothing, in which Christ and His love are everything, in which the heart is exercised, and the conscience remembers that it has needed cleansing, and that it has been cleansed by the work of Christ—that we depend absolutely on this

¹Findlay, 2:881.

grace. The affections also are in the fullest exercise."¹

11:26 Paul continued Jesus' explanation. Participation in the Lord's Supper dramatizes ("proclaims") the gospel. The service becomes a visual as well as an audio setting forth of the death of Christ and its significance.

"The Eucharist is an *acted* sermon, an *acted* proclamation of the death which it commemorates; but it is possible that there is reference to some *expression of belief* in the atoning death of Christ as being a usual element in the service."²

"It is not barely in remembrance of Christ, but to commemorate his glorious condescension and grace in our redemption. We own [acknowledge] before the world, by this very service, that we are the disciples of Christ, who trust in him alone for salvation and acceptance with God."³

Paul may have referred to "the cup" rather than "the wine," which would have been parallel to "the bread," in order to avoid the direct identification of the wine in the cup with blood. The idea of drinking blood was revolting to most people in the ancient world, particularly the Jews.⁴ On the other hand, Paul may have viewed both elements symbolically: the cup being a symbol of one's lot in life, particularly judgment, and the bread a symbol of what sustains life.

The Lord's Supper is not only a memorial celebration looking back to Jesus Christ's first advent. It is also an anticipatory celebration looking forward to His second advent. Paul used the same term ("proclaim") that the Jews used to describe the Passover liturgy, the *Haggadah* (lit. showing forth), to describe

¹J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 4:252.

²Robertson and Plummer, p. 249.

³Henry, p. 1818.

⁴Barrett, p. 268.

the Lord's Supper.¹ It shows forth ("proclaims") His death until He comes (cf. Exod. 13:8).

"... to 'declare the Lord's death till he come' in judgment means nothing else than that we should by the confession of our mouth declare what our faith recognizes in the Sacrament: that the death of Christ is our life."²

Evidently when the Lord returns to set up His earthly kingdom He will establish a new form of worship that will include the offering of certain animal sacrifices (Ezek. 40—46). These will be similar to the animal sacrifices that the Jews offered under the Old Covenant. However, since Jesus Christ has made a final sacrifice, these animal offerings will evidently be for memorial purposes and entirely for worship, not for the removal of sin. Another possibility is that they will have some role in restoring broken fellowship with God then.³

"The Communion is not supposed to be a time of 'spiritual autopsy' and grief, even though confession of sin is important. It should be a time of thanksgiving and joyful anticipation of seeing the Lord!"⁴

"... hardly a merry feast, but a happy one."⁵

In this section Paul reviewed and expounded the significance of the Lord's Supper so that his readers would value and celebrate it appropriately.

"In short, Paul is doing one thing and one thing alone. He is impressing on the Corinthians the tremendous importance of

¹Edersheim, p. 232.

²Calvin, *Institutes of ...*, 4:17:37.

³See Jerry M. Hullinger, "The Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40—48," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):279-89.

⁴Wiersbe, 1:607.

⁵R. Constable, *Live Saints*, devotional 13.

doing just this: eating *this* bread and drinking *this* cup. It is, after all, a matter of celebrating the Lord's *death*."¹

"It is interesting that nowhere are we commanded to remember the Lord's birthday [though it is not wrong to do so], but we are requested and commanded that those who are His own should remember His deathday."²

2. The correctives 11:27-34

Paul proceeded to urge the Corinthians to change their observance of the Lord's Supper, and he explained what they should do to correct their conduct.

Discerning the body 11:27-32

Paul explained that the Lord's Supper is more than a personal, introspective remembrance. It has implications for the church, because in His death Jesus Christ laid the foundation for a new community of believers who bear His name. Thus, the Lord's Supper should lead us to reflect on our relationship to one another as fellow Christians as well as to recall Calvary.

11:27 "An unworthy way" is any way that is not consistent with the significance of Christ's death. This does not mean that every participant must grasp the fullness of this significance, which is hardly possible. Nevertheless everyone should conduct himself or herself appropriately in view of the significance of the Lord's death. Even a child is capable of doing this. The divisions that existed in their church (v. 18), plus their selfish behavior (v. 21), constituted the unworthiness of the manner in which the Corinthians were observing the Lord's Supper. They had also lost the point of the memorial, which involves proclaiming salvation through Christ's death portrayed in ritual. The gospel goes out when we observe the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner even though unbelievers may not be present to hear it.

¹Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Proclaiming the Lord's Death," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 116.

²McGee, p. 52.

Being guilty" of Christ's "body" and "blood" means being guilty of treating them in an unworthy manner, namely, guilty of profaning them—treating them as common. It does not mean that such a person is in some special sense responsible for the death of Christ.

"To outrage the emblem is to outrage its original—as if one should mock at the Queen's picture or at his country's flag."¹

Paul was not warning unworthy persons so that they should refrain from attending the Lord's Supper. He was not discussing the character of the participants but their conduct in worship. No believer is worthy to participate, in view of our flawed characters, but we can and must participate in a worthy manner.

11:28 "The Corinthians neglected to examine themselves, but they were experts at examining everybody else."²

The reason for examining oneself is to determine that we are partaking in a worthy manner rather than in an unworthy manner. In the context this would involve behaving in a loving and unselfish way toward our fellow Christians, as well as being appreciative of the significance of the Lord's body and blood. We need to examine ourselves or else the Lord will have to examine and judge us for failing to participate in an appropriate way (v. 31).

Having conducted this brief self-examination, the believer should then proceed to participate. An unusually sensitive Christian might hesitate to participate, after thoughtful reflection, feeling overwhelmed by his or her personal unworthiness. However no one is ever worthy to partake. If someone thinks that he is, he is not. We are only worthy because Christ has made us worthy. We ought to partake

¹Findlay, 2:882.

²Wiersbe, 1:606.

feeling unworthy to do so. This attitude is part of what it means to partake in a worthy manner.

This simple reflection and participation lie at the very root of the motivation for living a life that glorifies God. The church has invented many ways to motivate Christians to put Jesus Christ first in their lives. These include altar calls, revival services, campfire dedication services, and many others—all of which have value. Unfortunately we have also neglected what the Lord Jesus instructed us here to do, which will motivate His people to live for Him better than anything else. If this observance has lost its motivating punch, it is because those who lead it have failed to give it the preparation, attention, and priority that it deserves in church life.

The frequent observance of the Lord's Supper—in a way that takes us back to the Cross—is one of the most powerful and effective motivators for living the Christian life. If you think a frequent observance of the Lord's Supper tends to become tiresome, remember that your spouse never tires of your frequent expressions of love for him or her.

11:29 Eating and drinking in an unworthy manner results in divine "judgment." Judgment is inevitable at the Lord's Table. We must judge (Gr. *diakrino*) ourselves before we partake, and then participate in a worthy manner, or else God will judge (*krino*) us. The "body" has a double sense in this verse: the body of Christ given on the cross, and the mystical body of Christ, the church.

"The 'unworthy' or 'inappropriate' participation in the Lord's Supper that entails eating and drinking judgment against the participants comes in not 'discerning (*diakrino*) ["properly recognizing"] the body' (11:29). How members of the community view one another, whether they are sensitive to the poor and latecomers or whether the prevailing social customs dictate their behavior, becomes the decisive issue. Does the

congregation recognize itself as the distinctive body of Christ?"¹

"Thus, what we have to do is not only to judge an evil committed, it is to discern one's condition, as it is manifested in the light—even as God Himself is in the light—by walking in it."²

- 11:30 In Corinth, God was judging some of the Christians with sickness and death. The reasons were the unjudged sin of selfish living (v. 21) and thoughtless participation in the communion service.³
- 11:31 If God's people do not judge themselves as they should, God will judge them. This judgment may involve physical illness, or even, in extreme cases, premature physical death (cf. Acts 5; 1 John 5:16).
- 11:32 We should regard this kind of God's punishment of Christians as "discipline" (Gr. *paideia*, lit. child training; cf. Heb. 12:5-11). The condemnation which God intends this discipline to spare us from experiencing is not the eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord that the unsaved will suffer (Rom. 8:1). It is chastening, even possibly premature death, and/or the Lord's disapproval at the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 3:15; 5:5). This is another instance of wordplay in the Greek text. If we discerned (*diakrino*, "properly recognize," v. 29) ourselves, we would not come under divine judgment (*krino*, "are judged"). When God judges us (*krino*), it is to correct us, so that we will not be "condemned" (*katakrino*) with the world.

Waiting for one another 11:33-34

Practical application now follows theological explanation.

- 11:33 Rather than disregarding the members of the congregation who had little or no food to bring to the love feasts, those who

¹Cousar, "The Theological ...," p. 100.

²Darby, 4:255.

³See Stanley D. Toussaint, "Suffering in Acts and the Pauline Epistles," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and Church*, pp. 188-89.

had plenty should share what they had. They should also "wait" to eat until all had been served.

Many churches these days have potluck suppers, periodically, that provide a modern counterpart to the first-century love feast. Some Christians have felt that we should practice the love feast whenever we observe the Lord's Supper today. Most have concluded that the love feast was just the setting in which the Lord's Supper took place in the early church. Jesus did not specifically command His disciples to observe the love feast, but He did command them to eat the Lord's Supper. Therefore most Christians believe that the love feast is not an ordinance of the church, and thus we are not bound to perpetuate it as the early church practiced it.

11:34 If some of the Corinthian Christians were too "hungry" to wait before they ate, they should "eat" something "at home" before they came to the service. Otherwise their unloving selfishness might result in the Lord's "judgment." It is very important to the Lord that we put the needs of others before our own needs (cf. 9:22; 10:33; Mark 10:45; Rom. 15:2; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 2:3; et al.).

Evidently there were other details ("the remaining matters") of how the Corinthians were behaving when they congregated that Paul did not want to comment on in this letter. Perhaps they were of local importance only. He planned to address these issues when he visited Corinth again (cf. 4:18-21; 16:2-3, 5-7).

The selfish attitude that marked the Corinthian church comes through strongly in this section of the epistle. It showed up in a particularly ugly display at the Lord's Table. Paul dealt with it severely both for the sake of the reputation of the Savior and for the welfare of the saints.

E. SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND SPIRITUAL PEOPLE CHS. 12—14

Paul had been dealing with matters related to worship since 8:1. He had forbidden the Corinthians from participating in temple meals, but he had allowed eating marketplace meat under certain circumstances (8:1—11:1). Then he dealt with two issues involving their own gatherings for worship:

head-coverings and the Lord's Supper (11:2-34). The issue of spiritual gifts (chs. 12—14) was the third issue that related to their gatherings for worship. This is the most important issue of the three as evidenced by the amount of text that Paul devoted to it and by the issue itself. Paul moved from the outward and visible social decorum issue of women's head coverings, to the more inward issue of the church's communion service, and then to the most inward issue of how the Spirit operates in the church.¹ Paul explained that being "spiritual" at present, since the perfect state has not yet come (13:8-13), means to improve the church in the area of its worship.

"More than any other issue, the Corinthians and Paul are at odds over the role of the Spirit. For them 'Spirit' has been their entrée to life in the realm of *sophia* ('wisdom') and *gnosis* ('knowledge'), with their consequent rejection of the material order, both now (7:1-7) and for the future (15:12), as well as their rejection of the Christian life as modeled by Paul's imitation of Christ (4:15-21). Their experience of tongues as the language(s) of angels had allowed them to assume heavenly existence now (4:8), thought of primarily in terms of nonmaterial existence, rather than ethical-moral life in the present. Thus Paul tries to disabuse them of their singular and overly enthusiastic emphasis on tongues (the point of chaps. 12—14); but in so doing, he tries to retool their understanding of the Spirit so as to bring it into line with the gospel."²

Paul wanted to correct the Corinthians in this section, not just to instruct them. This becomes clear in chapter 14. They were abusing the gift of tongues.³ The whole section divides into three parts and structurally follows an A-B-A chiastic pattern, as do other parts of this letter (i.e., chs. 1—3; 7:25-40; chs. 8—10). First there is general instruction (ch. 12), then a theological-ethical interlude (ch. 13), and finally specific correction (ch. 14).

"... there is not a single suggestion in Paul's response that they were themselves divided on this issue or that they were politely asking his advice. More likely, the crucial issue is their

¹Findlay, 2:884.

²Fee, "Toward a ...," p. 45.

³See Robert G. Gromacki, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 227-35.

decided position over against him as to what it means to be *pneumatikos* ('spiritual'). Their view apparently not only denied the material/physical side of Christian existence (hence the reason why chap. 15 follows hard on the heels of this section), but had an element of 'spiritualized (or overrealized) eschatology' as well. The key probably lies with 13:1, where tongues is associated with angels. As noted elsewhere (7:1-7; 11:2-16), the Corinthians seem to have considered themselves to be already like the angels, thus truly 'spiritual,' needing neither sex in the present (7:1-7) nor a body in the future (15:1-58). Speaking angelic dialects by the Spirit was evidence enough for them of their participation in the new spirituality, hence their singular enthusiasm for this gift."¹

1. The test of Spirit control 12:1-3

The apostle began his discussion by clarifying the indicators that a person is under the control of the indwelling Spirit of God. With this approach he set the Corinthians' former experience as idolaters in contrast to their present experience as Christians. "Inspired utterance" in itself does not identify what is truly spiritual. The intelligible content of such an utterance does, when the content is in harmony with the basic confession that Jesus Christ is Lord.

12:1 The presence of the phrase *peri de* ("Now concerning"), plus the change in subject, mark another matter about which the Corinthians had written Paul with a question (cf. 7:1; 8:1). It has to do with the "gifts" (abilities) that the Holy Spirit gives those believers that He indwells. This subject is the focus of all that Paul wrote in chapters 12 through 14, including the famous thirteenth chapter on love.

As in 10:1, Paul implied that what followed was instruction that his readers needed. "Spiritual gifts" is literally "the spirituals" (Gr. *ton pneumatikon*). Paul used *pneumatika* when he wanted to emphasize the Spirit, and he used *charismata* ("gifts") when he wanted to stress the gift. *Pneumatikon* is a broader term than the gifts themselves, though it includes them. It appears

¹Idem, *The First ...*, pp. 572-73. Paragraph division omitted.

to refer primarily to the people who are spiritual (cf. 2:15; 3:1). Evidently the Corinthians' question dealt with the characteristics of a spiritual Christian.

A spiritual Christian is a believer who is under the control of the Holy Spirit compared to one under the control of his or her flesh (sinful human nature; Gal. 5:16) or under the control of a demonic spirit (10:20-21). In 2:15 Paul described mature Christians as "spiritual" (Gr. *pneumatikos*, having the Spirit) in contrast to "natural" (i.e., unsaved, not having the Spirit). However, he proceeded immediately to clarify that it is not only possession of the Spirit, but also control by the Spirit, that marks one as truly spiritual (3:3).

"How spiritual are you? A difficult question to answer? Try this: how obedient are you? Apply this answer to the first question."¹

As always, "I do not want you to be unaware" indicates something important that Paul had to say (cf. 10:1; Rom. 1:13; 1 Thess. 4:13).

12:2 Many of the Corinthian believers had been "pagans." Various influences had led them "astray" from worship of the true God into idolatry.

"Corinth was experience-oriented and self-oriented. Mystery religions and other pagan cults were in great abundance, from which cults many of the members at the Corinthian church received their initial religious instruction. After being converted they had failed to free themselves from pagan attitudes and they confused the true work of the Spirit of God with the former pneumatic and ecstatic experiences of the pagan religions, especially the Dionysian mystery or the religion of Apollo."²

¹R. Constable, *Live Saints*, devotional 17.

²H. Wayne House, "Tongues and the Mystery Religions of Corinth," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:558 (April-June 1983):147-48.

"Mute idols" are idols that do not speak, in contrast to the living God who does speak. Paul previously said that demons are behind the worship of idols (10:20). He did not specifically say that the prophecy or *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues) that was being spoken in the Corinthian church proceeded from demonic sources. He only reminded his readers that there are "inspired" utterances that come from sources other than the Holy Spirit.¹ Probably some of them had spoken in tongues when they were pagans.²

"In classical [Greek] literature, Apollo was particularly renowned as the source of ecstatic utterances, as on the lips of Cassandra of Troy, the priestess of Delphi or the Sibyl of Cumae (whose frenzy as she prophesied under the god's control is vividly described by Virgil); at a humbler level the fortune-telling slave-girl of Ac. 16.16 was dominated by the same kind of 'pythonic' spirit."³

12:3 Enthusiasm or ecstasy or so-called "inspired" utterance do not necessarily indicate spirituality. By "inspired" utterance, I mean any utterance that the speaker claimed came from God, not necessarily a truly inspired new revelation from God. Paul's original readers needed to pay attention to what the person "speaking" in such a state said.

"Not the manner but the content of ecstatic speech determines its authenticity."⁴

What the person said about "Jesus" was especially important. No one motivated by the Holy "Spirit" would curse Jesus. Probably no one in the Corinthian church had done this, though at least one scholar believed that someone had done it.⁵ In the Septuagint, *anathema* ("accursed") means a thing devoted to God without being redeemed: something doomed to

¹See Gasson, p. 48.

²See Robert G. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*, pp. 5-9.

³Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 117.

⁴Barrett, p. 279. Cf. Deut. 13:2-6; 18:21-22.

⁵Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, p. 24.

destruction (Lev. 27:28-29; Josh. 6:17; 7:12).¹ *Anathema* is an Aramaic term carried over from the church's Jewish background.

Likewise no one would sincerely acknowledge that "Jesus is Lord"—Savior and/or Sovereign—unless "the Holy Spirit" had some influence over him or her. This was true regardless of whether the person was speaking in an ecstatic condition or in plain speech. Paul was not instructing his readers to test the spirits to see if they were of God (cf. 1 John 4:1-3). His point was that a so-called "inspired" utterance as such does not indicate that the Holy Spirit is leading a person.

The Holy Spirit leads those under His control to glorify Jesus Christ, not dumb idols, with their speech (cf. 2:10-13).

"The ultimate criterion of the Spirit's activity is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord. Whatever takes away from that, even if they be legitimate expressions of the Spirit, begins to move away from Christ to a more pagan fascination with spiritual activity as an end in itself."²

2. The need for varieties of spiritual gifts 12:4-31

Paul planned to return to the subject of *glossolalia* (ch. 14), but first he wanted to write more generally about spiritual gifts. In the verses that follow he dealt with differences in gifts in the church.

"Having given the negative and positive criterion of genuine spiritual endowments as manifested in speech, the Apostle goes on to point out the essential oneness of these very varied gifts."³

Diversity, not uniformity, is necessary for a healthy church, and God has seen to it that diversity exists in the larger body of Christ (vv. 6, 7, 11, 18, 24, 28). Notice that the Corinthians were doing in the area of spiritual gifts essentially what they were doing in relation to their teachers (3:4-

¹Robertson, 4:167.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 582.

³Robertson and Plummer, p. 262.

23): They were preferring one over others and thereby failing to benefit from all of them. This section of Paul's argument puts the subject of gifts into proper the theological perspective, whereas the previous pericope put it into its proper Christological perspective.

Diversity in the Godhead and in the gifts 12:4-11

12:4 Although there is only one Holy "Spirit," He gives many different abilities ("varieties of gifts") to different people. Everything in this pericope revolves around these two ideas. "Gifts" (Gr. *charismata*, from *charis*, meaning "grace") are abilities that enable a person to serve and glorify God. God gives them freely and graciously. That they are abilities seems clear from how Paul described them here and elsewhere (cf. Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:4).¹

"Spiritual gifts are capacities that make it possible for a believer to do things far beyond his natural gifts by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Though the Holy Spirit can use natural gifts, a spiritual gift always has a supernatural quality and is wrought by the Spirit as an expression of the power of the Spirit rather than the power of individuals."²

12:5 Likewise there are different "varieties of ministries" or services (Gr. *diakonia*) that "the same Lord" over the church gives. He gives some people the opportunity to serve in one ministry, and He gives other people the opportunity to serve in another ministry. For example, two people may have the same spiritual gift, but God gives each of them a different ministry.

12:6 Furthermore, there are different "varieties of effects" or workings (Gr. *energemata*, manifestations of the Spirit's power at work). Yet "the same God" is responsible for giving all of

¹See Eliezer Gonzalez, "Healing in the Pauline Epistles: Why the Silence?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:3 (September 2013):557-75. For defense of the view that spiritual gifts are ministries rather than abilities, see Kenneth Berding, "Confusing Word and Concept in 'Spiritual Gifts': Have We Forgotten James Barr's Exhortations?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:1 (March 2000):37-51.

²John F. Walvoord, ed., *Lewis Sperry Chafer Systematic Theology, Volume One, Abridged Edition*, p. 271.

these effects (or results). Two Christians may both have the same gift, but God may give much fruit to one and less fruit to the other.

"We must not expect to respond equally to the ministry of Christ through different people, nor should we expect that everyone will respond as by our gifts we minister Christ to others. But since we never know who might be waiting, who may be ready to respond as we use the gifts we have, the Christian life becomes a great adventure for God."¹

Just as "Spirit," "Lord," and "God" are distinct yet closely related in verses 4, 5, and 6, so are "gifts," "ministries," and "effects." We should probably not view these words as representing entirely separate ideas, but as facets of God's work in and through the believer. It is God who is responsible for our abilities, our opportunities for service, and the individual ways in which we minister, including the results of our service.

"With each person in this Trinity he associates one aspect of the spiritual gifts which had been granted to the church. As to their quality and source they are gracious bestowals, talents, abilities. As to their purpose, they are 'ministrations' intended for the service and help and strength of the church. As to their effect, they are workings or operations or manifestations of divine power."²

12:7 "Each" believer—regardless of his or her gifts, ministries, and the manner and extent of God's blessing—demonstrates the Holy Spirit through his or her life. Paul's point here was not that each believer has a gift, though that is true (cf. 1 Pet. 4:10). His point was that the Spirit manifests Himself in a great variety of ways. Gifts, ministries, and effects, all working in concert, display the Spirit's presence. It is not just the more

¹R. Constable, *Live Saints*, devotional 18.

²Erdman, p. 108.

spectacular gifts, ministries, and effects that do this. Believers who have spectacular gifts, ministries, or effectiveness are not necessarily more spiritual than Christians who do not. Each believer, not just certain believers, makes a unique contribution "for the common good" (cf. vv. 12-27; 3:4-10). Several examples of this fact follow in verses 8 through 10.

12:8 Paul mentioned nine ways in which the Spirit manifests Himself through believers. The list is representative rather than exhaustive, as is clear when we compare this list of spiritual gifts with other similar ones in the New Testament (cf. vv. 28, 29-30; 7:7; 13:1-3, 8; 14:6, 26; Rom. 12:4-8; Eph. 4:11). Since none of these lists is exhaustive, it seems that there are more gifts than those mentioned in these lists.¹ For example, Paul mentioned the gift of celibacy in 7:7, but this gift does not appear in any of the lists of gifts.

"It is not fanciful to suppose that, as some have claimed, they [these gifts] may be divided into three classes: one associated particularly with the intellect, the second with the will, and the third with the feelings or emotions."²

In this verse there is no definite article ("the") before the word "word" in either of its uses in the Greek text. This probably points to the fact that Paul was referring to an utterance of wisdom or of knowledge, namely, a wise or a knowledgeable utterance (cf. 1:17—2:16).³ The difference between the utterances probably lies in "wisdom" representing a mature perception of what is true to reality (cf. 1:24; 2:6-13; 14:6) and "knowledge" being the understanding of God's mysteries (revelations) in particular (cf. 13:2; 14:6). Other views follow:

"Whereas the word of wisdom brought direct revelation, the word of knowledge was the ability

¹Gromacki, *The Holy ...*, p. 205.

²Erdman, p. 109.

³Morris, p. 170.

to grasp that objective revelatory data and apply it in various connections."¹

"... I take knowledge to mean an understanding of holy things; but wisdom a thorough-going grasp of them. ... Let *knowledge* therefore be understood as the ordinary grasp of things, but *wisdom* as including an insight, by their unveiling, into things of a more secret and lofty nature."²

"It is the discourse, not the wisdom or knowledge behind it, that is the spiritual gift, for it is this that is of direct service to the church ..."³

Some believe that the gifts of a "word of wisdom" and a "word of knowledge" were temporary, having to do with direct revelations from God to first-century apostles and prophets.⁴

"Psychometry [the supposed ability to discover facts about an event or person by touching inanimate objects associated with them] is obviously Satan's counterfeit of the two gifts of revelation known by Christians as the gift of wisdom and knowledge and no doubt includes the other one of prophecy, too. As a result of the exercising of psychometry people have been warned only just in time of another's evil intention towards them, their instant action being able to ward off the intention; thieves have been discovered, and one's needs have been met, thoughts have been revealed, the future as well as the past unveiled—all of which encourages the enquirer to a firm belief in Spiritualism which can produce such marvels [by demonic activity]."⁵

¹Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual ...*, p. 37.

²Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 262.

³Barrett, pp. 284-85.

⁴E.g., William J. McRae, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 64-66.

⁵Gasson, p. 60.

12:9 The gift of "faith" in this context means the ability to trust in God. Every Christian has some faith, just as every Christian has some wisdom and knowledge. However some believers have more God-given ability to trust God than others, just as some have more God-given wisdom or knowledge than others. All believers should seek to cultivate wisdom, knowledge, and faith, but some have a larger God-given capacity for one or another of them than other Christians do. Some Christians find it easy to trust God, while others find it difficult. This is an indication of how much of the gift of faith one has been given.

The "gifts of healing"—the Greek word is plural: "healings"—by definition refer to abilities to cause healing to take place. Evidently there were various types of healings that those so gifted could produce; for example: physical, psychological, relational, and spiritual healings. Counselors and medical doctors have a degree of ability to produce healing today. However most Christians believe that God has not given the ability to restore people to health instantaneously today as He did in the early church.¹ Some people believe that Satan can heal people through his demon servants.²

"Because of the satanic imitation of the genuine 'gifts of healing' (1 Corinthians 12:9), it is imperative and of the utmost importance that God's people dismiss the naïve and erroneous notion that all healings are of God."³

¹For a discussion of the temporary nature of some of the gifts, namely, that they were in use in the early church but not thereafter, see Thomas R. Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:580 (October-December 1988):371-86; and John F. Walvoord, "Contemporary Issues in the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Part IV: Spiritual Gifts Today," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130:520 (October-December 1973):315-28. This article was reprinted under the title "The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:570 (April-June 1986):109-21. See also Vern S. Poythress, "Modern Spiritual Gifts as Analogous to Apostolic Gifts: Affirming Extraordinary Works of the Spirit within Cessationist Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:1 (March 1996):71-101.

²See Gasson, pp. 61-65, 73-79.

³Unger, p. 125.

12:10 "Miracles" are "mighty works" (Gr. *dynameis*) that alter the natural course of events.¹ Probably all types of miracles other than healings are in view here. Calvin limited these miracles to power over demons and hypocrites.² God gave the ability to do miracles to His Son, and to some Christians in the early church, in order to signify that He was with them and empowering them (cf. Luke 4:14—9:50; Gal. 3:5; Heb. 2:4). Luke's Gospel in particular presents Jesus as teaching and then validating His teaching by doing miracles. Acts shows the apostles doing the same thing.

"Prophecy" has a four-fold meaning in the New Testament: Prophets foretold future events. They also declared things known only by special new revelation from God. Third, they uttered, under the Spirit's prompting, some lofty statement or message in praise of God, or a word of instruction, refutation, reproof, admonition, or comfort for others (cf. 11:4; 13:9; 14:1, 3-5, 24, 31, 39). Fourth, they led in worship (Exod. 15:20-21; 1 Chron. 25:1). Evidently the first and second of these abilities passed out of existence with the composition of the last New Testament books. The last of the New Testament books that God inspired was probably Revelation, which most likely dates from about A.D. 95.³

"First, although prophecy was an especially widespread phenomenon in the religions of antiquity, Paul's understanding—as well as that of the other NT writers—was thoroughly conditioned by his own history in Judaism. The prophet was a person who spoke to God's people under the inspiration of the Spirit. The 'inspired utterance' came by revelation and announced judgment (usually) or salvation. Although the prophets often performed symbolic acts, which they then interpreted, the mainstream of prophetic activity, at least as it came to be canonized, had very little

¹See C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*.

²Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 262.

³See Mark L. Hitchcock, "A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary), 2005.

to do with 'ecstasy,' especially 'frenzy' or 'mania.' For the most part the prophets were understood only too well! Often the word spoken had a futuristic element, so in that sense they also came to be seen as 'predicters'; but that was only one element, and not necessarily the crucial one."¹

The ability called "the distinguishing of spirits" was apparently a gift of unusual discernment that enabled a person to tell whether a prophecy was genuine or counterfeit, namely, from the Holy Spirit or from a false spirit (cf. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:20-21). Thus it had a connection to prophecy similar to the connection between interpretation and tongues.² It is not the same as clairvoyance (seeing clearly) or clairaudience (hearing clearly), which some Spiritists claim.³

The gift of "various kinds of tongues," about which Paul would say much more in chapter 14, was the ability to speak in one or more languages that the speaker had not learned. However, these languages do not seem limited to human languages (cf. 13:1). Nevertheless they were intelligible with interpretation (14:10-14). They were not just gibberish.⁴ The New Testament writers did not consider the nonsense (gibberish) that pagans or Christians spoke, that were not languages, to be manifestations of the Spirit's gift of tongues.⁵

"It should be noted ... that only tongues is included in every list of 'gifts' in these three chapters [12:8-10, 28, 29-30; 13:1-3, 8; 14:6, 26]. Its place at the *conclusion* of each list in chap. 12, but at the beginning in 13:1 and 14:6, suggests that the problem lies here. It is listed last not because it is 'least,' but because it is the problem. He [Paul] always includes it, but at the

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 595.

²Keener, p. 101.

³See Gasson, pp. 51-57.

⁴Findlay, 2:889; Erdman, pp. 110, 126-27; and others held that the "tongues" were ecstatic phenomena.

⁵See Gromacki, *The Modern ...*, pp. 53-68.

end, after the greater concern for diversity has been heard."¹

The person with the ability to interpret "tongues" (languages) could accurately translate what a tongues-speaker said so that others present could know the meaning of what he or she said. Presumably some Christians with the gift of tongues also had the gift of "the interpretation of tongues," so they were also able to explain what they had said.

"With the possible exception of faith, all these gifts seem to have been confirmatory and foundational gifts for the establishment of the church (cf. Heb. 2:4; Eph. 2:20) and were therefore temporary."²

I think that even the gift of faith (i.e., great ability to trust God) may have been especially needful during the establishment of the church. Whether all the other gifts were temporary is debatable.³

The table below catalogues the lists of spiritual gifts in Paul's epistles.⁴ The numbers under the Scripture reference columns indicate the order of the gifts in the respective passages.

	1 Cor. 12:8-10	1 Cor. 12:28	1 Cor. 12:29-30	Rom. 12:6-8	Eph. 4:11
Apostle		1	1		1
Prophet	6	2	2	1	2
Discerner of spirits	7				
Teacher/Pastor		3	3	3	4

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 572. Cf. idem, "Tongues—Least of the Gifts? Some Exegetical Observations on 1 Corinthians 12—14," *Pneuma* 2 (1980):3-14.

²Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 533. See also Erdman, pp. 110, 122; Darby, 4:268.

³See Appendix 2: "Summary of my understanding of spiritual gifts" at the end of these notes.

⁴Adapted from Ladd, pp. 534-35.

Word of wisdom	1				
Word of knowledge	2				
Evangelist					3
Exhortation				4	
Faith	3				
Miracle worker	5	4	4		
Healing	4	5	5		
Tongues speaker	8	8	6		
Tongues interpreter	9		7		
Service				2	
Administration		7			
Leading				6	
Helping		6			
Showing mercy				7	
Giving				5	

12:11 This section of Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts concludes with another reminder that, though these manifestations of the Spirit vary, they all indicate the presence and working of "one and the same Spirit" of God. Paul also stressed again the Spirit's sovereignty in distributing the gifts ("as He wills"; cf. John 3:8). The Corinthians should not try to manipulate the Spirit, but should accept and submit to His distribution of the gifts as He saw fit. By the way, the fact that the Spirit "wills" (or intends) indicates that He is a Person and not just an influence.

There is a general progression in this list from the more common to the more uncommon and esoteric gifts (cf. v. 28). The more unusual gifts that appear toward the end of this list attracted the Corinthians. Some gifts were probably more common at one place and in one church than others, depending on the Spirit's sovereign distribution (cf. 1:4-5). Some were probably more common at some times than at others too, as the Spirit bestowed them.

Since spiritual gifts are abilities that God gives Christians with which to serve Him, it is useful for us to know what our gifts are. Though some Christians have become overly preoccupied with analyzing themselves, we need to know the equipment that God has given us if we are to put our abilities to their best use.¹ Often people who know us well and/or have observed us in a variety of ministry situations can spot our spiritual gifts better than we can. What do other people say you do well? What do you enjoy doing? What has God blessed that you have done in His service? What do you believe is important for you to do for Him? The answers to these questions can also help identify one's gifts.

Some Christians struggle because they do not like the gifts, ministries, and or fruit that God has given them. They would prefer to have something else. In this case one needs to yield to the Spirit's control and accept the abilities, ministries, and results that He has given. I struggled with this issue earlier in my Christian life, but eventually God gave me peace about my giftedness. I have learned that I can make the greatest contribution to the building of Christ's church by serving Him as He has "wired" me, not by trying to serve Him in ways that I might prefer.

The body and its members 12:12-14

Paul now compared the body of Christ, the universal church—though by extension the local church as well—to a human body. His point was not that the church needs to have unity, which it does, but that its diversity is a good thing.

12:12 The apostle compared the church and the human "body" in other epistles as well as here (Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 1:18; 2:19). He probably adapted the idea of the body politic, which was an essentially secular but commonly understood

¹Check out www.churchgrowth.org for resources that are available to help Christians identify and develop their spiritual gifts.

concept, in order to illustrate the church. There can be unity in a body without uniformity. Here the apostle stressed the fact that diversity among the members is an essential characteristic of a unified organism. Evidently the Corinthians were too narrow minded and did not appreciate that there can and must be diversity in a spiritual church.

"One of the marks of an individual's maturity is a growing understanding of, and appreciation for, his own body. There is a parallel in the spiritual life: as we mature in Christ, we gain a better understanding of the church, which is Christ's body. The emphasis in recent years on 'body life' has been a good one. It has helped to counteract the wrong emphasis on 'individual Christianity' that can lead to isolation from the local church."¹

12:13 Baptism by the "Spirit" took place initially on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:33; 11:16). Since then individual believers experience Spirit baptism when they personally trust Christ as their Savior (Acts 11:15-17; Rom. 8:9).

"Some Oneness, or Jesus Only, Pentecostal groups have gone to an extreme by saying that one is not truly saved until baptized in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. The Assemblies of God and most other Trinitarian Pentecostals recognize the baptism in the Holy Spirit as an experience distinct from regeneration [i.e., as a "second blessing"]."²

In Spirit baptism the Holy Spirit "baptized" (Gr. *baptidzo*, lit. submerges) the believer into the "one body" of Christ. He made us a part of the church. Water baptism simply illustrates this. Every believer has experienced Spirit baptism regardless of his or her race or social status ("whether Jews or Greeks,

¹Wiersbe, 1:607.

²Stanley M. Horton, "The Pentecostal Perspective," in *Five Views on Sanctification*, p. 128.

whether slaves or free"). We are now on equal footing in the sense that we are "all" members of the body of Christ.

The figure of drinking "of one Spirit" recalls John 7:37 through 39, where Jesus invited the thirsty to come and drink of Him to find refreshment. Baptism and drinking were both initiation experiences, and they take place at the same time. In the first figure the Spirit places the believer into Christ, and in the second figure the Spirit comes into the Christian. This is probably a case of Semitic parallelism in which both clauses make essentially the same point. We have come into the body of Christ, and the Holy Spirit has come into us.

"... the Spirit not only surrounds us, but is within us."¹

Because the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit places believers into the body of Christ, the church, it has seemed reasonable to some that this ministry of the Spirit will cease when the church is taken to heaven at the Rapture.² This does not necessarily mean that the Spirit will not indwell believers on the earth after the church is taken to heaven. The baptizing ministry of the Spirit and the indwelling ministry of the Spirit are distinctly different ministries.

12:14 Both bodies, the physical human body and the spiritual body of Christ, consist of "many" members, not just "one part." This fact helps us to appreciate the fact that we each make a limited contribution to the larger organism, the church. A human body composed of only one part—say one eye—would be a monstrosity, and a church composed of only one gifted believer would likewise be a horrible assembly.

The modern church often uses this pericope to stress the importance of unity, which is in great need today. However Paul's emphasis originally was on the importance of diversity within the church.

¹Barrett, p. 289.

²John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 146, 231; Charles C. Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 76, 109.

The application of the figure 12:15-26

Paul proceeded to spell out the implications of his analogy.

12:15-16 Perhaps Paul chose the "foot," "hand," "ear," and "eye" as examples because of their prominence in the body. Even though they are prominent and important, they cannot serve the body alone. They need each other.

"... Chrysostom remarks that the foot contrasts itself with the hand rather than with the ear, because we do not envy those who are very much higher than ourselves so much as those who have got a little above us ..."¹

"The *foot* and *hand* represent men of active life; the *ear* and *eye*, those of contemplative life."²

12:17 Different functions as well as different members are necessary in the body (cf. v. 4). Paul's point was not the inferiority of some members but the need for all the members.

"Our bodies are not all tongue. (I have met a few people who seemed to be all tongue, but they are exceptions!)"³

12:18 Paul again stressed, in this verse, God's sovereignty in placing each member "in the body, just as He desired." We need to discover how God has gifted us and to become as effective as possible where He has placed us. We should concentrate on using the abilities that we have received rather than longing to be different, or insisting on doing things that God has not gifted us to do (cf. 7:26-27).

¹Robertson and Plummer, p. 273.

²R. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and D. Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 1216.

³McGee, 5:61.

"Whenever we begin to think about our own importance in the Christian Church, the possibility of really Christian work is gone."¹

12:19 If all the members of the human body were the same it would not be able to function as a body. It would be incapable of getting anything accomplished. For example, if all had the gift of tongues, the gift that the Corinthians valued so highly, the body would not function. If an automobile, to change the figure, were made up only of steering wheels, it could not function as an automobile.

12:20 Uniformity is not the case in the human body. It has a variety of "parts" that carry out many different functions, but it is "one" unified organism.

12:21 "The eye" may represent the member of the body of Christ who can observe and identify what is going on in the church and the world. And "the hand" may represent that member who can carry out or execute what the eye has identified as needing attention. Both abilities are needed in a church.

It is interesting that Paul used "the head" and "the feet" as examples: the top of the body and the bottom. He may have been reminding those who felt superior that those whom they regarded as inferior were as necessary as themselves for the body to function (cf. 11:17-34). Too often because Christians differ *from* each other we also differ *with* each other.

12:22 Rather than regarding themselves as superior the "haves" in the church needed to remember that the "have nots" were important for the effective operation of the whole organism. Even the "weaker" little toe, or the rarely appreciated pancreas, plays a crucial role in the physical body. "Weaker" here means feebler or less impressive (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9).

12:23-24a When dealing with our human bodies, we bestow more honor on what we consider to be our "less honorable" parts by covering them up. Paul may have been referring to the sexual

¹Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 127.

organs here.¹ On the other hand the "more presentable parts," such as our faces, do not require special covering. The point is that we take special pains to honor our less esteemed physical members, and we should do the same in the church, rather than neglecting or despising them. When was the last time your church gave public recognition to the nursery workers or the cleanup crew?

12:24b "God has so composed the body," both human and spiritual, so the different members can care for one another. He does not ignore any member but makes the same sufficient provision for each one ("giving more abundant honor to that part which lacked"). We do not always see this in the human body, but it is true. For example, the eyelids protect the eyes, the skin protects to inner organs, and the toenails protect the toes. Likewise, God's honoring of the less prominent members in the church may not be apparent now, but it will be at the judgment seat of Christ, if not before then.

12:25 God does not want "division" (dissent, Gr. *schisma*) in His body. There was some in the Corinthian church (1:10; 11:18). "But" (a strong contrast in the Greek, *alla*) the members should have concerned, loving "care for one another." Paul illustrated this attitude with what follows.

12:26 The suffering of "one part of the body" means the suffering of "all the parts," and the honor of one means the rejoicing of "all."

"Plato had pointed out that we do not say, 'My finger has a pain,' we say, 'I have a pain.'"²

"When a thorn enters the heel, the whole body feels it, and is concerned: the back bends, the belly and thighs contract themselves, the hands come forward and draw out the thorn, the head

¹Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 613-14.

²Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 126.

stoops, and the eyes regard the affected member with intense gaze' [CHRYSOSTOM]."¹

In view of this we can and should honestly "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15).

"Ancients emphasized that true friends shared each other's joys and sorrows."²

Paul's preceding comments about the body (vv. 12-26) are applicable to both the physical body and the spiritual body of Christ. However he was speaking about the human body mainly as an illustration of the spiritual body.

The fact of diversity restated 12:27-31

Next the apostle spoke more specifically about the members of the body of Christ again (cf. vv. 1-11).

12:27 "You" is emphatic in the Greek text and is plural. The Corinthian Christians are in view, but what Paul said of them applies to all groups of Christians. Together we make up "Christ's body," the church, and each of us is an individual member of it. Again, what Paul said of the church is true of it in its macro and in its micro forms: the universal church and the local church.

12:28 Paul listed eight kinds of members ("parts") with special functions. This list differs somewhat from the one in verses 8 through 10 where he identified nine manifestations of the Spirit's working. This list, like the former one, is selective rather than exhaustive.

The ranking of these gifted individuals is evidently in the order of the importance of their ministries. Another possibility is that the order represents a historic sequence in the history of the church.³ When Paul said earlier that all the members were essential (v. 21), he did not mean that some did not have a more crucial function to perform than others. He did not

¹Jamieson, et al., p. 1216.

²Keener, p. 104.

³Morgan, *The Corinthian ...*, p. 159.

mention this distinction there because he wanted each member to appreciate the essential necessity of all the other members. In another sense, however, some gifts are more important than others (v. 31; 14:1).

God called and gifted the "apostles" to plant and to establish the church in places where the gospel had not yet gone. *Apostello* means "to send out," so it is proper to think of apostles as missionaries sent out to do pioneer work. "Prophets" were the human channels through whom God sent His revelations to His people (cf. Eph. 2:20). Some of them also wrote the books of the New Testament.

"I am certain, in my own mind, that he [Paul] means by prophets, not those endowed with the gift of foretelling, but those who were blessed with the unique gift of dealing with Scripture, not only by interpreting it, but also by the wisdom they showed in making it meet the needs of the hour."¹

"Teachers" gave believers instruction in the Scriptures. Teachers were more important in the church than the prophets who simply gave words of edification, exhortation, and consolation (14:3), but they were less important than the prophets who announced authoritative revelation. The latter type of prophet is in view in this verse.

"... the task of teachers consists in preserving and propagating sound doctrine (*sana dogmata*) so that purity of religion may remain in the Church."²

"... a scholar will learn more from a good teacher than he will from any book. We have books in plenty nowadays, but it is still true that it is through people that we really learn of Christ."³

¹Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 271.

²Ibid.

³Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 129.

"God has not given teachers to the Church in order that they may supplant [replace] the Bible and save His people the trouble of studying the Word for themselves, but that they may spur the people of God on to more intensive searching of the Scriptures."¹

Workers of "miracles" and people with the "gifts of healings" gave dramatic proof that the power of God was working in the church so that others would trust Christ. They may have ministered especially to the Jews, since the Jews looked for such signs of God's presence and blessing (cf. 1:22). People with the gift of "helps" seem to have provided assistance of various kinds for people in need. Those with the gift of "administration" managed and directed the affairs of the churches. Those with "various kinds of tongues" bring up the rear in this list as being the least important of those mentioned. Paul said more about their relative importance and function in chapter 14.

"... sometimes a person, who spoke many languages, did not, however, know the tongue of the actual church, that he had to deal with; and interpreters made up for such a deficiency."²

"The shortness of the list of charismata [gifts] in Eph. iv. II as compared with the list here is perhaps an indication that the regular exercise of extraordinary gifts in public worship was already dying out."³

The traditional view is that Paul wrote Ephesians (ca. A.D. 62) about six years after he wrote 1 Corinthians (ca. A.D. 56).

12:29-30 These two verses contain a third list of gifts in a descending order of priority. Each of Paul's seven questions in these verses expects a negative answer. The apostle's point was that it

¹Ironside, p. 152.

²Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 272

³Robertson and Plummer, p. 281, footnote. Cf. *A Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Lord's Day," by N. J. D. White, 3:141.

would be ridiculous for everyone to have the same gift. Variety is essential. It is wrong to equate one gift, particularly speaking in tongues, with spirituality.

"All of the believers in the Corinthian assembly had been baptized by the Spirit [v. 13], but not all of them spoke in tongues (1 Cor. 12:30)."¹

"... in these verses Paul strikes a deathblow to the theory that speaking in tongues is the sign of the possession of the Spirit, for the answer 'No' is expected to each question (cf. Greek)."²

Many Pentecostals interpret "All do not speak in tongues, do they?" as "All do not continue to speak in tongues, do they?" since the verb is in the Greek present tense.³ This supports their belief that speaking in tongues is the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. However Paul's point in this context is that not all Christians possess the same spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues.

12:31 Paul advised the Corinthians to "earnestly desire" some gifts more than others, because some are more important in the functioning of the body than others. While the bestowal of gifts is the sovereign prerogative of the Spirit (vv. 8-11, 18), human desire plays a part in His bestowal (cf. James 4:2). This verse seems to indicate that the Spirit does not give all His gifts to us at the moment of our salvation. I see nothing in Scripture that prohibits our viewing the abilities God gives us at birth as part of His gifts—though God gives talents to every individual but only spiritual gifts to believers.⁴ Likewise a believer can receive a gift, or an opportunity for service, or the Spirit's blessing on his or her ministry, years after his or her conversion.⁵ Everything that we have or ever will have is a gift

¹Wiersbe, 1:609.

²S. L. Johnson Jr., p. 1251.

³See Horton, p. 130.

⁴See McRae, pp. 20-22.

⁵See Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 170-74. See Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual ...*, p. 50, for the view that God gives every Christian all the spiritual gifts he or she will ever have at the moment of regeneration.

from God, but spiritual gifts are abilities that God gives us that enable us to serve Him "for the common good" (v. 7).¹

"To strive zealously means more than to pray; it includes effort toward cultivating and toward producing a receptivity and a fitness on our part."²

Another view is that Paul meant that the Corinthians were to desire that God would give people with the greater gifts to their assembly.³ It seems to me that if Paul meant that he would have written: Desire the greater gifted people.

God did not give the gift of apostleship, in the technical sense of apostleship, to any other than those whom Christ Himself selected—who had seen the risen Lord Jesus (9:1). This gift went to a small group of men in the first generation of the church's history. Apostleship, in the general sense of one sent out with a message, continues today. Sometimes we refer to these gifted people as missionaries in order to distinguish them from Paul and the 12 apostles.

Likewise we use the term "prophet" in both a technical and in a general sense today. Usually we think of prophets as people who gave new revelation from God or predicted the future. As I mentioned previously, prophets also spoke forth a word from the Lord by exhorting or encouraging the church, and some of them led the church in worship. The Greek word *prophetes* means "one who speaks forth." In the first, technical sense prophets have ceased in the church. In the second, general sense they are still with us.⁴ We sometimes refer to the exhorters and encouragers as "preachers" in order to distinguish them from first-century "prophets" who gave new revelation and predicted the future.

¹See Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 120.

²Lenski, p. 542.

³Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual ...*, p. 88.

⁴See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.

Today some people who desire to sharpen their ability to preach and teach the Scriptures enroll in Bible college or seminary to do so. This is one example of "earnestly" desiring the greater gifts. J. Vernon McGee shared his personal testimony of earnestly desiring a greater gift:

"Not having been brought up in a Christian home, I had no Christian training at all. When I went away to seminary, I didn't even know the books of the Bible. I had graduated from a college where the emphasis was placed on the intellectual and the philosophical, and I was trying to be that kind of preacher. Then I heard Dr. Harry Ironside speak. He explained Scripture in a simple manner. And I heard him make the statement, 'Put the cookies on the bottom shelf so the kiddies can get them.' And I remembered that My Lord had said, 'Feed my sheep' (see John 21:16). He hadn't said, 'Feed my giraffes.' So I went to God and prayed, 'Lord, I want to be *that* kind of preacher.' Later, I substituted for Dr. Ironside at Dallas Theological Seminary, and when he passed on, the seminary's president, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, called me on the phone. He asked, 'Would you take Dr. Ironside's lectures here at the seminary?' I could hardly answer him clearly, and I almost rudely hung up the phone. I dropped to my knees, and I confess that I wept as I thanked God. I said, 'Lord I prayed that You would let me teach like Dr. Ironside, and you have answered my prayer!' I coveted earnestly the best gift, and He answered my prayer. Although I am no Dr. Ironside, how I thrill today at the experience and the privilege of teaching the Word of God!"¹

Paul went on to say that there is an even more important discipline that a believer should cultivate in order to reach the goal of being maximally effective in the Lord's service, besides earnestly desiring the greater gifts. That way involves valuing

¹McGee, 5:62. Paragraph division omitted.

and cultivating love (ch. 13). The apostle did not mean, of course, that one should disregard the most important gifts in order to seek love. We should give attention to both: cultivating love and cultivating abilities that are strategically important in the church. Nevertheless, as important as sharpening abilities is, it is even more important that we excel in loving.

"The most excellent way' which Paul will now show his friends at Corinth is not one more gift among many, but 'a way beyond all this.' That extraordinary way is, of course, the way of *agape*, that fruit of the Spirit which is of primary importance to every believer and to the body of Christ."¹

"The most excellent way then is where love is the controlling power in all our actions."²

"What Paul is about to embark on is a description of what he calls 'a way that is beyond comparison.' The way they are going is basically destructive to the church as a community; the way they are being called to is one that seeks the good of others before oneself. It is the way of edifying the church (14:1-5), of seeking the common good (12:7). In that context one will still earnestly desire the things of the Spirit (14:1), but precisely so that others will be edified. Thus it is not 'love versus gifts' that Paul has in mind, but 'love as the only context for gifts'; for without the former, the latter have no usefulness at all—but then neither does much of anything else in the Christian life."³

Chapter 12 is a chapter that stresses balance (cf. Gal. 5). On the one hand, each Christian is only a part of a larger organism, but each is an

¹Thomas A. Jackson, "Concerning Spiritual Gifts: A Study of I Corinthians 12," *Faith and Mission* 7:1 (Fall 1989):68.

²Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 274.

³Fee, *The First ...*, p. 625.

indispensable part. In one sense we are equally important because we all serve an essential function, but in another sense some are more crucial than others. God determines our gifts, ministries, and individual effectiveness, yet our desire and initiative have a part to play in our service as well. Ability, ministry opportunity, and individuality are very important, but love is even more important. A good measure of our personal maturity as Christians will be how well we can keep these paradoxes in balance in our personal lives and ministries. The Corinthians needed help in this area.

"The Church is neither a dead mass of similar particles, like a heap of sand, nor a living swarm of antagonistic individuals, like a cage of wild beasts: it has the unity of a living organism, in which no two parts are exactly alike, but all discharge different functions for the good of the whole. All men are not equal, and no individual can be independent of the rest: everywhere there is subordination and dependence. Some have special gifts, some have none; some have several gifts, some only one; some have higher gifts, some have lower: but every individual has some function to discharge, and all must work together for the common good. This is the all-important point—unity in loving service."¹

	Unity	Diversity	Maturity
1 Corinthians	12:1-13	12:14-31	13:1-13
Romans	12:1-5	12:6-8	12:9-21
Ephesians	4:1-6	4:7-12	4:13-16

3. The supremacy of love ch. 13

Paul now proceeded to elaborate on the fact that love is more important than the most important spiritual gifts. Some of the Corinthian Christians may not have possessed any of the gifts mentioned in the previous three lists in chapter 12, but all of them could practice love. Clearly all of them needed to practice love more fully. The *fruit* of the Spirit, the chief of which

¹Robertson and Plummer, pp. 269-70. The following chart is from Wiersbe, 1:607.

is love (Gal. 5:22-23), is a more obvious demonstration of the Spirit's presence in a life, and His control over a life, than the other *gifts* of the Spirit.

The love in view is God's love that He has placed in the believer by the indwelling Spirit that should overflow to God and others. It is the love that only the indwelling Holy Spirit can produce in a believer and demonstrate through a believer. Fortunately we do not have to produce it. We just need to cooperate with God by doing His will, with His help, and the Spirit will produce it. I believe that love is a spiritual gift, not just a spiritual grace and a fruit of the Spirit, because God gives us the ability to demonstrate love.

"A Christian community can make shift somehow if the 'gifts' of chapter 12 be lacking: it will die if love is absent. The most lavish exercise of spiritual gifts cannot compensate for lack of love."¹

This chapter is something of a digression in Paul's argument concerning keeping the gift of tongues in its proper place (cf. 14:1), but it strengthens his argument considerably. As we have seen throughout this epistle, the Corinthians needed to love one another and others. It is not coincidental that this great chapter on love appears in a letter to this unloving church.

The necessity of love 13:1-3

In these first three verses Paul showed that love is superior to the spiritual gifts that he listed in chapter 12. He progressed from the lesser to the greater gifts, and from the easier to the more difficult abilities.

"It is hard to escape the implication that what is involved here are two opposing views as to what it means to be 'spiritual.' For the Corinthians it meant 'tongues, wisdom, knowledge' (and pride), but without a commensurate concern for truly Christian behavior. For Paul it meant first of all to be full of the Spirit, the *Holy Spirit*, which therefore meant to behave as those 'sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be his holy people' (1:2), of which the ultimate expression always is to 'walk in love.' Thus, even though these sentences reflect the immediate context, Paul's concern is not simply with their

¹Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 124.

over-enthusiasm about tongues but with the larger issue of the letter as a whole, where their view of spirituality has caused them to miss rather widely both the gospel and its ethics."¹

"All four classes of gifts (xii. 28) are included here: the ecstatic in v. 1; the teaching (*propheteia*) and the wonder-working (*pistis*) gifts in v. 2; and the administrative in v. 3."²

"It has well been said that love is the 'circulatory system' of the body of Christ."³

13:1 Probably Paul began this chapter by referring to "tongues" because of the Corinthians' fascination with this gift (cf. ch. 14). That is where their problem lay. He also built to a climax in verses 1 through 3, moving from the less to the more difficult actions. Evidently Paul used the first person here ("I") because the Corinthians believed that they themselves spoke "with the tongues of mankind and of angels" (cf. 14:14-15).

Speaking with the tongues of mankind and of angels does not refer to simple eloquence, as the context makes clear (cf. 12:10, 28, 30). The "tongues of mankind" probably refer to languages that people speak. The tongues "of angels" probably refer to the more exalted and expressive language(s) with which angels communicate with one another.⁴ Some interpreters believe that they refer to ecstatic utterance. But throughout this whole discussion of the gift of tongues there is no evidence that Paul regarded tongues as anything but intelligible languages. Throughout the whole New Testament, "tongues" means "languages."⁵ However what was spoken in a language could have been spoken with great emotional excitement in a trance-like state (ecstasy).

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 630.

²Robertson and Plummer, p. 288.

³Wiersbe, 1:610.

⁴See John C. Poirier, *The Tongues of Angels: The Concept of Angelic Languages in Classical Jewish and Christian Texts*.

⁵See Lowery, "1 Corinthians," pp. 537-38.

"In speaking of tongues of angels he [Paul] is using hyperbole for something remarkable or rare. ... Paul is saying, 'You may have a grasp of all the languages, not only those of all men, but of the angels over and above.'"¹

Of course humans do not know the language of the angels, but it must be an exalted (higher, more advanced) language, because angels are superior, spirit beings. The Corinthians evidently believed that they could speak in angelic languages. Some writers have concluded that "tongues ... of angels" is part of the hyperbole that appears in verse 2.² That is, there is really no such thing as angelic tongues. The phrase simply depicts exalted speech.

In Psalm 78:24 and 25, the poet Asaph described the manna that the Israelites ate in the wilderness as "the bread of angels [lit. "mighty ones"]." This is clearly a reference to physical manna that stresses its heavenly origin and high quality, not that angels actually feed on manna. Perhaps Paul was using "the tongues ... of angels" in a similar way here: in order to emphasize the heavenly origin and high quality of messages from God that were given in tongues.

Paul's point seems to have been that, even if one could speak in this exalted language, but the person did not "have love" (i.e., act lovingly), his or her speech would be hollow and empty. To act lovingly, of course, means to actively seek the benefit of someone else.

"It is the charitable heart, not the voluble [incessant and fluent] tongue, that is acceptable with God."³

¹Calvin, *The First ...*, pp. 274-75. Hyperbole is exaggerated speech not meant to be taken literally.

²E.g., Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 535; Keener, p. 108.

³Henry, p. 1819.

"Noisy" gongs and "clanging" cymbals were common in some of the popular pagan cults of Paul's day.¹ They made much noise but no sense. Some so-called tongues-speakers today claim that their gibberish is the language of angels, but it needs to be interpreted in a clear and understandable way in order to qualify as a language. Often this claim is just a way to justify speaking gibberish (unintelligible or meaningless speech, nonsense).

13:2 "Prophecy" was a higher "gift" than *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues), but it was still inferior to "love" (cf. 14:1-5). Earlier Paul wrote of the importance of understanding life from God's perspective and grasping the truths previously not revealed but now made known by His apostles (2:6-13). Nevertheless understanding the truth without having love makes the servant of Christ useless to Him ("I am nothing," cf. 8:1b). Possession of spiritual gifts is not the sign of the Spirit, but loving behavior is.

"A clear and deep head is of no signification, without a benevolent and charitable heart."²

Even "faith" great enough "to remove mountains" is not as important as "love" (12:9; cf. Matt. 17:20; Mark 11:23; Luke 17:6). A mountain is a universal symbol of something immovable. This is hyperbole and metaphor.

13:3 Even what passed for "charity," or self-sacrifice for less fortunate individuals, is not the same as real "love" (Gr. *agape*). It is inferior to it. It might profit the receiver, but it does not profit the giver without love.

Paul's personal sufferings for the salvation of others were also worthless without "love" (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-29; 12:10). Even one's acceptance of martyrdom might or might not spring from love. If it did not, it was valueless in the sight of God, and

¹Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 125; Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 131; Robertson and Plummer, p. 289.

²Henry, p. 1819.

it would bring no divine reward to the one who submitted to it (cf. Dan. 3:28; Rom. 5:2-3; 2 Cor. 1:14).

Paul was not setting love in contrast to gifts in this pericope. He was arguing for the necessity and supremacy of love if one is to behave as a true Christian.

"Love is the indispensable addition which alone gives worth to all other Christian gifts."¹

Love is to Christian service what fuel is to an automobile: it proves it with energy and enables it to carry out its intended function.

"Love defines which gifts are the 'best': those that build up the body."²

The character of love 13:4-7

The apostle next pointed out the qualities of love that make it so important: its character or nature. He described these qualities in relationship to a person whose character love rules over. We see them most clearly in God and in Christ, but also in the life of anyone in whose heart God's love reigns.

"Love may be difficult to define; it is not difficult to discern. Paul attempts no definition, analysis, or description; he pictures love in action. He shows what it does and feels, and what it refrains from doing. He records the ways in which it manifests itself."³

"As you have seen a man of science take a beam of light and pass it through a crystal prism, as you have seen it come out on the other side of the prism broken up into its component colors—red, blue, yellow, violet, orange, and all the colors of the rainbow—so Paul passes this thing, love, through the magnificent prism of his inspired intellect, and it comes out on the other side broken up into its elements."⁴

¹Barrett, p. 303.

²Keener, p. 107.

³Erdman, p. 118.

⁴Henry Drummond, "The Greatest Thing in the World," in *First Corinthians Thirteen*, pp. 21-22.

"Paul's central section [of this chapter: vv. 4-7] uses anaphora (repetition of the first element) extensively. One of the three major types of rhetoric was epideictic (involving praise or blame), and one of the three types of epideictic rhetoric was the encomium, a praise of a person or subject. One common rhetorical exercise was an encomium on a particular virtue, as here (or Heb 11:3-31, also using anaphora)."¹

The characteristics of love were notably absent in the Corinthian church. This was probably why Paul wrote so much about it in this epistle.

"The observance of the truths of this chapter ... would have solved their [the Corinthians'] problems."²

13:4a Patience and kindness, like "love," are aspects of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). The first characteristic is love's passive response, and the second is its active initiative. Patience and kindness characterize God, Christ, and truly Christian behavior. Love is seen when we are "patient" and "kind."

13:4b-5 Paul followed the two positive expressions of love with seven verbs that indicate how it does not behave. The first five of these typified the Corinthians, as we have seen: They were "jealous" (cf. 3:3; 4:18), boastful (3:18; 8:2; 14:37), "arrogant" (4:6, 18-19; 5:2; 8:1), acting "disgracefully" (7:36; 11:2-16), and self-seeking (10:24, 33). Their behavior was not demonstrating love.

Love does not deal with other people in a way that injures their dignity ("does not act disgracefully"). It does not insist on having its own way, nor does it put its own interests before the needs of others ("does not seek its own benefit," cf. Phil. 2:4). It is not irritable or touchy ("is not provoked"), but it absorbs offenses, insults, and inconveniences for the sake of the welfare of others. It "does not keep an account of a wrong suffered" with a view to taking revenge (cf. Luke 23:34; Rom. 12:17-21; 2 Cor. 5:19).

¹Keener, p. 107.

²S. L. Johnson Jr., p. 1251.

"One of the great arts in life is to learn what to forget."¹

"One of the most miserable men I ever met was a professed Christian who actually kept in a notebook a list of the wrongs he felt others had committed against him. Forgiveness means that we wipe the record clean and never hold things against people (Eph. 4:26, 32)."²

In the last two characteristics ("is not provoked") and ("does not keep an account of a wrong suffered") Paul moved beyond what this letter reveals that marked the Corinthians. These conditions may have been present in the Corinthian church, but there is no evidence that they were in this letter.

13:6 Love takes no delight in evil or the misfortunes of others, but it takes great pleasure in what is right.

"Love cannot share the glee of the successful transgressor."³

"Love absolutely rejects that most pernicious form of rejoicing over evil, gossiping about the misdeeds of others; it is not gladdened when someone else falls. Love stands on the side of the gospel and looks for mercy and justice for all, including those with whom one disagrees."⁴

"Christian love has no wish to veil the truth; it is brave enough to face the truth; it has nothing to conceal and so is glad when the truth prevails."⁵

13:7 Love covers unworthy things rather than bringing them to the light and magnifying them ("keeps every confidence"; cf. 1 Pet. 4:8). Love is hopeful that those who have failed will not

¹Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 136.

²Wiersbe, 1:611.

³Robertson and Plummer, p. 294.

⁴Fee, *The First ...*, p. 639.

⁵Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 137.

fail again rather than concluding that their failure is inevitable ("hopes all things"; cf. Matt. 18:22). It is always eager to believe the best, and it puts the most favorable construction on ambiguous actions.¹

"This does not mean ... that a Christian is to allow himself to be fooled by every rogue, or to pretend that he believes that white is black. But in doubtful cases he will prefer being too generous in his conclusions to suspecting another unjustly."²

"Love ever is ready to make excuses for others; it throws a kindly mantle over all their faults."³

It does not allow itself to become overwhelmed but perseveres steadfastly through difficult trials ("endures all things").

The permanence of love 13:8-13

Paul moved on to point out that Christian love (*agape*) characterizes our existence now and forever, but gifts (*charismata*) are only for the present. The Corinthians were apparently viewing the gifts as one evidence that they were already in the eschatological stage of their salvation. Paul heightened appreciation for love by expounding on its permanence in this section.

13:8 "Love never fails" in the sense of falling away (dropping out) when the physical and temporal things on which affection rests pass away. It outlasts temporal things. "Gifts" of the Spirit will pass ("be done away" or "cease") because they are temporary provisions, but the fruit of the Spirit will abide.

"It is so wrong to tell children that God won't love them. I used to be in a Sunday school class of little fellows. They were a bunch of mean brats—I was the only good boy in the class! The teacher would say to us, 'God won't love you boys if you keep

¹Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 127.

²Robertson and Plummer, p. 295. See also Morgan, *The Corinthian ...*, p. 165.

³Erdman, p. 120.

acting that way.' I used to think *God surely can't love me very much*. But He *did* in spite of my meanness. How wonderful it is to know that God loves us!"¹

Prophecies are messages from God, but when we stand before Him and hear His voice there will be no more need for prophets to relay His words to us. Likewise when we stand before God there will be no need to speak in other languages ("tongues"), because we will all understand God when He speaks. The "knowledge" that is so important to us now will be irrelevant then because when we are in God's presence we will know perfectly (v. 12; cf. 1:5; 8:1; 12:8). The knowledge in view seems to be knowledge of God's ways in the present age. As will become clearer in chapter 14, Paul's preference regarding the gifts was "prophecy," but the Corinthians favored "tongues" and "knowledge."

The verb that Paul used to describe what will happen to "prophecy" and "knowledge" is in the passive voice in Greek, and it means that they will be terminated ("done away with," from *katargeō*; cf. 2:6). The verb he used to describe what will happen to "tongues" is in the middle voice and means that they will automatically "cease" of themselves (from *paūo*).² The passive voice points to God terminating prophecy and knowledge when we see Him. The middle voice suggests that tongues will peter out before we see God.³ Church history testifies that this is what happened to the gift of tongues shortly after the apostolic age.⁴ Paul dropped tongues from his

¹McGee, 5:65.

²Robertson, 4:179.

³See Stanley D. Toussaint, "First Corinthians Thirteen and The Tongues Question," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):311-16.

⁴Origen (ca. 185-ca. 254 A.D.), "Against Celsus," 7:8 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:614; Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.), "Homily 12 on Matthew," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 10:77; idem, "Homily 14 on Romans," *ibid.*, 11:447; idem, "Homily 29 on 1 Corinthians," *ibid.*, 12:168; idem, "Homily 6 on 1 Corinthians," *ibid.*, 12:31; Augustine (354-430 A.D.), "On Baptism, Against the Donatists," 3:16:21, *ibid.*, 4:443; idem, "The Epistle of St. John," 6:10, *ibid.*, 7:497-98; idem, "The Epistle of 1 John. Homily," 6:10, *ibid.*, 7:497-98; idem, "The Answer to the Letters of Petition, to Donatist," 2:32:74, *ibid.*, 4:548; and idem, "On the Gospel of St. John, Tractate," 32:7, *ibid.*, 7:195. See Michael J.

discussion at this point, which supports the fact that the gift of tongues would not last as long as knowledge and prophecy. He continued to speak of knowledge and prophecy in the next verses.

13:9 In the meantime, before we see the Lord, our knowledge and prophecy are imperfect, in contrast with what they will be when we see Him. Prophecy is imperfect in the sense that revelations and explanations of God's mind are only partial or incomplete.

13:10 In the light of the context, "the perfect" (Gr. *teleion*, mature, whole, complete) may refer to the whole truth about God.¹ Another possibility is that it refers to our state when we stand in the Lord's presence.² When we reach that point in history the Lord will remove (*katargeo*, cf. v. 8) what is partial and will do away with the limits on our knowledge, as well as many other limitations that we suffer in our present condition. Variations on the second view above are that "the perfect" refers to the Rapture,³ to the Lord's return,⁴ or to the final mature state of Christ's body (the church) at the end of the Church Age.⁵ All of these views point to the time when Christians will be together in the Lord's presence.

Svigel, "The Passing of the Prophets in the Apostolic Fathers," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 176:704 (October-December 2019):459-75. See also Calvin, *Institutes of ...*, 4:19:6, 19; Dillow, *Speaking in Tongues*, pp. 147-64; and Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 1:236-37; for further information about the historical cessation of the gift of tongues. See also George W. Dollar, "Church History and the Tongues Movement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):316-21; and the series of four articles by F. David Farnell, "Is the Gift of Prophecy for Today?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:595 (July-September 1992):277-303; 596 (October-December 1992):387-410; 150:597 (January-March 1993):62-88; and 598 (April-June 1993):171-202; Gromacki, *The Modern ...*, pp. 11-18.

¹Barrett, p. 306.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 645; Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 536; Thomas R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* pp. 333-34; Keener, p. 109.

³Toussaint, "First Corinthians ...," pp. 312-14; Hunt, 2:752.

⁴Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1744; Robertson and Plummer, p. 297; McRae, p. 92.

⁵Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual ...*, pp. 106-13; idem, "'Tongues ... Will Cease,'" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 17:2 (Spring 1974):81-89; and idem, "1 Cor 13:11 Revisited: an Exegetical Update," *Master's Seminary Journal* 4:2 (Fall 1993):187-201. See also Farnell, 150:598:191-93.

Another view is that "the perfect" refers to the completion of the New Testament canon, and "the partial" refers to the incomplete canon and the Corinthians' partial knowledge.¹ They were both incomplete because God had not yet given all the prophecy that He would eventually give in order to complete the New Testament. However this view puts too much weight on prophecy and knowledge and not enough on our other temporary limitations, to which Paul also referred (v. 12).

A third possibility is that "the perfect" refers to the new heavens and new earth.² However the New Testament does not reveal that God will remove Christians' limitations, to any greater extent, sometime after we see the Lord Jesus than He will when we see Him (cf. Rom 8:32).

13:11 Paul compared our present phase of maturity to childhood ("when I was a child") and that of our later phase, when we are with the Lord, to adulthood ("when I became a man"). It is characteristic of children to preoccupy themselves with things of very temporary value. The Corinthians took great interest in the things that would soon pass away, namely, knowledge, tongues, and prophecy. A sign of spiritual maturity is occupation with things of eternal value such as love. Again, Paul was stressing the difference between the present and the future.

13:12 Another illustration of the difference between our present and future states as Christians is "a mirror." In Paul's day craftsmen made mirrors out of metal.

"... Corinth was famous as the producer of some of the finest bronze mirrors in antiquity."³

¹Merrill F. Unger, *New Testament Teaching on Tongues*, p. 95; Myron J. Houghton, "A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:611 (July-September 1996):344-56; Dillow, *Speaking in ...*, pp. 119-36. See also Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:101.

²John F. MacArthur Jr., *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 231.

³Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 647-48. Cf. Robertson and Plummer, p. 298; Findlay, 2:901.

Consequently the apostle's point was not that our present perception of reality is somewhat distorted, but in the future it will be completely realistic.¹ Rather it was that now we see indirectly, but then we will see directly, "face to face." Today we might say that we presently look at a photograph, but in the future we will see what the photograph pictures.

Now we "know" (Gr. *ginosko*) only partially. But when the Lord has taken us to heaven and we stand in His presence we will know "fully" (Gr. *epignosko*), as fully as God now knows us. I do not mean that we will be omniscient. We will not be. We will be fully aware. Now He knows us directly, but then we will also know Him directly.

13:13 "But now" resumes Paul's original thought about the supremacy of love. It does not carry on the contrast between what is now and what will be later. In contrast to what will pass away—namely, knowledge, tongues, and prophecy—faith, hope, and love will remain (cf. Rom 5:1-5; Gal. 5:5-6; Eph. 4:2-5; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Heb. 6:10-12; 10:22-24; 1 Pet. 1:3-8, 21-22). "Faith" here is not the gift of faith (v. 2; cf. 12:9) but the trust in God that characterizes all of His children.

"By some students of the hymn [i.e., ch. 13] the word 'now' has been taken to imply that at the present time, during the present age, faith, hope, and love are abiding, but that in the age to come faith and hope will cease to exist, and of the three only love will remain. Quite on the contrary, Paul affirms that all are to abide and yet that love ever will be supreme among the three."²

Among the enduring virtues "love" is "the greatest" because it will only increase when we see the Lord, rather than decreasing in us, as faith and hope will. In the future we will continue to trust God and hope in Him, but the reality of His presence will make it easier for us to do so then than now.

¹See Michael Fishbane, "Through the Looking Glass: Reflections on Ezek 43:3, Num 12:8 and 1 Cor 13:8," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986):63-74.

²Erdman, p. 125.

Apparently Paul introduced "faith" and "hope," at this point in order to show that "love" is not only superior to the gifts, but it is superior even to other great virtues. Faith and hope are gifts, and they are also Christian virtues of the same type as love. Yet love even outstrips the other major Christian virtues, because it is superior to them.

"It is clear ... that love is said to be greater here, not in every respect, but because it will last for ever, and now has a primary role in keeping the Church in being."¹

"Love is a property of God himself. ... But God does not himself trust (in the sense of placing his whole confidence in and committing himself to some other being); if he did, he would not be God. ... If God hoped he would not be God. But if God did not love he would not be God. Love is an activity, the essential activity, of God himself, and when men love either him or their fellow-men they are doing (however imperfectly) what God does."²

The point of Paul's beautiful classic exposition of love is this: We should value and give attention to the cultivation and practice of love even more than to that of even the so-called "greater" spiritual gifts (cf. 12:31). The other gifts, as important as they are, are only partial and temporary. As love is the greatest of the virtues that will endure forever, so the gift of tongues is the least of all the gifts. It would last only a short time.³

4. The need for intelligibility 14:1-25

"Paul had discussed the gift of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, and the graces of the Spirit; and now he concluded this section by explaining the government of the Spirit in the public worship services of the church. Apparently there was a tendency for some of the Corinthians to lose control of themselves as they exercised their gifts, and Paul had to remind them of the

¹Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 283.

²Barrett, p. 311.

³See Alexander Strauch, *The 15 Descriptions of Love*.

fundamental principles that ought to govern the public meetings of the church. There are three principles: edification, understanding, and order."¹

Paul went on to elaborate on the inferiority of the gift of tongues, which the Corinthians elevated, in order to convince them to pursue the more important gifts. His point was that intelligible speech (i.e., prophecy) is superior to unintelligible speech (i.e., tongues) in the assembly. He argued first for intelligible speech, which benefits the believers gathered to worship (vv. 1-25). In this whole comparison Paul was dealing with the gift of tongues unaccompanied by the gift of interpretation of tongues.

The superiority of prophecy to tongues 14:1-5

The apostle began this discussion of tongues by comparing it to the gift of prophecy, which the Corinthians also appreciated (cf. 12:10, 28; 13:8). He urged the Corinthians to value prophecy above tongues because prophecy can edify believers and/or lead to unbelievers' conversion, since it involves intelligible "inspired" speech.

14:1 This verse sums up what Paul had just written about love, and it resumes the thought in 12:31 by restating that exhortation. In contrast to some of the milder advice that he gave in this epistle, Paul strongly urged his readers to follow the way of love. This imperative ("Pursue love") advances the thought by urging the readers to seek the gift of prophesying in particular. This indicates that, while spiritual gifts are sovereignly bestowed, God does not necessarily grant them all at conversion.

"At the end of chap. 12, where he had been speaking specifically of the *gifts* themselves as gracious endowments, he told them, 'eagerly desire the greater *charismata*.' Now in a context where the emphasis will be on the activity of the Spirit in the community at worship, he says, 'eagerly desire the things of the Spirit [*ta pneumatika*].'"²

¹Wiersbe, 1:612.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 655.

"Gifts are the hands through which love serves."¹

14:2 *Glossolalia* (ecstatic speaking in tongues) by itself (without interpretation) is not edifying to other people, but prophecy is. This statement again raises a question about what speaking in tongues involved.

On the day of Pentecost some people spoke in tongues and other people, who knew the languages spoken, received edification because they heard of God's mighty deeds in their native languages (Acts 2:1-11). Interpreters were unnecessary on that occasion (cf. Acts 10:46; 19:6). Evidently what was taking place in the Corinthian church was different from what took place on the day of Pentecost, though the tongues in both cases were languages.

In Corinth, and perhaps in other early churches, people spoke in tongues among people who did not understand the languages. An interpreter was necessary in order to enable those present to understand and benefit from what the tongues-speaker was saying in a strange language (vv. 5, 13). Paul used the Greek words translated "tongues" and "languages" interchangeably in this passage (cf. vv. 2, 10, 11, 13, et al.).² Two different Greek words appear (*glossa* and *phone*), but they both refer to languages. This is an important proof that tongues were languages.

Some interpreters have suggested another distinction. They have claimed that the tongues in Acts were foreign languages, but that the tongues in Corinthians were ecstatic utterances, not languages, but unintelligible speech.³ There is no basis for this distinction in the Greek text however. The terminology used is the same, and the passages make good sense if we understand tongues as languages, and languages as tongues, wherever these words occur. In 13:1 Paul wrote of "the

¹Lenski, p. 576.

²Ibid., p. 609.

³E.g., Robertson and Plummer, pp. 301, 306.

tongues of mankind and of angels," which were evidently two different types of languages.¹

If someone spoke in an unknown language, and no one could interpret what he or she was saying, the person speaking was not speaking to other "people." "God" knew what he or she was saying, even if no one else did, including the person doing the speaking. "In his" human "spirit" the speaker was uttering "mysteries" (Gr. *mysteria*), namely, things hidden or secret from the understanding of those in the church who were listening. Obviously Paul's concern was the edification of the church. He did not disparage the gift of tongues itself, but he wanted the Corinthians to keep it in its rightful place.

Paul described the "spirit" as distinct from the mind (cf. vv. 14-19).

"Contrary to the opinion of many, spiritual edification can take place in ways other than through the cortex of the brain. Paul believed in an immediate communing with God by means of the S/spirit that sometimes bypassed the mind; and in vv. 14-15 he argues that for his own edification he will have both. But *in church* he will have only what can also communicate to other believers through their minds."²

14:3 In contrast to the foreign speech uttered by tongues-speakers, those present could understand what a person who prophesied spoke because it was in the language of his audience. The words benefited the hearers by building them up, encouraging them, and consoling them. The words "edification," "exhortation," and "consolation" set forth the primary ways in which prophecy builds up the church. Alford took exhortation and consolation as being different kinds of edification.³ Others have taken them as being three different kinds of ministry. The

¹See Keener, pp. 112-13, S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Gift of Tongues and the Book of Acts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):310-11.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 657.

³Alford, 2:2:590.

main purpose of prophecy as a gift was not to predict events in the future but to build up believers in the present.

Official Apostles	The Twelve and the Apostle Paul Communicated new revelation
Functional (unofficial) apostles	Church planters and missionaries Communicated edification, exhortation, and consolation

14:4 The person who spoke in tongues in church edified only himself or herself. He or she praised God and prayed to God while speaking in a tongue. He or she also benefited from realizing that the Holy Spirit was enabling him or her to speak a language that he or she had not learned. This would have encouraged the tongues-speaker, but this speaker did not edify himself or herself in the sense of profiting from the message that the Holy Spirit had given. He did not know what his own words meant, unless he also had the gift of interpretation. But in this discussion Paul left that gift out of the picture almost entirely (cf. v. 5).

If the tongues-speaker understood what he himself was saying, he could communicate this to those present in their language. That is what a prophet did. Prophets did not just foretell the future or announce new special revelation from God. They also delivered statements or messages in praise of God, or a word of instruction, refutation, reproof, admonition, or comfort for others.¹ Paul's point was that edifying the church is more important than edifying oneself. He did not deny that speaking in tongues does, on some level, edify the tongues-speaker (cf. vv. 14-15, 18-19).

"Though he himself would not comprehend the content of that praise, his feelings and emotions would be enlivened, leading to a general exhilaration and euphoria. This was not a bad

¹See my note on 11:4.

thing. Paul certainly was no advocate of cold, dispassionate worship. The gifts were not given for personal enrichment, however, but for the benefit of others (12:7; cf. 10:24; 1 Peter 4:10). Personal edification and exhilaration were often natural by-products of the legitimate exercise of one's gift, but they were not the main reasons for its exercise."¹

- 14:5 Paul acknowledged the value of the gift of tongues even though it also required an interpreter. Nevertheless he made it clear that the ability to prophesy was more important ("greater is the one who prophesies"). The issue, again, is private versus public benefit. Since Paul depreciated speaking in tongues without interpretation so strongly, it seems very likely that this is what the Corinthians were doing in their meetings. The real issue was not a conflict between tongues and prophecy, however, but between unintelligible and intelligible speech.

In this whole discussion "prophecy" evidently refers primarily to an impromptu word that someone would share in a service—in which congregational participation was possible—more than to a prepared sermon.

Supporting analogies 14:6-12

Paul illustrated his point that hearers do not benefit at all from what they do not understand. He used musical instruments as examples and clarified more about foreign languages.

- 14:6 This verse sets the scene for what follows in this pericope. "Revelation," "knowledge," "prophecy," and "teaching" are all intelligible utterances. These four words, respectively, probably refer to: a new revelation (cf. 12:8); an insight into truth; a word of edification, exhortation, or consolation from the Lord (v. 3); and instruction in the faith.
- 14:7-8 Even the sounds that people make using inanimate musical "instruments" need to be intelligible to profit anyone. This is

¹Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 538.

especially obvious in the case of a call to battle. If the bugler blows a confused tune the army will not know whether to attack or retreat. The "flute" and the "harp," as well as the bugle, were commonplace in the Greco-Roman world.

14:9 Incomprehensible speech may be personally satisfying to the one talking, but it profits only a little those who are listening. The only profit would be entertainment. For example, when a foreigner sings a solo in a church service in his or her native language almost everyone enjoys the song because of its beauty. Yet we do not receive edification from it because the words are unintelligible to us.

"Charles H. Spurgeon said: 'I am afraid that many of my ministerial brethren must imagine that when Scripture tells them to "Feed My sheep," it means "Feed My giraffes," for they put the food so high that people would have to be giraffes to reach it.' Scripture says, 'Feed My sheep.' Always put the food down where the sheep can get it. It should be the ambition of the preacher of the Word to use language so simple and so plain that everybody can understand."¹

14:10-11 Clearly Paul was speaking about languages, not gibberish, even though the Greek word translated "languages" (*phone*) means sounds or voices. The context shows that he had languages in mind. A non-Greek was a foreigner (Gr. *barbaros*, barbarian) to a Greek. The word *barbaros* is onomatopoeic, meaning the foreigner's language sounded like so much "bar bar bar" to the Greek.² Paul's point was that, for communicating, the tongues-speaker who did not have an interpreter was no better than an incomprehensible barbarian. Even though his speech may have had meaning to the speaker, it had none to the hearers.

Someone may enjoy watching and listening to an Italian or other foreign language opera occasionally. He or she may like to listen to the music for its own beauty, even if he or she may

¹Ironside, p. 444.

²Onomatopoeia is the formation of a word from a sound associated with what is named.

not be able to understand the words. However, when the foreign words being sung are translated into English, with captions above the stage or on a screen, the listener can enjoy it even more. Then one can profit from following the story, which he or she cannot do otherwise, if all that one takes away from the performance is the memory of beautiful sounds.

14:12 In view of what Paul had written about the relative value of tongues-speaking and prophecy, the Corinthians who were zealous ("eager") for spiritual gifts would be better off pursuing the gifts that would enable them to build up the church. They should value these gifts rather than the gifts that gave them some personal satisfaction when they exercised them without edifying others. The Corinthians were zealots when it came to spirits (spirituals, Gr. *pneumatōn*). The English translators often interpreted this word as synonymous with *pneumatikōn* ("spiritual gifts," cf. v. 1), but it is different. Probably Paul meant that they were zealous over a particular manifestation of the Spirit, namely, what they considered to be the mark of a truly "spiritual" Christian, which was the gift of tongues (cf. vv. 14-15, 32). He wanted them to "strive to excel for the edification of the church."

"Utterances that are not understood, even if they come from the Spirit, are of no benefit, that is, edification, to the hearer. Thus, since they have such zeal for the manifestation of the Spirit, they should direct that zeal in corporate worship away from being 'foreigners' to one another toward the edification of one another in Christ."¹

Application in view of believers 14:13-19

Paul continued his argument by clarifying the effect that unintelligible speech has on believers gathered for worship.

14:13 The Corinthian who already had the gift of tongues needed to ask the Lord ("to pray") for the ability to interpret his or her utterances so that the whole church could benefit from them

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 666.

(cf. v. 5). Note that Paul did not say that tongues-speakers should abandon this gift but that their practice of it needed to be corrected.

14:14 Public prayer in a church meeting is in view here, but some of the Corinthians may have been praying in tongues privately as well. While praying "in a tongue" might give the person doing so a certain sense of exultation in his "spirit," his "mind" would not benefit. He would not know what he was saying without interpretation. The "spirit" (Gr. *pneuma*) here seems to refer to that part of the person that exercises this spiritual gift. It is separate from the "mind" obviously. A person's "spirit" prays as the Holy Spirit gives him or her utterance.

"... it is likely that the Corinthians also went wrong in this respect, that, just as they were in the habit of speaking in foreign languages, so they were also using them in prayer."¹

"If the gift of speaking in a tongue is kept distinct from the understanding, so that the speaker is a foreigner to himself, as well as to others, what good will he do by stammering along like that?"²

"That, my friend, is the answer to those who say that they speak in tongues for their private devotions. If the 'understanding is unfruitful,' you don't get a spiritual lift out of it; that is, the Holy Spirit is not ministering to you. If you get a lift, it is merely psychological. Paul says our understanding is unfruitful."³

14:15 Paul advocated praising God and praying to God with both the "spirit" (emotions) and the "mind" (understanding). The spirit and the mind are both receptors as well as expressers of impressions. Music without words can make a real impression on us, but that impression is not intellectual. One reason that

¹Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 291.

²Ibid., p. 292.

³McGee, 5:68.

tongues is an inferior gift is that in its expression, the speaker's reason has no control.

"Public worship should be performed so as to be understood."¹

Sometimes modern Christians who believe they have the gift of tongues wonder if they should speak in tongues in private, since they do not know what they are saying if they themselves cannot interpret what they are saying. Some of them claim that doing so edifies them (v. 4). Let us assume they are speaking some language that they have not learned, which is what the tongues-speakers in the early church were speaking. This, by the way, eliminates most modern tongues-speakers, since most modern tongues-speakers simply repeat gibberish.

A pastor friend of mine who used to "speak in tongues" (gibberish) told me that he had taught many Christians to "speak in tongues," and he could teach anyone to do so. According to him it just required learning a few phrases, getting oneself into the proper emotional state, and releasing one's inhibitions.²

Paul did not discourage speaking unknown languages in private. Nevertheless the relative value and profitability of such an exercise are so minimal that its practice seems almost foolish in view of the more edifying activities that are open to Christians. Perhaps the current preoccupation with feeling good, in contrast to having to work hard with one's mind to edify the church, is what makes this practice attractive to many people today.

"It is, of course, impossible for anyone to prove experimentally that speaking in tongues cannot occur today. It may be demonstrated, however, that speaking in tongues is not essential to God's purpose now, and that there are good reasons to

¹Henry, p. 18:21.

²See Gromacki, *The Modern ...*, pp. 41-42, for other examples of instructions on how to speak in tongues by those who advocate this practice.

believe that most if not all the phenomena which are advanced as proof of modern speaking in tongues is either psychological or demonic activity."¹

If the New Testament gift of tongues was still in the church today, we would expect that missionaries with this gift would not have to go to language school to learn the language of the people that they were preparing to minister to. But this is not the case.

- 14:16-17 Paul substituted the word "bless" for "pray to" here. When we praise God in prayer we say a benediction on Him: a word of blessing. The believer who does not understand what the person praying in tongues is saying ("the outsider," Gr. *idiotes*, lit. private person) is unable to add their affirmation at the end of the prayer. "Amen" means: So be it. Whenever we lead in public prayer, we should do it so the other people who are praying with us can join in and affirm our words (cf. 1 Chron. 16:36; Neh. 5:13; 8:6; Ps. 106:48). It is clear in verse 16 that Paul was speaking about a public worship situation. Giving thanks in public worship is important, even if no one else joins in, but it is even more important that other believers be allowed to join in.
- 14:18-19 Corinthian tongues-enthusiasts could not reject Paul's instruction because he did not have the gift himself and so failed to appreciate its value. He spoke in tongues "more than" all of them. He believed in the validity of the gift but did not value it highly.² Edifying instruction was "10,000" times more important than personal private exultation for the building up of the church gathered for worship. This is another use of hyperbole, which was common in antiquity.³ The edification (building up) of the body is, of course, God's great purpose for Christians today (Matt. 16:18).

¹Walvoord, *The Holy ...*, pp. 185-86.

²See Chadwick, p. 269.

³Keener, p. 114.

"Occasionally, in conversation, someone will say, 'Oh, I don't speak in tongues in public; I only do so in my private devotions. It is my own prayer language.' ... Two responses are in order. First, there is no instance in the New Testament of anyone speaking in tongues in private; it is always public. Furthermore, tongues 'are for a sign' (v. 22), which indicates tongues were meant to be public. Second, when Paul said that he spoke in tongues more than all of them he was not necessarily talking about private devotions. He probably was looking back to 1 Corinthians 13:1, where he discussed the degree of the gift of tongues. This then would mean Paul could speak in more different languages than any of the Corinthians."¹

Paul affirmed the gift that the Corinthians apparently regarded as the sign of genuine spirituality, but he did so by correcting their thinking about what was really important in their meetings. Worship should never be self-centered, and it should always be intelligible and edifying.²

Application in view of unbelievers 14:20-25

Uninterpreted tongues did not benefit visiting unbelievers any more than they edified the believers in church meetings. Prophecy, on the other hand, benefited both groups.

14:20 Thinking that tongues-speaking demonstrates spirituality evidences immaturity ("do not be children in your thinking").

"Children prefer what glitters and makes a show to what is much more valuable; and it was childish to prefer ecstatic utterance to other and far more useful gifts."³

¹Stanley D. Toussaint, "Rethinking Tongues," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172:686 (April-June 2015):184.

²Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 145.

³Robertson and Plummer, p. 315.

"Some people have the idea that speaking in a tongue is an evidence of spiritual maturity, but Paul taught that it is possible to exercise the gift in an unspiritual and immature manner."¹

There is a sense in which it is good for Christians to be childlike, namely, in our innocence regarding evil ("in evil be infants"). But when it comes to understanding ("thinking") we need to "be mature" (cf. 3:1-2). The Corinthians were not innocent in their behavior, any more than they were mature in their thinking.

- 14:21 The "Law" here refers to the Old Testament, since the passage Paul cited is Isaiah 28:11 and 12 (cf. Deut. 28:49; Isa. 29:10-12; 30:9-11; 33:19). The context of this passage was the Israelites' refusal to accept Isaiah's warnings concerning the coming Assyrian invasion. God told them that, because they refused to listen to their prophet's words, He would "teach" them by using their foreign-speaking invading enemy. Nevertheless even then, God said, they would not repent. Isaiah preached repentance to the Israelites in their own language, but they did not repent. Then God brought the invading Assyrians into Israel. Even then His people did not repent, though, by the Assyrian threat, God "spoke" to them again of their need to repent. He reminded them of their need to repent by allowing them to hear the foreign language of this enemy.
- 14:22 "So then" in this verse probably draws a conclusion from the preceding quotation. Tongues-speaking in the church was a "sign" to visiting "unbelievers," like the foreign-speaking invading Assyrians were to the unbelieving Jews in Isaiah's prophecy, but "prophecy" was for "believers."²
- 14:23 Paul drew a conclusion: "Therefore." He painted a picture of the Corinthian church assembled and engaged in a frenzy of

¹Wiersbe, 1:614.

²See Zane C. Hodges, "The Purpose of Tongues," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:479 (July-September 1963):226-33; J. Lanier Burns, "A Reemphasis on the Purpose of Tongues," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:527 (July-September 1975):242-49; and Harold W. Hoehner, "The Purpose of Tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:20-25," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, pp. 53-66.

unintelligible tongues-speaking. Two types of individuals walk in: one is a believer untaught in the matter of spiritual gifts, an outsider (cf. v. 16), and the other is an unbeliever. To both of them the worshippers appear to be "insane" rather than soberly engaged in worship and instruction. The church meeting would resemble the meetings of a mystery cult, in which such lunacy was common.

"It was strange that what the Corinthians specially prided themselves on was a gift which, if exercised in public, would excite the derision of unbelievers."¹

14:24-25 If, on the other hand, someone in the church was prophesying, and the congregation was receiving instruction, both visitors would gain a positive impression from the conduct of the believers. More importantly, what the prophet said would also convict them (cf. 2:14-15). Paul's description of the visitors' response came from Isaiah 45:14 (cf. Zech. 8:23), and it contrasts with the unresponsiveness of the Israelites to the messages that God had sent them through foreign language speakers (i.e., the Assyrians). Prophecy would result in the repentance of visiting unbelievers ("he will fall on his face"), but tongues-speaking would not. These verses summarize the effects of good Christian preaching on uninstructed believers and unbelievers.

"The gift of prophesying, however successful, is no glory to the possessor of it. It is the Spirit of God, not the preacher's own power, that works the wonderful effect."²

Paul did not mean that every individual in the church ("all speak in tongues ... all prophesy") would either speak in tongues or prophesy (cf. vv. 23, 24). He meant that if one of those gifts dominated to the exclusion of the other the stated results would normally follow.

¹Robertson and Plummer, p. 317.

²Ibid., p. 318.

"The Corinthians tend to shut their ears to prophecy because they gain more satisfaction from listening to tongues than from hearing their faults exposed and their duties pointed out in plain rational language."¹

To summarize, Paul permitted only intelligible utterances, when the church gathered for worship, because they edify believers and bring the uninstructed and the lost to conviction of their need (for instruction or salvation). As inferior as the gift of tongues was, it did have a legitimate purpose, namely, to impress unbelievers, especially Jews, with the fact that God was behind the Christians. Speaking in tongues was a feature of some of the pagan Greek mystery religions, so it would not have made as big of an impression on Greeks as it did on Jews.

5. The need for order 14:26-40

The Corinthians' public worship practices not only failed to some extent to be edifying and convicting, but they also involved disorderly conduct. Paul proceeded to deal with this additional need in order to help his readers value these qualities over the pseudo-spirituality that they associated with sensational *glossolalia*.

The ordering of these gifts 14:26-33

The apostle now began to regulate the use of tongues with interpretation, and he urged the use of discernment with prophecy.

"St Paul has here completed his treatment (xii.—xiv.) of *pneumatika*. He now gives detailed directions as to their use."²

14:26 The apostle did not want any one gift to dominate the meetings of this richly gifted church. Again, his list of utterance gifts was limited and selective: "a psalm," "a teaching," "a revelation," "a tongue," "an interpretation." Many Christians could and should make a variety of contributions to the general spiritual welfare of the congregation. Paul permitted the use of "tongues," but not

¹Barrett, p. 324.

²Robertson and Plummer, p. 319.

their exclusive use, and only if someone provided "an interpretation" (v. 27).

"That many in Corinth exercised their gifts in the interests of self-development and even of self-display can hardly be doubted; this was contrary to the law of love which regulates all Christian behaviour."¹

"Those gifts should be most highly prized which are most helpful to the Church and to one's fellow believers."²

14:27-28 Paul laid down three guidelines for the use of tongues in public worship: First, the believers should permit only "two or at the most three" interpreted tongues messages. This is in harmony with the inferior contribution that tongues make compared with prophecy.³ Second, the speakers should give them consecutively ("each one in turn"), rather than simultaneously, in order to minimize confusion. The Spirit does not overpower the speaker, but leads speakers to contribute in appropriate times and ways (v. 32). The Spirit's leading of the Old Testament prophets to speak at appropriate times and in the proper settings illustrates this. Third, the Christians should not allow tongues without interpretation in the church services ("one is to interpret").

"The suggestion that 'speak to himself and to God' deals with private activity is not plausible in a context devoted to public worship, which is the general theme of 11:2—14:40. ... 'Speaking to oneself and to God' was a proverbial expression for meditation."⁴

14:29 Likewise the "prophets" should minister in an orderly fashion. Only a few prophets ("two or three") were to "speak" at a service. The others in the congregation, not just other

¹Barrett, p. 327.

²Erdman, p. 132.

³See Baxter, 6:116-17.

⁴Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual ...*, pp. 151, 152.

prophets, should pay attention to what they said. The Greek word *diakrino* means "pass judgment" or "weigh carefully" (NIV). In 12:10 this Greek word refers to "distinguishing." Here it probably means to evaluate carefully and, if need be, to reject, if what was said was not in harmony with Scripture.

"The apostle does *not* instruct the churches to sort out the true and false *elements in any particular prophecy*. Rather, he instructs them to sort out the true and false *prophecies among the many they would hear*."¹

14:30-31 Here we seem to have an example of prophecies that took place in the early church conflicting with each other. What Paul seems to have envisioned was one person—both men and women could prophesy in this sense (11:4-5)—sharing a word from the Lord. This type of prophesying was open to almost anyone in the church. While this person was still speaking, another prophet received a revelation from the Lord. This second prophet appears to have had a more direct revelation than just the casual desire to address the congregation that had moved the first speaker to minister.

In such a case the first speaker was to give preference to the person making the new revelation. Presumably the first speaker could finish what he was saying later if he or she desired to do so. An example of this happening took place in Acts 11:28 and 21:10 and 11, when the prophet Agabus made revelations to the Christians in Antioch and Caesarea respectively.

"There was obviously a flexibility about the order of service in the early Church which is now totally lacking [in many modern churches]. ... Everything

¹R. Fowler White, "Does God Speak Today Apart from the Bible?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, p. 84. This essay is a rebuttal of the teaching of Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, pp. 133-43, 209-15; and Grudem, *The Gift ...*; idem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 1049-61, on this subject.

was informal enough to allow any man who felt that he had a message to give to give it."¹

14:32-33 "Prophets" were to control themselves when speaking ("the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets"), even when giving new revelation (cf. vv. 27-28). The nature of this gift was that it did not sweep the prophet into a mindless frenzy. Pagans, on the other hand, who received demonic revelations frequently lost control of themselves. Inability to control oneself was no evidence that the prophet spoke from God. On the contrary, it indicated that he was not submitting to God's control, because God produces "peace," not "confusion."

"The theological point is crucial: the character of one's deity is reflected in the character of one's worship. The Corinthians must therefore cease worship that reflects the pagan deities more than the God whom they have come to know through the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 12:2-3). God is neither characterized by disorder nor the cause of it in the assembly."²

Again the apostle reminded his readers that what he was commanding was standard policy in "all the churches of the saints" (cf. 1:2; 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:36). This reminder indicates again that this church had some serious underlying problems.

Confusion and disorder in church services are not in keeping with the character of God, and such conditions dishonor Him.

The ordering of the women 14:34-35

Paul had formerly acknowledged that women could share a word from the Lord in the church meetings (11:4-16). Now he clarified one point about their participation in this context of prophesying.

14:34 The word translated "to keep silent" (Gr. *sige*) means just that, namely, to hold one's tongue. However in 11:5 Paul spoke as

¹Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 150.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 697.

though women prophesying in the church was a common and acceptable practice. He did not prohibit it there. I think the best explanation of this apparent contradiction comes out of the context, as is usually true. Paul had just permitted others in the congregation to evaluate the comments that a prophet made (v. 29). Now he qualified this by saying that the women should not do so vocally in the church meetings as the men could. The teaching of "the Law" on this subject appears to be a reference to woman's subordination to the authoritative man in her family (Gen. 3:16). "The Law" then would refer to the Old Testament, as it does in verse 21.

"... we should understand this as referring to the situation where things can be done in the regular way, or where the Church is well established. For a situation can arise where there is a need of such a kind as calls for a woman to speak. But Paul is confining himself to what is fitting in a properly organized congregation."¹

"Although some philosophic schools included women disciples (and Jesus seems to have allowed them, Mk 15:40-41; Lk 8:1-3; 10:38-42), most schools, whether Jewish or Gentile, did not, and society expected men rather than women to absorb and question public lectures."²

"... ancient society rarely allowed teaching roles to women."³

14:35 Rather than calling out a question in the middle of some male or female prophet's message, the women were to wait and ask "their own husbands" about it "at home" after the service. Presumably unmarried women would ask their father, or some other man in the church, after the service.

¹Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 306

²Keener, p. 119.

³Idem, "Women's Education and Public Speech in Antiquity," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:4 (December 2007):759.

"Although he says 'husbands', he is not forbidding the women from consulting the prophets themselves, if necessary; for all husbands are not capable of giving an answer."¹

"In these [modern] days, it is often the men that do not understand and they ask the women at home!"²

Men could raise questions or make comments, but too much of this could ruin the orderliness of the service and the edifying value of the message. Consequently Paul instructed "the women," evidently in harmony with their position of subordination, to refrain. It is improper for a woman to speak in church meetings in the situation that Paul addressed in the context. That situation is the questioning and/or perhaps challenging of what a prophet said who was sharing something that he or she believed God had given him or her to pass on to the church.³

"To suggest that the women should learn by asking their husbands at home (14:35) would sound repressive to most of us today (at least where questions can be asked in public meetings), but probably seemed comparatively progressive in Paul's environment (and in some traditional cultures today)."⁴

There have been many other explanations of this apparent contradiction. The view that women should not speak at all in

¹Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 307.

²Ironside, p. 455.

³Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, pp. 136-37; Morris, pp. 201-2; Robertson and Plummer, p. 325; James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman In Biblical Perspective*, pp. 188, 190; *The NET2 Bible*; et al.

⁴Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 119.

the church, under any circumstances, has a long history.¹ But it does not resolve the apparent contradiction.

Lenski assumed that all of what Paul said in 14:26 through 32 applies only to men and that he added verses 33 through 36 as an appendix to deal with women's participation.² However, this does not harmonize with 11:4 and 5.

William Barclay believed that at that point in history Paul was not able to rise above the spirit of his age, which was that women should not participate in intellectual activities on a par with men.³ This view fails to appreciate the implications of Paul's inspiration by the Spirit as he wrote as well as his high regard for women that he expressed elsewhere in his writings.

G. Campbell Morgan seems to have regarded Paul's prohibition as necessary in view of conditions unique in Corinth that are no longer present today.⁴ It was improper for a woman to speak in church then just as it was improper for a woman to unveil herself in church then.

C. K. Barrett believed that Paul did not write verses 34 and 35. He presumed that some other person added them to the text later, when Christians thought good order was more important than the freedom of the Spirit.⁵

Gordon Fee also argued that these verses are not authentic.⁶

Harry Ironside believed that the occasions at which women could speak were different than the official meetings of the church, at which they were to be silent.⁷

¹Fairly recent advocates include Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual ...*, pp.158-61; and James Greenbury, "1 Corinthians 14:34-35: Evaluation of Prophecy Revisited," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:4 (December 2008):721-31.

²Lenski, p. 614.

³Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 151.

⁴Morgan, *The Corinthian ...*, pp. 180-81.

⁵Barrett, pp. 332-33.

⁶Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 699-702.

⁷Ironside, p. 454-55. Cf. Wiersbe, 1:616.

David Lowery wrote that Paul wanted only the married women whose husbands were present in the meeting to be silent but that other women could speak if properly covered.¹

S. Lewis Johnson Jr. seems to have felt that women were not permitted to speak in the church meetings, except when they prayed or prophesied.²

B. B. Findlay and H. Wayne House concluded that women could not speak if others considered that what they said was authoritative.³

Anne Blampied wrote that Paul told the women to keep silent because they were violating the principle of order in the church, not because they were women.⁴

Andrew Spurgeon interpreted the imperatives as permissive. He believed that they expressed Paul's approval of what the Corinthian women were doing.⁵

To summarize, the most common view is that Paul forbade some form of inappropriate speech, but not all speech.⁶ The second most popular interpretation is that Paul forbade some form of inspired speech other than prophecy, perhaps speech contradicting the prophets or speaking in tongues.

"Paul's long response to the Corinthians' enthusiasm for tongues is now finished. The basic issue is over what it means to be *pneumatikos* ('spiritual'); and on this issue Paul and they are deeply divided. They think it has to do with speaking in tongues, the language(s) of the angels, the sure evidence that

¹Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 541.

²S. L. Johnson Jr., "The First ...," p. 1255.

³Findlay, 2:915; H. Wayne House, "Caught in the Middle," *Kindred Spirit* 13:2 (Summer 1989):14; idem, "The Speaking of Women and the Prohibition of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:579 (July-September 1988):301-18.

⁴Anne B. Blampied, "Paul and Silence for 'The Women' in I Corinthians 14:34-35," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 18:2 (October 1983):143-65. See also Calvin, *The First ...*, pp. 306-7.

⁵Andrew B. Spurgeon, "Pauline Commands and Women in 1 Corinthians 14," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:671 (July-September 2011):317-33.

⁶E.g., Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 135.

they are already living in the pneumatic [spiritual] existence of the future. For this reason they have great zeal for this gift (cf. v. 12), including an insistence on its practice in the gathered assembly. Apparently in their letter they have not only defended this practice, but by the same criterion have called Paul into question for his lack of 'spirituality.' Hence the undercurrent of apologetic for his own speaking in tongues in vv. 6, 15, and 18.¹

"Paul's response to all this has been twofold. First, they are to broaden their perspective to recognize that being Spirit people by its very nature means a great variety of gifts and ministries in the church (chap. 12). Second, the whole point of the gathered people of God is edification, the true expression of love for the saints. Whatever they do in the assembly must be both intelligible and orderly so that the whole community may be edified; thus it must reflect the character of God, which is how it is (or is to be) in all the churches of the saints (v. 33)."²

Concluding confrontation 14:36-40

Paul concluded his answer to the Corinthians' question concerning spiritual gifts (chs. 12—14) and his teaching on tongues (ch. 14) with a strong call to cooperation. He zeroed in on their individualism (v. 36; cf. v. 33) and confronted them on the issue of who indeed was spiritual (v. 37). Like the prophets of old, he warned anyone who disagreed with his instructions (v. 38) and finally summarized his argument (vv. 39-40; cf. 4:18-21).

14:36 In this verse Paul reminded the Corinthians that they did not set the standard for how the church meetings should proceed. Their arrogance evidently drew this warning, which Paul put in the form of two questions. The Corinthian church was not the first or mother church, nor was it the only church to which the gospel had come—as though it was a unique church (cf. 11:16; 14:33b). Therefore the Corinthian readers should submit to the apostle's direction (cf. 9:1-23).

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 709.

²Ibid. See also Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, pp. 63-64.

- 14:37 Anyone could easily validate a Corinthian's claim to being "a prophet or spiritual." He could do so by checking to see if he or she acknowledged that what Paul had written was authoritative because he was an apostle of the Lord. The things that he had written to them were "the Lord's commandment." Submission to apostolic authority was the test, not speaking in tongues. Submissiveness to the apostles and their teaching was an expression of submission to the Lord Himself (cf. 7:10, 25). It still is, because what the apostles wrote was inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).
- 14:38 The Corinthians were not to "recognize" as a prophet, or as a person under the control of the Holy Spirit, anyone who refused to acknowledge Paul's apostolic authority. Failure to recognize the Lord as the source of Paul's teaching would lead to that person's failure to be "recognized" (i.e., acknowledged with approval) by the Lord (cf. 8:2-3).
- 14:39 "Therefore" signals a summation of the entire argument on spiritual gifts. "My brothers and sisters" sounds a loving note at the end of this very stern discussion (cf. 1:10). "Earnestly desire to prophesy" repeats the imperative with which Paul began (v. 1). "Do not forbid speaking in tongues" concedes the legitimacy of their favorite gift. Paul heartily encouraged the exercise of the gift of prophecy, but he only permitted the gift of speaking in tongues with certain qualifiers.

As time passed God no longer gave prophets revelations concerning the future. The Apostle John was evidently the last person to function as a prophet in this sense (cf. Rev. 22:18). Prophets after John no longer received new revelation directly from the Lord either. We can see that this was beginning to pass away even during the history of the church that Luke recorded in Acts. Much of the revelation contained in the books of the New Testament was of this type: having to do with future events. In this sense the gift of prophecy was foundational to the establishment of the church and has ceased (Eph. 2:20). Nevertheless people continued to speak forth messages from the Lord, which is the basic meaning of

the Greek word *propheteuo* ("to prophesy"). In the more general sense, this gift is still with us today (cf. v. 3).

Paul said that his readers were not to "forbid speaking in tongues." He meant they were not to do so provided they followed the rules that he had just explained for the exercise of this gift. Certainly if someone has the New Testament gift of tongues he or she should observe these rules today as well. However many Christians seriously doubt that anyone has this gift today. Christians involved in the charismatic movement believe that the gift does exist today, as do some of the cults, such as Spiritualism.¹ Nevertheless the differences between tongues-speaking as practiced today and what took place in first-century churches has led many believers to conclude that these are very different experiences.

14:40 The foundational principles that should underlie what takes place in church meetings are these: Christians should do everything "properly," namely, in a decent and "orderly" manner, everything should be edifying (v. 26), and a spirit of peace should prevail (v. 33).

This chapter on speaking in tongues is extremely relevant because of current interest in the charismatic gifts of the Spirit. If believers followed the teaching in this chapter alone, even in charismatic churches, there would be far less confusion in the church over this subject.

"In these three chapters (xii.—xiv.) the Apostle has been contending with the danger of *spiritual anarchy*, which would be the result if every Christian who believed that he had a charisma were allowed to exercise it without consideration for others."²

Some members of the Corinthian church continued to resist Paul's apostolic authority, as 2 Corinthians makes clear.

What about "tongues" that are not languages? They are not what the New Testament deals with. But how should we deal with them? I suggest five things: First, recognize that "do not forbid speaking in tongues" (v. 39)

¹See Gasson, p. 48.

²Robertson and Plummer, p. 328.

does not refer to this type of tongues but to languages. Church leaders can forbid speaking in the "non-language" type of tongues. Second, recognize that interpreting this type of tongues is not what the New Testament is talking about either. Third, since this type of tongues does not edify the church, and often disrupts the church, church leaders can prohibit it in church meetings. Fourth, if someone wants to practice this type of tongues in private it will only make him or her feel good—possibly. It will not help others. Fifth, this type of tongues can be learned by almost anyone, including unbelievers. It is not a supernatural ability that God gives to only some Christians, as many advocates of non-language "tongues" claim.¹

F. THE RESURRECTION OF BELIEVERS CH. 15

The Apostle Paul did not introduce the instruction on the resurrection that follows with the formula that identifies it as a response to a specific question from the Corinthians (i.e., *peri de*, "Now concerning"). From what he said in this chapter he apparently knew that some in the Corinthian church had adopted a belief concerning the resurrection that was contrary to apostolic teaching. They believed that there is no resurrection of the dead (cf. vv. 12, 16, 29, 32; Acts 17:32).

"Educated, elite Corinthians probably followed views held by many philosophers, such as immortality of the soul after the body's death. ... Some Greeks (like Epicureans and popular doubts on tombstones) denied even an afterlife. Yet even Greeks who expected an afterlife for the soul could not conceive of bodily resurrection (which they would view as the reanimation of corpses) or glorified bodies."²

Apparently Paul included this teaching in order to correct this error and to reaffirm the central importance of the doctrine of the resurrection in the Christian faith.

"... the letter itself is not finished. Lying behind their view of spirituality is not simply a false view of spiritual gifts, but a false theology of spiritual existence as such. Since their view

¹See Appendix 2 "Summary of my understanding of spiritual gifts" at the end of these notes for further discussion of this subject.

²Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 122. Paragraph division omitted.

of 'spirituality' had also brought them to deny a future resurrection of the body, it is fitting that this matter be taken up next. The result is the grand climax of the letter as a whole, at least in terms of its argument."¹

"This chapter has been called 'the earliest Christian doctrinal essay,' and it is the only part of the letter which deals directly with doctrine."²

Evidently most of the Corinthian church believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (15:3-4), but belief in His resurrection did not necessarily involve believing that God would raise all believers in Christ. Christ's resurrection gave hope to believers about the future, but that hope did not necessarily involve the believer's resurrection. This seems to have been the viewpoint of many early Christians until Paul taught them that their bodily resurrection was part of their hope, which he did here. Thus this chapter has great theological value for the entire church.

"... apparently soon after Paul's departure from Corinth [after his 18 months of ministry there] things took a turn for the worse in this church. A false theology began to gain ground, rooted in a radical pneumatism [spiritism] that denied the value/significance of the body and expressed in a somewhat 'overrealized,' or 'spiritualized,' eschatology. Along with this there arose a decided movement against Paul. These two matters climax in this letter in their pneumatic [spiritual] behavior (chaps. 12—14) and their denial of a resurrection of the dead (chap. 15), which included their questioning of his status as *pneumatikos* ([spiritual] 14:36-38) and perhaps their calling him an 'abortion' or a 'freak' (15:8). Thus, as elsewhere, Paul sets out not only to correct some bad theology but at the same time to remind them of his right to do so."³

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 713.

²Robertson and Plummer, p. 329. A doctrine is a belief or set of beliefs that is held and taught by a church, political party, or other group.

³Fee, *The First ...*, p. 716.

I. The resurrection of Jesus Christ 15:1-11

Paul began by reaffirming their commonly held belief: Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. In this section the apostle stressed the objective reality of both Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

"The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of all the Biblical teaching regarding the future life. If Christ arose and showed Himself alive to His own after His death, there really is something after this life."¹

15:1 The Corinthians and all Christians have their standing in Christ as a result of "the gospel" message that they believe.

"The bulk of the people do not know the first principles of the gospel. We [preachers] assume too much when we take it for granted that our hearers, all of them, understand the gospel."²

15:2 Paul did not entertain the possibility that his readers could lose their salvation by abandoning the gospel that he had preached to them. "If you hold firmly to the word which I preached to you" means "if you hold fast (in mind) in what language I told you the good news."³ If they remembered and held fast to the gospel that they had received they would continue to experience God's deliverance as they lived day by day. "By which you also are saved" means by which gospel you were saved, are being saved, and will be saved. Their denial of the Resurrection, a major aspect of the gospel message that they had heard, might indicate that some of them had not really believed the gospel.

15:3 As with the events of the Lord's Supper (11:23), Paul had heard of the Lord Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances, and he had then passed this information along to others. Elsewhere he wrote that he had not received the gospel from other people but directly from the Lord (Gal. 1:11). Probably some aspects of it came to him

¹Pache, p. 163.

²C. H. Spurgeon, *An All Round Ministry*, p. 308.

³Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 138.

one way and others in other ways. He may have received the essence of the gospel on the Damascus Road and later learned more details from other sources. Or ...

"He received the facts from the Apostles and others; the import of the facts was made known to him by Christ (Gal. i. 12)."¹

Three facts are primary concerning Jesus' death: He "died," He died "for our sins," and He died as the Scriptures revealed that He would ("according to the Scriptures"). These facts received constant reaffirmation in the early preaching of the church (cf. Acts 3:13-18; 8:32-35).

"People are wicked and sinful; they do not know God. But Christ died 'for our sins,' not only to forgive but also *to free people from their sins*. Hence Paul's extreme agitation at the Corinthians' sinfulness, because they are thereby persisting in the very sins from which God in Christ has saved them. This, after all, is what most of the letter is about."²

"The language 'for our sins' is a direct reflection of the LXX [Septuagint translation] of Isa. 53. Since Judaism did *not* interpret this passage messianically, at least not in terms of a personal Messiah,³ and since there is no immediate connection between the death of Jesus and the idea that his death was 'for our sins,' it is fair to say that whoever made that connection is the 'founder of Christianity.' All the evidence points to Jesus himself, especially at the Last Supper with his interpretation of his death in the language of Isa. 53 as 'for you' (see on 11:23-25)."⁴

¹Robertson and Plummer, p. 333.

²Fee, "Toward a ...," p. 49.

³Footnote 56: See A. Neubauer, ed., *The Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah, According to [the] Jewish Interpreters*, 2 vols.

⁴Fee, *The First ...*, p. 724.

"'Christ died'—that is history; 'Christ died for our sins'—that is doctrine. Without these two elements, joined in an absolutely indissoluble union, there is no Christianity."¹

15:4 Jesus' burial emphasizes the finality of the Messiah's death (cf. Acts 2:29) and serves as evidence of the reality of His resurrection (cf. Acts 13:29-30). He could not have truly arisen if He had not truly died and was buried.

"... apart from His bodily resurrection we could have no proof that God had accepted His propitiatory [satisfying, atoning] work ..."²

The perfect tense and passive voice of the Greek verb translated "was raised" implies that, since God raised Him, He is still alive. "The third day" was Sunday. Friday, the day of the crucifixion, was the first day, and Saturday was the second.³ The phrase "according to the Scriptures" probably describes the Resurrection alone in view of the structure of the sentence in Greek (cf. Lev. 23:10-14; Ps. 16:10-11; 17:15; Isa. 53:10b; Hos. 6:2; Matt. 12:38-41). According to the Scriptures all three persons of the Godhead had a part in Jesus' resurrection: the Son (John 2:19, 21), the Father (Rom. 6:4; cf. Heb. 13:20), and the Spirit (Rom. 8:11).

"Though the resurrection is part of the gospel message, it is not part of the saving work of Christ on the cross. The resurrection is stated as proof of the efficacy [effectiveness, success] of Christ's death. Having accomplished redemption by His death, Jesus Christ was 'raised because of our justification' (Rom. 4:25). The fact that Jesus Christ is alive is part of the Christian's good news,

¹J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, p. 27.

²Ironside, p. 468. See also p. 478.

³See Martin Pickup, "'On the Third Day': The Time Frame of Jesus' Death and Resurrection," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:3 (September 2013):511-42.

but individuals are saved by His death, not by His resurrection."¹

- 15:5 Peter ("Cephas") was, of course, the leader of the 12 disciples. Perhaps Paul referred to the Lord's special appearance to Peter (Luke 24:34) because some individuals in the Corinthian church revered Peter (1:12) as well as because he was the key disciple. "The twelve" refers to the 12 disciples, even though only 11 of them were alive when the Lord appeared to them. This was a way of referring to that particular group of Jesus' followers during His earthly ministry (Matt. 10:1).²
- 15:6 This is the only record of Jesus' post-resurrection appearance "to more than 500" people in the New Testament. That Jesus appeared to so many people at one time is evidence that His resurrection body was not a spirit. Many people testified that they had seen Him on this one occasion. Since the Resurrection took place about 23 years before Paul wrote this epistle, it is reasonable that the majority of this group of witnesses was still alive ("most of whom remain until now"). Any skeptical Corinthians could check with them.
- 15:7 This "James" was most likely the half-brother of Jesus. He became the leader of the Jerusalem church (cf. Acts 15:13-21). "The apostles" as a group included Matthias, who was not one of the 12 original disciples. "All the apostles" probably refers to a collective appearance to literally all the apostles (except Judas, who committed suicide before Jesus died).
- 15:8 Paul regarded the Lord's appearance to him on the Damascus Road as an equivalent post-resurrection appearance and the Lord's "last" one.

"Paul thinks of himself here as an Israelite whose time to be born again had not come nationally (cp.

¹Thomas L. Constable, "The Gospel Message," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, p. 203. See also John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 232; and Gavin Ortlund, "Resurrected as Messiah: The Risen Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:4 (December 2011):749-66.

²See Daniel J. Pfeifer, "Which Came First, the Symbol or the Referent? A Study of the Historical Twelve," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172:688 (October-December 2015):433-49.

Mt. 23:39), so that his conversion by the appearing of the Lord in glory (Acts 9:3-6) was an illustration, or instance, before the time of the future national conversion of Israel. See Ezek. 20:35-38; Hos. 2:14-17; Zech. 12:10—13:6; Rom. 11:25-27; 1 Tim. 1:16."¹

Another view is that Paul meant by "one untimely born" that he had become an apostle after the Twelve had become apostles.

Paul may have referred to himself as he did ("one untimely born," lit. the abortion) not because his apostleship came to him prematurely. The Lord appointed him some time after the others. He may have done so because, compared with the backgrounds and appointments of the other apostles, Paul's background and appointment were unusual. He lacked the normal "gestation period" of having accompanied the Lord during His earthly ministry (cf. Acts 1:21-22). Calvin believed that Paul was referring to his sudden conversion.²

"Since this is such an unusual term of deprecation, and since it occurs with the article, *the* 'abortion,' it has often been suggested that the Corinthians themselves have used the term to describe Paul, as one who because of his personal weaknesses is something of a 'freak' in comparison with other apostles, especially Apollos and Peter. Others have suggested that the term is a play on Paul's name—*Paulus*, 'the little one.' Hence they dismissed him as a 'dwarf.' This has the advantage of helping to explain the unusual 'digression' in vv. 9-10, where he in fact allows that he is 'least' of all the apostles; nonetheless God's grace worked the more abundantly in his behalf. In any case, whether it originated with them, which seems altogether likely, or with Paul himself in a sudden outburst of self-disparagement, it seems hardly

¹ *The New Scofield ...*, p. 1247.

² Calvin, *The First ...*, p. 315.

possible to understand this usage except as a term that describes him vis-à-vis [with respect to] the Corinthians' own view of apostleship."¹

Paul stressed the appearances of the risen Christ (vv. 5-9) because they prove that His resurrection was not to a form of "spiritual" (i.e., non-corporeal, non-physical) existence. Just as His body died and was buried, so also His body was raised, and many witnesses saw it—often many witnesses at one time.

15:9 Paul probably used the Corinthians' view of him as an abnormal apostle to comment on his view of himself in this verse and the next one. Evidently Paul truly felt himself the "least" worthy to be an apostle. He did not regard his apostleship as inferior to that of the other apostles however (cf. 2 Cor. 10:1—13:10; Gal. 1:11—2:21). The reason that he felt so unworthy was because, while the other apostles were building up the church, he had been tearing it down ("I persecuted the church of God").

15:10 Paul recognized his apostolic calling as a gracious gift from God. The giving of God's "grace" proves "vain" when it does not draw out the appropriate response of loving service. Paul responded to God's unusually great grace to him by offering back unusually great service to God. However he did not view his service as self-generated ("yet not I") but as the product of God's continual supply of grace to him ("the grace of God with me"). God saved Paul by grace, and Paul served God by God's grace.

15:11 Paul and the other apostles all believed and preached the same gospel. Paul did not proclaim a different message from what Peter, James, and the others did (cf. Gal. 2:1-10). This commonly agreed on message is what the Corinthians had "believed" when those who had ministered in Corinth had preached to them. By denying the Resurrection the Corinthians were following neither Paul, nor Apollos, nor Cephas, nor Christ. They were pursuing a false doctrine of their own.

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 733. Paragraph division omitted.

The point of this section of verses was to present the gospel message, including the account of Jesus Christ's resurrection, as what many reliable eyewitnesses saw and what all the apostles preached. Paul did this in order to stress that Jesus Christ's resurrection, which most of the Corinthian Christians accepted, had objective reality. Even though Paul had a different background from the other apostles, he heralded the same message that they did. Consequently his original readers did not need to fear that what they had heard from him was some cultic perversion of the truth. It was the true gospel, and they should continue to believe it.

2. The certainty of resurrection 15:12-34

In the preceding paragraph Paul firmly established that the gospel the Corinthians had believed contained the fact that God had raised Jesus Christ bodily, along with other equally crucial facts. Next he proceeded to show the consequences of rejecting belief in the resurrection of the body.

"Paul uses *reductio ad absurdum*: if there is no resurrection (i.e., of believers in the future), then Jesus did not rise (15:12-13), a point on which he dwells at length (15:12-19, where Paul provides rhetorical emphasis through a series of seven if-then statements)."¹

The negative alternative 15:12-19

Paul first appealed to the Corinthians' logic. In this form of logic, called *modus tollens*, Paul's argument was that, since Christ was raised, there must also be a resurrection of believers.² That Paul had believers in view, rather than all people, seems clear in that he was discussing the hope of believers. Other passages teach the resurrection of other groups of people, even all others (e.g., Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:4-5, 12; et al.). Here it becomes clear, for the first time in this chapter, that some of the Corinthians were saying there is no resurrection of the dead. If they were correct, then Christ did not arise, and they had neither a past nor a future.

¹Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 126. The Latin phrase *reductio ad absurdum* (lit. reduction to the absurd) describes a method of proving the falsity of a premise by showing that its logical consequence is absurd or contradictory.

²The Latin phrase *modus tollens* (lit. mood that denies) describes the rule of logic that states that if a conditional statement is accepted, and the consequent does not hold, then the negation of the antecedent can be inferred.

15:12 Belief in the resurrection of a dead body seems to have been difficult for Greeks to accept in other places as well, not just in Corinth (cf. Acts 17:32; 2 Tim. 2:17-18). Evidently some of the Corinthian Christians were having second thoughts about this doctrine because of the general denial of bodily resurrection by the Greeks.

"These deniers apparently believe that those who are truly 'spiritual' (in the Corinthians' sense) are already 'reigning with Christ' in glory (see 4:8)."¹

"On the whole the Greek did believe in the immortality of the soul, but the Greek would never have dreamed of believing in the resurrection of the body."²

To most Greeks the idea of the resurrection of the body was loathsome because they viewed the body as a hindrance to attaining the highest aspects of life. They had a proverb that said: "The body is a tomb," and one of the Greek writers wrote: "I am a poor soul shackled to a corpse."³ So the idea of a resurrected Christ conflicted with their disbelief in bodily resurrection.

"Greek philosophy entertained no conception of a resurrection of the body."⁴

15:13-14 Belief in bodily resurrection is foundational to the Christian faith. If the resurrection of the body is impossible, then the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fiction. If He did not rise, the apostles' preaching rested on a lie and was in "vain" (pointless), and consequently the Corinthians' faith would have been in "vain" (useless and hopeless).

¹Furnish, p. 74.

²Barclay, *The Letter ...*, p. 156.

³Ibid.

⁴Merrill C. Tenney, *The Reality of the Resurrection*, p. 23.

"The fulfillment of God's purpose for Christ's victory over the grave is the key to Pauline eschatology."¹

This is the first in a series of conditional statements ("if ... then") that run through verse 19. They are first class conditions in the Greek text, which express the assumption of reality for the sake of the argument. In verse 13 Paul did not express disbelief in the resurrection from the dead. He only assumed that there is none in order to make a point. This was also his tactic in verses 14, 16, 17, and 19.

15:15 If there were no resurrection of the body the apostles would not only be in error but they would also be false witnesses against God. They would have been preaching something untrue about God, namely, that He did not raise Jesus Christ—when He really had. This would be a serious charge for the Corinthians to make against the man who had founded their church, who claimed to represent God. Really, by denying the Resurrection, the unbelieving Corinthians were the "false witnesses."

15:16-18 Paul repeated his line of thought, contained in verses 12 through 14, using other terms in order to emphasize a different point. If Christ was still dead and in the grave, then "faith" in Him for salvation is "worthless."² If Christ did not rise, the believer is still dead in his or her sins. He or she is without any hope of forgiveness or eternal life. So Christians who had already died ("fallen asleep in Christ") would be lost forever ("have perished"), eternally separated from God. Even though it is the death of Christ that saves us, if He had not been raised from the dead His death would have been in vain.

"The denial of their future, that they are destined for resurrection on the basis of Christ's resurrection, has the net effect of a denial of their

¹Ibid., p. 77.

²See Norman L. Geisler, "The Significance of Christ's Physical Resurrection," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146:582 (April-June 1989):148-70.

past, that they have received forgiveness of sins on the basis of Christ's death."¹

Paul evidently meant that, given the Corinthians' position, the believer has no future of any kind. "Perished" probably has this meaning since, even though they denied the Resurrection, they were still baptizing for the dead (v. 29).

15:19 If the Christian's hope "in Christ" is just for what he or she can expect this side of the grave, then that person deserves pity. Of course there are some benefits to trusting Christ as we live here and now (cf. 1 Tim. 4:8). However we have to place these things in the balance with what we lose in this life for taking a stand for Him (cf. Phil. 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:4-5; 9:25). If we have nothing to hope for on the other side of the grave, specifically the resurrection of our bodies, the Christian life would not be worth living ("we are of all people most to be pitied").

To summarize his argument Paul claimed that if believers have no future, specifically resurrected bodies like Christ's, we have no past or present to speak of either. That is, we have no forgiveness of our past sins, and we have no advantage over unbelievers in the present.

"It is a point of very great importance to remember that the Corinthians were not denying the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; what they were denying is the resurrection of the body; and what Paul is insistent upon is that if a man denies the possibility of the resurrection of the body he has thereby denied the possibility of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and has therefore emptied the Christian message of its truth and the Christian life of its reality."²

The positive reality 15:20-28

Paul turned next to show that the resurrection of Christ makes the resurrection of believers both necessary and inevitable. The consequences of this fact are as glorious as the effects of His not being raised are dismal. Those "in Christ" must arise, since Christ Himself arose. His resurrection was in the past, but ours will be in the future. Christ's resurrection set in

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 743.

²Barclay, *The Letter ...*, p. 153.

motion the defeat of all God's enemies, including death. His resurrection demands our resurrection, since otherwise death would remain undefeated.

15:20 The argument advances here by connecting the believer with "Christ." Christ was the "first fruits" of the larger group of those whom God has chosen for salvation. This is the last mention of Christ's resurrection in the argument, but all that follows rests on the fact of His resurrection.

"... we remember the statement made by Horace Bushnell, 'The resurrection of Jesus Christ is absolutely the best attested fact in ancient history.' You cannot think of any other incident in ancient history that has anything like the number of witnesses to its truth as we have to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ."¹

The Jews celebrated Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month on their sacred calendar. Jesus died on the day that Jewish fathers killed the Passover lamb, which was a Friday that year. The Jews offered a sacrifice of "first fruits" the day after the Sabbath (Saturday) following the Passover (Lev. 23:10-11), namely, Sunday. This was the day that Jesus arose. Fifty days later, on Pentecost, they presented another offering of new grain that they also called an offering of first fruits (Lev. 23:15-17).

The first fruits that the Jews offered following the Passover were only the first of the crops that they offered later. Paul saw in this comparison the fact that other believers would rise from the dead just as Jesus Christ did. He used the first fruits metaphor to assert that the resurrection of believers ("those who are asleep," i.e., have died) is absolutely inevitable. God Himself has guaranteed it.

15:21-22 The apostle also drew a lesson from two uniquely representative men: Adam and Christ. Adam derived life from another, God. But Christ is, Himself, the Fountain of Life. Adam was the first man in the old creation, and, like him, all of his

¹Ironside, p. 475.

descendants die physically. Christ is the first man in the new creation, and, like Him, all of His descendants (His sons and daughters by faith) will live physically (cf. Rom. 5:12-19). Obviously Paul was referring only to believers as descendants of Christ.¹ Both Adam and Jesus were men. Therefore our resurrection will be a human resurrection, not some spiritual type of resurrection. Physical resurrection is as inevitable for the sons of Jesus Christ (believers) as physical death is for the sons of Adam (humans).

15:23 The Greek word translated "order" (*tagma*) is a military one used of ranks of soldiers. Paul's idea was that Christ was the first rank, and He experienced resurrection first. Christians are in a different rank and will experience resurrection together as a group and at a different time, namely, at the Lord's coming (Gr. *parousia*, lit. appearing, i.e., at the Rapture). The apostle did not go on to give a complete explanation of the various resurrections here. There will be other ranks of people who will arise at other times including Tribulation saints, Old Testament believers, and the unsaved.

"Passages like John 5:25-29 and Revelation 20 indicate that there is no such thing taught in Scripture as a 'general [all people at the same time] resurrection.'"²

Paul's point here was that the resurrection of Christians is just as certain to take place as the fact that Christ's resurrection already took place. He did not mean that our resurrection will be of a different type than Christ's (i.e., spiritual rather than physical).

15:24-26 "The end" refers to the end of the present heavens and earth in view of what Paul said about it here. This will come more than 1,000 years after the Rapture. Then Christ, who will have been reigning over His earthly millennial "kingdom," will hand over that kingdom to His "Father." Christ's abolition of all other

¹See Andrew Wilson, "The Strongest Argument for Universalism in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59:4 (2016):805-12.

²Wiersbe, 1:618.

"rule and all authority and power" will take place when He subdues the rebels that will rise up against Him at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:7-10). He will also finally defeat "death," and from then on no one will die. The saved will enter the new heavens and new earth to enjoy bliss with God forever while the lost will suffer everlasting torment (Matt. 25:46; Rev. 20:11—21:1).

"Many see evidence of the millennium in Paul's discourse on resurrection (1 Co 15, esp. vv. 20-28)."¹

"... it is not only possible but probable that Paul understood this final triumph to take place during the millennial reign of Christ. To sum up the principal evidence, Paul's use of *epeita* ('after that') and *eita* ('then') in 1 Corinthians 15:23-24, the syntax of 15:24-25, and the parallel use of Psalms 8 and 110 in 1 Corinthians 15 and Hebrews 1 and 2 all point to the understanding that when Paul mentioned a kingdom and reign in 15:24-25, he referred to the reign of Christ on this earth following His return and prior to the eternal state, a time that Revelation 20:4-6 calls 'the thousand years.'"²

Even though Jesus triumphed over death in His resurrection, believers still die. Therefore we must experience resurrection at some point, because we are "in Christ," and because only then, after all believers have been raised, will the final enemy, death, be subdued. Only then will God become "all in all" (i.e., everything that matters; v. 28; cf. Col. 3:11).

15:27 Paul saw Jesus Christ as the person who fulfilled the prophecy recorded in Psalm 8:7.³ In this psalm the ruler in view is man,

¹Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 280.

²D. Edmond Hiebert, "Evidence from 1 Corinthians 15," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, p. 234.

³See Donald R. Glenn, "Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2: A Case Study in Biblical Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, pp. 44-45; and Martin Pickup, "New Testament

but Christ will be the man who will have regained for humanity all that Adam lost (cf. Ps. 110:1). Of course God the "Father" is excepted; He will not be under the rule of the Son of God. The Father is the One who will finally bring "all things" into "subjection" to Christ.

15:28 Finally "God" will be the head of everything (cf. Rom. 11:36): "all in all". The earthly millennial kingdom will end, and everything will merge into the eternal kingdom of God (cf. Isa. 9:7; Luke 1:33).¹ Some interpreters believe that the kingdom that Paul referred to here is Christ's present cosmic Lordship that He exercises from heaven.² But this view does not harmonize well with biblical eschatology. Christ will be submissive to His Father forever, as He always has been.

This is the central biblical passage that affirms the eternal functional (not ontological) subordination of the Son to the Father (cf. 3:22-23; 8:6; 11:3; Mark 13:32; 14:62; John 1:1; 14:28; 17:24; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 2:9-11; 4:19-20).³ The resurrection of Christ set in motion a chain of events that will ultimately culminate in the death of death. Then God will be "all in all."

"The meaning seems to be that there will no longer be need of a Mediator: all relations between Creator and creatures, between Father and offspring, will be direct."⁴

In this pericope Paul traced the progressive steps of Christ from His resurrection to His final functional subordination to His Father, which will occur at the end of the present heavens and earth. Undoubtedly he intended his readers to identify with the Savior since he had taught them that believers reproduce the experiences of their Lord when they reproduce

Interpretation of the Old Testament: The Theological Rationale of Midrashic Exegesis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:2 (June 2008):353-81.

¹Cf. Saucy, *The Case ...*, pp. 321-22.

²E.g., C. E. Hill, "Paul's Understanding of Christ's Kingdom in I Corinthians 15:20-28," *Novum Testamentum* 30:4 (October 1988):297-320.

³John V. Dahms, "The Subordination of the Son," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:3 (September 1994):351-64.

⁴Robertson and Plummer, p. 358.

His attitudes and actions. In view of what lies ahead, how foolish it would be to deny the resurrection of the body. This passage clarifies the true significance of Easter.

Other arguments for resurrection 15:29-34

Paul turned from Christ's progressive steps to the Christian's experience in order to argue *ad hominem* for the resurrection. An *ad hominem* argument is one that appeals to self-interest rather than to logic. The Corinthians' actions, and his, bordered on absurdity if the dead will not rise. This paragraph is something of a digression. The main argument resumes in verse 35.

15:29 This verse probably refers to proxy baptism: the custom of undergoing baptism for someone who died before he or she could undergo baptism.¹ Morris wrote that there have been 30 to 40 interpretations of this verse.² Baptism for the dead was a custom in at least one of the Greek mystery religions, one that was based close to Corinth in the neighboring town of Eleusis, namely, the Eleusian mystery religion.³

Perhaps the Corinthians were practicing baptism for the dead for people who became Christians, either on their deathbeds or under other circumstances that made it difficult or impossible for them to undergo baptism in water. However Paul did not say that the Corinthians were doing this, only that some people did this: "Why then are they baptized for them?" not: Why then are you baptized for them? Paul's mention of the custom is not necessarily an endorsement of it. But, on the other hand, he did not specifically condemn it either.

Whether he approved of it or not the Corinthian believers were evidently influenced by this custom. It appears again that the spirit of the city of Corinth had invaded the church. Paul used this practice to argue for the reality of resurrection. His point was that if there is no physical resurrection it is foolish to

¹Alford, 2:2:612; Pache, pp. 90-92.

²Morris, p. 219. See the commentaries for other views and John D. Reaume, "Another Look at 1 Corinthians 15:29, 'Baptized for the Dead'," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):457-75; Archer, pp. 401-2.

³Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 544.

undergo baptism for someone who had died, because in that case they are dead and gone forever.¹ Suppose, on the other hand, that there is a resurrection. When God raises those baptized by proxy, they would not be the ones to suffer shame for failure to undergo baptism while they were alive.

The Corinthians may have carried proxy baptism over into the church from pagan religions. That is a distinct possibility since we have seen that they had done this with other pagan practices. There is nothing in Scripture that encourages this practice, though some have interpreted this verse as an encouragement. Some Christian groups that believe water baptism contributes to a person's salvation advocate it. Today Mormons do.² However, the mention of a practice in Scripture does not always constitute endorsement of it. We have seen this in chapters 8 through 11 especially.

One writer believed that the first reference to "the dead" in this verse refers metaphorically to the apostles who had died (cf. v. 31).³ This seems unlikely to me in view of the prevalence of this custom in and around Corinth.

Another possible interpretation is that by being baptized—if indeed the Corinthian Christians were doing this—they were publicly taking the places of their fellow believers who had died. They were filling up the ranks of baptized Christians who, by dying, had left vacancies in those ranks.⁴

15:30 If there is no resurrection why did Paul endure so many hardships and dangers in his ministry? The apostle's sacrifices do not prove there will be a resurrection, but they do show that he believed that there would be one. He willingly faced "danger every hour" because he believed that God would raise

¹See Barrett, pp. 362-63; and Robertson and Plummer, p. 360.

²See Jan Karel Van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults*, p. 168; John H. Gerstner, *The Theology of the Major Sects*, pp. 50, 178.

³Joel R. White, "Baptized on Account of the Dead": The Meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:29 in its Context," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116:3 (1997):487-99.

⁴Ironside, pp. 496-504.

him and that his resurrected body would continue beyond the grave.

15:31 Paul backed up this assertion with a kind of oath. He said that he faced death "daily" just as surely as he boasted about the Corinthians. In this epistle Paul was quite critical of his readers. Probably he meant that he was boasting in their very existence as Christians rather than that he was boasting to other churches about their behavior.

15:32 One example of facing death occurred in "Ephesus," where Paul was when he wrote this epistle. His fight "with wild beasts" was probably not with wild animals. This expression probably describes his conflict with very hostile human adversaries. The Greek phrase *kata anthropon* ("from human motives," lit. according to man) identifies Paul's words as figurative language. Furthermore, Roman citizens did not participate in hand-to-hand combat with animals in the arenas.¹ Perhaps Demetrius and/or Alexander were the beasts that Paul had in mind (Acts 19:24-41; 2 Tim. 4:14).

Paul quoted Isaiah 22:13 in order to prove his point (cf. Eccles. 2:24; 9:7-10). If there is no resurrection we may as well live only for the present.

15:33 This quotation comes from a comedy by Menander (c. 342-290 B.C.) titled *Thais*, but it may date back to Euripides (c. 484-406 B.C.).² It had become proverbial in Paul's day. Therefore Paul used it to warn his readers that, if they kept company with people who denied the resurrection, their character would eventually suffer.

15:34 The Corinthians needed to "sober up morally [lit. righteously]" and think correctly. Rather than living for the present, as their pagan neighbors were undoubtedly encouraging them to do, they needed to "stop sinning" and fulfill their present purpose, namely, to propagate the gospel. It was a shame that they had

¹Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 149; Robertson and Plummer, p. 362.

²Morris, p. 221.

neighbors who still had "no knowledge of God" since they, the Corinthians, had much knowledge of God (1:5; 8:1).

"Since salvation finally has to do with being known by and knowing God (13:12), what makes the Corinthians' persisting in sin so culpable [blameworthy] is that it keeps others from the knowledge of God (15:34)."¹

It may be that Paul was also using irony to refer to the "spiritual" viewpoint of the Corinthians. The appearance of "knowledge" here again raises that possibility since, as we have seen, knowledge fascinated the Corinthians. Paul had also spoken something to their "shame" earlier (cf. 6:5). If he was intending to be ironic, the apostle was probably putting down those responsible for taking the church in the dangerous direction that it had gone. If so, he meant that his readers should "sober up ... and stop sinning" because some of them did not have the truth (true knowledge), which was to their shame.

These *ad hominem* (experiential) arguments do not prove beyond doubt that God will raise the bodies of people from the dead, but they support Paul's stronger historical (vv. 1-11), logical (vv. 12-19), and theological (vv. 20-28) arguments in the preceding sections. They show that Christians generally, and the apostle in particular, believed in the Resurrection deeply. It affected the way they lived, as it should affect the way we live.²

3. The resurrection body 15:35-49

Paul next addressed the objection that the resurrection of the body is impossible because, when a person dies, his or her body decomposes and no one can reassemble it. The Corinthians seem to have wanted to avoid thinking that the material body was essentially good. Hellenistic dualism seems to have influenced their thinking about the human body and,

¹Fee, "Toward a ...," p. 40.

²For an introduction to reincarnation, which denies resurrection, see H. Wayne House, "Resurrection, Reincarnation, and Humanness," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):131-50. See also Van Baalen, pp. 51-64; Gerstner, pp. 91-103, 185.

therefore, the resurrection. Dualism is the philosophy, so common in pagan Greek thought, that the body is only the husk of the real person who dwells within it. The Greeks believed that the more a person can live without the constraints that the body imposes the better.

The biblical view, on the other hand, is that the body is essentially good, and it is just as much a part of the real person as the immaterial part (cf. Gen. 2:7). The original readers did not, and most people do not, view very positively a resurrection that involves simply resuscitating human corpses. Paul proceeded to show that the resurrection of believers was not simply a resuscitation of dead bodies but a powerful re-creation of new, glorified, bodies. Paul taught a more glorious future for believers than the present "spiritual" existence that some in the Corinthian church advocated.

"The Corinthians are convinced that by the gift of the Spirit, and especially the manifestation of tongues, they have already entered into the spiritual, 'heavenly' existence that is to be. Only the body, to be sloughed off at death, lies between them and their ultimate spirituality. Thus they have denied the body in the present, and have no use for it in the future."¹

"Dead" (Gr. *nekros*) appears 11 times in verses 1 through 34 but only three times after verse 34. This indicates a shift in Paul's argument.

Analogies from nature 15:35-44

A key word in this section of Paul's argument is "body" (Gr. *soma*), which occurs 10 times, compared to zero times in the first 34 verses. The apostle proceeded to offer two sets of analogies (seeds, vv. 36-38; and various types of bodies, vv. 39-41), which he then applied to the resurrection of the dead (vv. 42-44).

15:35 This objection to the resurrection has to do with the reconstruction of the body, after decomposition, out of the same physical elements that it formerly possessed. Obviously it would be impossible (from the human standpoint) to reassemble the original cells and to reconstruct a person after he or she had been dead for some time. This is the primary problem that Paul solved in the rest of this pericope.

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 778.

For example, if someone died at sea and sailors buried him in the ocean, a fish would probably eat his body. The atoms and molecules of his body would then become part of the fish. If a fisherman caught and ate the fish, its body would become part of the fisherman's body. If the fisherman died, and an undertaker buried him in the ground, and someone eventually sowed wheat over his grave, the fisherman's atoms and molecules would go into the wheat. A third person might eat the wheat, and so on. How could the first person's body ever come together again?

Celsus, a critic of Christianity who lived about A.D. 220, ridiculed the Christians' belief in the resurrection of the body with these words:

"Really it is the hope of worms! For what soul of a man would any longer wish for a body that had rotted?"¹

15:36-38 Such an objection sounds very reasonable on the surface, but it is really foolish, and it drew a sharp rebuke from Paul. The "wise" Corinthians were really fools. The body that God resurrects will not be the same type of body that died, even though it is identified as the body of the same person. Paul proceeded to illustrate with a seed of "grain." A new form of life springs forth from death.

"True, the seed does not so literally die as does the body, but it ceases to exist in the form of a seed to appear in the higher form of the fruitful stalk."²

The "body" that houses the immaterial part of a person is different before and after death—like the difference between a seed and grain. Just so, human life exists in one form of body before death, but after death and resurrection it exists in a different type of body. God makes this transformation with grain, so He can do it with humans too. This is so obvious in

¹Barclay, p. 157.

²Erdman, p. 147.

nature that we can understand Paul's sharp retort in verse 36. A "fool" in biblical literature is someone who excludes God from consideration. That is exactly what the Corinthians were doing when they failed to observe what God did to the seed that they sowed in their fields.

15:39-41 This passage begins and ends by stressing the differences within various kinds of bodies.

"(Pet lovers take note: Paul did not teach here that animals will be resurrected. He only used them as an example.)"¹

The second and fifth sentences ("There is one flesh of mankind, another flesh of animals, another flesh of birds, and another of fish" and "There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars") stress the differences within genres (classes or families of bodies) while contrasting what is earthly with what is heavenly. The central elements ("There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another") state the realities of earthly and heavenly bodies. Structurally the passage is a chiasm:²

- A Not all *flesh* is the same (i.e., earthly bodies).
- B Examples of different kinds of flesh: people, animals, birds, fish
- C There are heavenly and earthly kinds of bodies.
- C' The splendor of heavenly bodies is of one kind and the splendor of earthly bodies is of another kind.
- B' Examples of different kinds of splendor: sun, moon, stars
- A' Not all stars (i.e., heavenly bodies) have the same *splendor*.

¹Wiersbe, 1:620.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 783.

In verse 39 Paul used animal life to point out the different types of flesh: humans, land animals, birds, and fish. This anticipates what he said later about the earthly versus the heavenly existence of believers. A body can be genuinely fleshly and still subsist in different forms for different environments. For example, Jesus' resurrection body had flesh and bones (Luke 24:39), though it also had other unusual properties—including the ability to appear and disappear (Luke 24:31, 36). The fact that there are different kinds of "bodies" ("flesh") among the animals should help us to understand, and believe, that there can also be different kinds of human bodies. Some human bodies are mortal and some are immortal. Some are corruptible and others incorruptible.

Likewise the fact that celestial bodies differ in "glory" (magnificence) should help us realize that human bodies can also differ in glory. The glory of a perishable, mortal human body is much less than that of an imperishable, immortal human body. Also, the differing glory of the "heavenly bodies" argues for differences among glorified believers.

15:42-43 The human body goes into the ground "perishable," like a seed. However God raises it "imperishable," like grain. It goes into the ground "in dishonor": we have to leave everything behind when we die. But it rises "in glory": free from the constraints of mortality. It is weak when it dies, but it is powerful when it arises.

15:44 It is "natural" (Gr. *psychikon*, soulish, belonging to the present age), but it becomes "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*, i.e., supernatural, belonging to the future age). The Corinthians had not entered into their eschatological states yet. This would come with their resurrections. Their bodies would become "spiritual," namely, fitted for their future existence. Thus "spiritual" here also refers to the body's use, not just its substance.¹

¹See René A. López, "The Nature of the Resurrection Body of Jesus and Believers," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170:678 (April-June 2013):143-53.

"... for pagans in and outside the church, Paul seeks to show that the fundamental relation of creation to resurrection (and behind that the identification of the Creator as the Redeemer) is a non-negotiable of the metanarrative [larger story] of the Christian gospel, an essential *sine qua non* of the Bible's world view, without which one is lost (1 Cor 15:17; cf. Acts 17:30-31)."¹

The Corinthians believed that they were alive in a new kind of "spiritual" existence from the time they trusted Christ. While it is true that Christians are now new creatures in Christ, we are not yet experiencing all that God has promised that we will experience. This present spiritual resurrection from being dead in their offenses and sins (Eph. 2:1) is the only type of resurrection that they saw. They did not believe that human bodies had any future beyond the grave. Paul wrote to help them see that their physical bodies would be raised to continuing life, but that those bodies, while physical, would be of a different type than their present physical bodies. They would be spiritual, but of a different type than what they thought of as spiritual.

"Neither burial nor cremation, neither severance of limbs nor complete disintegration of parts can present any problem to the all-knowing, almighty Lord who will then clothe His redeemed people with their resurrection bodies."²

The analogy from Scripture 15:45-49

Paul now returned to his analogy of Adam and Christ (cf. vv. 21-22) in order to reinforce his argument, which he had brought to a head in verse 44.

15:45 The natural body is physical, the product of "the first man, Adam," who received life from God (Gen. 2:7). That life resides in a body characterized as "natural" (i.e., alive with both

¹Peter Jones, "Paul Confronts Paganism in the Church: A Case Study of First Corinthians 15:45," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (49:4 (December 2006):736. The Latin phrase *sine qua non* (lit. [cause] without which not) refers to something that is absolutely necessary. See also René A. López, "Does *The Jesus Family Tomb* Disprove His Physical Resurrection?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:660 (October-December 2008):425-46.

²Baxter, 6:118.

material and immaterial components). It eventually dies. However the resurrection body is "spiritual," the product of Jesus Christ, "the last Adam," who gives new life.¹ That life will inhabit a body that will never die. Paul called it "spiritual" because it is prepared for the spiritual rather than the physical realm. Moreover, it comes to us from a spirit-being ("a life-giving spirit")—Jesus Christ—rather than a physical being—Adam. One can take on full spiritual existence, including a spiritual body, only as Christ did, namely, by resurrection.²

15:46 Even though God breathed life into Adam at Creation, that gift constituted Adam as a "natural" person, fitted only for the present order. The breathing of new life into believers at their resurrection, so to speak, will make them "spiritual" persons fitted for the future.

Paul may have included this word of clarification in order to refute the Platonic idea that the ideal precedes the real. Plato (c. 425-347 B.C.) taught that the ultimate realities are purely and simply spiritual, and physical things only represent them. This is probably a view that some in Corinth held. Paul said the physical (natural) body comes first and precedes the spiritual body, which is fitted for the eternal realm.

15:47-48 God formed Adam out of dust to live on this planet (Gen. 2:7). Jesus Christ had a heavenly origin. However Paul seems to have meant more than this, since he compared two human beings: "the first man" and "the second man." His emphasis seems to have been that the first Adam was fitted for life in this age, with natural life, whereas the last Adam was fitted for life in the age to come, with spiritual life. God equipped both to live in the realm that they would occupy.³

Similarly, the bodies that we inherit from Adam are for "earthy" existence. The bodies we will receive from Christ at our resurrection will be for living in the "heavenly" realm. Paul was

¹See F. W. Grant, *The Crowned Christ*, pp. 67-78, for discussion of "the Last Adam."

²See Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "'Life-Giving Spirit': Probing the Center of Paul's Pneumatology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:4 (December 1998):573-89.

³See Grant, pp. 55-67, for discussion of "the Second Man."

not speaking of heavenly existence as distinct from life in hell but of spiritual in contrast with earthly.

"Each race has the attributes of its Head. As a consequence of this law ... we who once wore the likeness of the earthly Adam shall hereafter wear that of the glorified Christ. What Adam was, made of dust to be dissolved into dust again, such are all who share his life; and what Christ is, risen and eternally glorified, such will be all those who share His life."¹

15:49 "Just as" surely as Christians "have borne the image" of the first Adam (have natural bodies), so "we will also bear the image" of the last Adam (and have spiritual bodies). Paul concluded this pericope by reminding his readers that bearing the image of the heavenly Adam (Christ) was still future, and it is certain ("we will").

God's intent to make man in His own image (Gen. 1:26) will finally reach fulfillment when believers receive their heavenly bodies that enable them to live in the spiritual sphere, the sphere in which He lives. God's act of forming man out of the dust of the ground and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life was only the first step toward the accomplishment of His goal. His creation of resurrection bodies for us will be the final step.

Should a Christian be buried or cremated after he or she dies? It used to be mainly atheists and agnostics who were cremated, in Western countries. They usually did so in order to challenge God (if He existed) to try to put all of the atoms of their bodies together again.² Today it is probably true that most people who choose cremation do so for practical reasons (cost, convenience, etc.) rather than for religious reasons.

I have chosen to be buried (if I die before the Rapture), rather than cremated, because it seems to me that burial honors the

¹Robertson and Plummer, p. 374.

²See McGee, 5:79.

body, which is a revelation of the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:27), more than cremation does. However, I do not believe that choosing cremation violates any biblical command, so it is one of those matters in which Christians have freedom to choose (cf. chs. 8—10). Paul's point was that God will resurrect everyone, regardless of the condition of their bodies after they die.

"The problem is that the Corinthians believed that they had already assumed the heavenly existence that was to be, an existence in the Spirit that discounted earthly existence both in its physical and in its behavioral expressions. What Paul appears to be doing once again is refuting both notions. They have indeed borne—and still bear—the likeness of the man of earth. Because of that they are destined to die. But in Christ's resurrection and their being 'in him' they have also begun to bear the likeness of the man of heaven. The urgency is that they truly do so now as they await the consummation when they shall do so fully."¹

4. The assurance of victory over death 15:50-58

Paul brought his revelation of the resurrection to a climax in this paragraph by clarifying what all this means for the believer in Christ. Here he also dealt with the exceptional case of believers who are alive at the Rapture (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18). The transformation of each living believer's spirit, soul, and body is absolutely necessary for him or her to enter the spiritual mode of future existence. This transformation will happen when Christ calls Christians home to Himself (cf. John 14:1-3).

15:50 The apostle's introductory words ("Now I say this") indicate a new departure in his thought. The phrase "flesh and blood" refers generally to the mortal body and to living mortals in particular in this verse. This was a familiar idiom in Paul's world for humans and human bodies.² It is impossible for us, in our present physical bodies, to enter into the heavenly glories in the kingdom of God. Entering the kingdom of God and

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 795.

²Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 133.

inheriting the kingdom of God seem to be synonymous terms as used in the New Testament. Some interpreters believe that Paul had in mind the millennial kingdom on earth.¹ Another view is that he meant heaven.² I think Paul meant that it is impossible for mortals to go to heaven, when God will be "all in all" (v. 28). We must have immortal bodies to do both of these things. "The perishable" is another term that describes us now, but it highlights the destruction of our present bodies through death.

15:51 The word "Behold" grabs the reader's attention and announces something important. Paul was about to explain something never before revealed: "a mystery" (Gr. *mysterion*; cf. Matt. 13:11; Rom. 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; 6:19; et al.). A mystery, as the New Testament writers used the word, was not something presently concealed, but something formerly concealed but now revealed. Paul had previously written that at the Rapture, dead Christians will rise first, before God snatches up living Christians to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:15-17).

Now Paul revealed that living believers would not only be taken up but also instantaneously receive spiritual bodies: "we will all be changed." Three key New Testament passages that deal with the Rapture are John 14:1 through 3, 1 Corinthians 15:51 through 53, and 1 Thessalonians 4:13 through 18.

Not every Christian will die before he or she receives a new body, but each and every one will experience this change, even the "spiritual" Corinthians who were "saints" (1:2). Whether we believers are alive or dead ("sleep," cf. 11:30) when the Rapture takes place, we will all receive spiritual bodies at that moment. "All" negates the doctrine of the "partial rapture" of the church, the view that only Christians who are consciously awaiting the Rapture will participate in it.³

¹See René A. López, "A Study of Pauline Passages on Inheriting the Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:672 (October-December 2011):447-48.

²Gaebelein, 3:2:141.

³See John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, ch. 10: "Partial Rapture Theory," pp. 105-25.

15:52 This transformation will not be a gradual process but instantaneous. The Greek word translated "moment" (*atomos*) refers to an indivisible fragment of time. "The twinkling of an eye" takes only a fraction of a second.

A "trumpet" blast sound will summon Christians home to heaven (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16). It is "the last trumpet" that connects with the destiny of believers who are living at that time, the one that signals the end of our present existence and the beginning of our future existence.¹

"We need not suppose that St Paul believed that an actual trumpet would awaken and summon the dead. The language is symbolical in accordance with the apocalyptic ideas of the time. The point is that the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of the living will be simultaneous, as of two companies obeying the same signal."²

Some posttribulationists equate this trumpet with the seventh or last trumpet of Revelation 11:15-18.³ This does not seem to me to be valid. Other trumpets will sound announcing various other events in the future (cf. Matt. 24:31; Rev. 8:2, 6, 13; 9:14; et al.). However, Christians, believers living in the Church Age, will not be on the earth then, and those trumpets will not affect us. This last trumpet is not the very last one that the Bible speaks of.⁴

The fact that Paul included himself, in the group living at the time of the Rapture, shows that he expected that event to take place imminently (i.e., possibly at any moment; cf. 1 Thess. 4:15, 17). If he had believed that the Tribulation precedes the Rapture it would have been natural for him to

¹See Barnabas Lindars, "The Sound of the Trumpet: Paul and Eschatology," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67:2 (Spring 1985):766-82.

²Robertson and Plummer, p. 377.

³E.g., Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, p. 73. Posttribulationists believe that Christians will go through the Tribulation whereas pretribulationists believe that the Rapture will occur before the Tribulation.

⁴Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, pp. 259-69. See also John F. Walvoord, *End Times*, p. 28; Ironside, p. 529.

mention that here.¹ But no passage or verse dealing with the Rapture mentions any event that must precede the Rapture. It is the next event on God's prophetic timetable.²

"Christ's return is always imminent; we must never cease to watch for it. The first Christians thought it so near that they faced the possibility of Jesus' return in their lifetime. Paul thinks he too may perhaps be alive when it happens."³

"The simple fact is that Paul did not know when Christ would return. He was in the exact position in which we are. All that he knew, and all that we know, is that Christ may come at any time."⁴

Paul did not answer the interesting questions of who will blow or who will hear this trumpet, probably because the trumpet appears to be a metaphor for God's summons. Throughout Israel's history, God announced His working for the nation, and He summoned His people to Himself, with the blowing of literal trumpets (Exod. 19:16, 19; 20:18; Lev. 25:9; Num. 10:2, 8-10; et al.). So He might use a literal trumpet for this purpose at the Rapture as well.

The Scriptures reveal at least four times in history when there will be a resurrection: Christ's resurrection was the first. People who were raised back to life in Old Testament times experienced resuscitation and later died again. The bodies of the saints who were raised shortly after Christ arose (Matt. 27:52-53) also evidently experienced resuscitation—like Jairus' daughter, the widow of Nain's son, and Lazarus—and died again later.

¹For more evidence that the Rapture takes place before the Tribulation, see Pentecost, *Things to ...*, pp. 193-218; John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture ...*; idem, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*; and Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 482-87.

²John F. Walvoord, "The Rapture: The Next Event on God's Calendar," in *The Road to Armageddon*, p. 30.

³Gaston Deluz, *A Companion to 1 Corinthians*, p. 248. See also Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, ch. 6: "The Imminency of the Coming of Christ for the Church," pp. 108-37.

⁴Lenski, p. 737.

Second, Christians (believers in Christ alive during the Church Age) who have died will experience resurrection at the Rapture of the church (v. 52; 1 Thess. 4:16). Third, Old Testament saints and Tribulation saints will be resurrected shortly after Christ's Second Coming (Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:4). Fourth, all unbelievers throughout history, and presumably believers who died during the Millennium, will be raised at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:13).¹

Will believers have scars on their resurrection bodies, as Jesus' resurrected body did (cf. John 20:24-27)? Will we be overweight then, if we were overweight when we died? These and many similar questions are unanswerable at the present time. I tend to think that the bodies that we will have in the future will be those that glorify God the most, whatever that may involve.

People sometimes ask if their pets will go to heaven when they die. Heaven appears from Scripture to be a place reserved for human beings and spirit beings such as angels. A mother was trying to comfort her daughter after her pet cat had died. She said, "Don't worry, dear. Fluffy will be in heaven." Her pragmatic little daughter replied, "What would God want with a dead cat?" A little boy asked his father if his beloved dog would be in heaven. The father wisely answered, "If he has to be in heaven to make you happy, I'm sure he'll be there."

15:53 The dead will rise in bodies that are not subject to corruption, and the living will receive immortal bodies too. Paul may have wanted to contrast the dead and the living by the different terms that he chose for each in the first and second parts of this verse respectively ("perishable ... imperishable" and "mortal ... immortality").² Still, the distinction is not strong enough to be significant. Both the dead and the living will receive "imperishable" (i.e., immortal) bodies.

¹See Appendix 3 "What happens to a person after he dies?" at the end of these notes.

²Joachim Jeremias, "Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God," *New Testament Studies* 2 (1955-56):152.

- 15:54 This transformation will fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah 25:8. What Paul had just revealed harmonizes with prophetic Scripture: God will overcome death (cf. vv. 23-28).
- 15:55 Paul modified for his own purposes Hosea's defiant challenge for "Death" (personified) to do its worst (Hos. 13:14), and he used the passage to taunt Death himself. Death is people's last enemy (cf. v. 25). God will defeat it when He raises His people to life.
- 15:56 The fatal "sting of death" touches humans through "sin" (Rom. 6:23). What reveals sin as sinful is "the Law" of God (what God has revealed as His will). That is its "power" (Rom. 7:7-11). Because Jesus Christ overcame sin and fulfilled the Law death cannot hold its prey (Rom. 5:12-21). Death is still an enemy in the sense that it robs us of mortal life. In spite of this it is not a terror to the believer because it is the doorway into an immortal life of glory.
- 15:57 The "victory" over the condemnation of the Law, sin, and death comes to us "through our Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. Rom. 8:2). For this Paul was very grateful to God, as every believer should be (cf. Rom. 7:25): "thanks be to God!"
- 15:58 Paul concluded his discussion of the resurrection with an exhortation to be faithful ("firm" and "immovable") in the present (cf. 4:16-17; 5:13; 6:20; 7:40; 10:31-33; 11:33-34; 12:31; 14:39-40).

"Despite the magnificent crescendo with which Paul brings the argument of chap. 15 to its climax, the last word is not the sure word of future hope and triumph of vv. 50-57; rather, in light of such realities, the last word is an exhortation to Christian living (v. 58). Thus, eschatological salvation, the great concern of the epistle, includes proper behavior or it simply is not the gospel Paul preaches."¹

¹Fee, "Toward a ...," p. 58.

"Eschatology has moral implications (6:13-14; 15:30-32, 58)."¹

Paul's exhortation does not just call for ethical behavior (cf. vv. 33-34) but for continued involvement in fulfilling the Great Commission, which is the work of the gospel: "always excelling in the work of the Lord." Paul closed this chapter with an encouraging incentive to help the Corinthians focus on the goal, which would one day include rewards for faithful service: "knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

G. Campbell Morgan believed that this verse wraps up everything Paul wrote in this epistle since 1:9, where Paul introduced his "great fundamental affirmation": that Christians are called into fellowship with Jesus Christ. All the intervening material deals with hindrances to this fellowship.²

This chapter began with a review of the gospel message, from which some in the Corinthian church were in danger of departing by denying the resurrection. The charge to remain firm (v. 58), therefore, probably means to remain firm in the gospel as the Lord and the apostles had handed it down. Paul's readers should not move away from it, but should remain immovable in it. They should also increase their efforts to serve the Lord ("always excelling"), even as Paul had done (v. 10). Rather than living for the present only (v. 32), believers should live in the present with the future clearly in view (cf. 1:9; 9:26). One day we will have to give an account of our stewardship (3:12-15).

No one, except Jesus Christ, has come back from the dead to tell us what is on the other side. However His testimony through His apostles is sufficient to give us confidence that there is life and bodily resurrection after death. Christians will live that life in a changed body which will be incapable of perishing. It is therefore imperative that we make sure that we, and all around us, enter that phase of our existence with our sins covered by the sacrifice of Christ.³

¹Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 135.

²Morgan, *The Unfolding ...*, pp. 389-90; idem, *The Corinthian ...*, p. 205.

³See also Gary Habermas and Anthony Flew, *Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?*; John Wenham, *The Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict?*; Josh McDowell, *More Than*

G. THE COLLECTION FOR THE JERUSALEM BELIEVERS 16:1-12

I have chosen to include this section with the others that deal with questions that the Corinthians had asked Paul, rather than with Paul's concluding comments, because it begins with *peri de* ("Now concerning," 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:12; cf. 8:4). Probably the Corinthians had asked about the collection that Paul was assembling in a letter or through messengers. This is the least confrontational section in this epistle, but we can detect tension here too. Problems over this collection emerge clearly in 2 Corinthians.

"Most ancient letters were brief, and a large number were business-related. Whereas most of Paul's correspondence more closely resembles philosophers' letters discoursing on moral topics, he is ready to address business as well."¹

"This chapter may seem unrelated to our needs today, but actually it deals in a very helpful way with three areas of stewardship: money (1 Cor. 16:1-4), opportunities (1 Cor. 16:5-9), and people (1 Cor. 16:10-24). These are probably the greatest resources the church has today, and they must not be wasted."²

There is a logical connection between the last verse of chapter 15 and the first verse of chapter 16: This collection was part of "the work of the Lord" in which the Corinthian believers were to excel in view of the victory that was theirs through the Lord Jesus Christ.³

1. Arrangements for the collection 16:1-4

16:1 It seems that the Corinthian Christians had heard about "the collection" (Gr. *logeias*, an extra collection) that Paul was getting together for the poor "saints" in Jerusalem (v. 3) and wanted to make a contribution. James, Peter, and John had

A Carpenter; Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection*; Frank Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?* Albert L. Roper, *Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?*

¹Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 136.

²Wiersbe, 1:621.

³Erdman, p. 154.

encouraged Paul and Barnabas to remember the poor when they were in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:10; cf. Acts 11:27-30).

"In a city of which the prosperity depended in large measure upon Jewish rites and ceremonies, converts to Christianity would have peculiar [particular] difficulty in securing employment and obtaining financial support."¹

There is no record of the directions that Paul gave the Galatian churches, to which he referred here, in any of his other surviving epistles. "The churches of Galatia" evidently were those in southern Galatia, including Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul had passed through this region as he moved west toward Ephesus, from which he wrote this epistle (Acts 18:23).

16:2 From the earliest days of the church's existence Christians assembled on Sundays ("the first day of every week") to worship in commemoration of the Lord's resurrection. The Lord had not commanded this but it quickly became customary. The unsaved Jews met on Saturdays to worship.

"This is our earliest evidence respecting the early consecration of the first day of the week by the Apostolic Church. Apparently, the name 'Lord's Day' was not yet in use, and the first day of the week is never called 'the sabbath' in Scripture."²

Sunday would have been a natural occasion "to put aside" money for fellow believers since it was particularly on this day that Christians who gathered for reflective worship reviewed their responsibilities. Paul did not specify whether the individual Christian should save the money in his possession for later distribution or if a church official should. The former alternative seems more probable in view of the apostle's language.³

¹Ibid., p. 153.

²Robertson and Plummer, p. 384.

³Fee, *The First ...*, p. 813.

Note also that Paul did not say how much to set aside, except that it was to be as the Lord had blessed each one ("as he may prosper"). The amount was entirely up to the givers. Paul mentioned nothing specifically here about giving proportionately to one's income. We saw earlier that both rich and poor made up this church (11:21). Paul's counsel amounted to: Set aside a little regularly now so that you will not need to make a major withdrawal from your funds later.

"The essential features of Christian giving are stated here: (1) the time of giving; (2) the regularity of giving; (3) the participants in giving; (4) the basis of giving; and (5) the manner of giving."¹

"It is not the diligent hand that will make rich by itself, without the divine blessing. It is his bounty and blessing to which we owe all we have."²

16:3 Paul planned to send an approved representative from each of the contributing churches, or possibly from each group of churches, "to Jerusalem" with their "gift." The "letters" that he spoke of may have been letters of introduction from himself, since it appears that at this time Paul did not plan to make this trip himself. Such a procedure would guarantee that the money would arrive safely and that everyone would view the whole project as being done honestly (cf. 2 Cor. 8:21).

16:4 The apostle was open to the possibility of going to Jerusalem—as part of the group ("they will go with me")—if this seemed best ("if it is appropriate for me to go also"). After he wrote this letter he decided to go (Rom. 15:25-26) and indeed went (Acts 20:16, 22; 21:17; 24:17).

"That the mother church of Christendom should be thus, in its need, sustained by the daughter churches, was natural; and it is at the same time an affecting circumstance, to find *him* the most

¹ *The New Scofield ...*, p. 1250.

² Henry, p. 1826.

anxious to collect and bear to them this contribution, whose former persecuting zeal had doubtless (see Acts xxvi. 10) made not a few of those saints *widows and orphans*."¹

"It is these practical ministries that show that believers have the same love that animated our Saviour when He came from Heaven to give Himself for a lost world. So Christians are to look out [for] those in need and seek to make things easier for them."²

"Ministers are doing their proper business when they are promoting or helping in works of charity."³

These few verses, along with 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 as well as statements in Philippians 4:10 through 19 and Roman 12:8, provide guidelines for individual Christians and churches in giving. The principles that Paul advocated were: saving up for giving should be regular, and giving should be in response to the Lord's material provision. The believers should manage their gifts with integrity. Everything they did should not only be above reproach, but other people should perceive it as such.

Notice that Paul made no mention of tithing—here or elsewhere. Tithing is a method of giving that God prescribed for the Israelites under the Mosaic Law. People commonly practiced tithing as an act of worship in the ancient Near East (cf. Gen. 28:22).⁴ It was also a common tax.⁵ This is still true in some modern countries. For example, in England a part of every person's taxes goes to maintain the Church of England. Some residents regard this part of their tax as their contribution to the church, or their tithe. The Mosaic Law actually required that the Israelites give back to God about 22

¹Alford, 2:2:621.

²Ironside, p. 538.

³Henry, p. 1826.

⁴See C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, 1:207.

⁵W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, pp. 245-51.

percent of their incomes (cf. Lev. 27:30-33; Deut. 12:5-6, 11, 18; 14:28-29).¹

However Christians are not under the Mosaic Law (Rom. 10:4; et al.). It is therefore understandable that neither Jesus Christ nor the apostles commanded tithing. Some Christians believe that because Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20), and Jacob tithed (Gen. 28:22), tithing antedates the Mosaic Law and is therefore binding on Christians. Nevertheless a biblical practice is not the same as a biblical precept (command). Moreover, the absence of any reference to tithing in the New Testament, plus the teaching of other guidelines, strongly suggest that God wants Christians to follow a different method. The principles that should govern Christians in our giving appear throughout the New Testament but mainly in 1 Corinthians 16, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, and Philippians 4.

"When I was pastoring a church in Texas, one of my officers owned several Coca-Cola plants, and one of them was in our town. He was a man of means, and he owned a ranch where we used to go to hunt and fish. Often he would ask me why I didn't preach on tithing. One day I said, 'Why should I preach on tithing?' He said, 'Because it is the Bible way of giving.' I agreed, 'Yes, it was the Old Testament way of giving, but under grace I don't believe tithing is the way it should be done.' So he asked me, 'How do you think it ought to be done?' I took him to this verse: 'As God hath prospered him.' Now this was during the depression. If you are as old as I am, you will remember that the depression in the 1930s was a very serious time. So I said to him, 'For some strange reason, Coca-Cola is selling, and you are doing very well. However, there are some members in our church who couldn't give a tithe right now. I don't believe God is asking them to give a tenth. There are a few people who are doing well, and they are to give as they have been prospered—and they ought to give a half.' Do you know that this man never again suggested that I preach on tithing! The reason was that he was tithing, but he didn't want to give as God had prospered him."²

¹Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life*, p. 86.

²McGee, 5:82.

"No pressure, no gimmicks, no emotion. A need had to be met, and the Corinthians were capable of playing a role in it. In a day of highly visible campaigns for money on every side, there is something to be said for the more consistent, purposeful approach outlined here."¹

"Many Christians today are more interested in competing with neighbors' status symbols than in caring for the poor."²

2. The travel plans of Paul and his fellow apostles 16:5-12

As the preceding verse revealed, Paul's plans were tentative to some extent. He wanted the Corinthians to know that he anticipated a return to Corinth and, hopefully, a stay of several months. Timothy and Apollos might return as well.

16:5 At the time he wrote, Paul planned to head north from Ephesus and then west and to spend some time in "Macedonia." Macedonia was the Roman province north of Corinth, where Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea stood. His plan was then to travel south to Corinth. Paul later changed this plan and instead traveled directly from Ephesus to Corinth (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2) and then returned to Ephesus (cf. 2 Cor. 2:5-8; 7:12). Later he did visit Macedonia and then Corinth (2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:6-16).³

16:6-7 Paul did "spend the winter" in Corinth, but it was the winter after the one when he expected to be there, the winter of A.D. 57-58 rather than 56-57 (cf. Acts 20:2-3; Rom. 16:1, 23). He sensed the need to spend a good long visit in Corinth ("for some time, if the Lord permits"), and in view of the problems in the church that he mentioned in this letter we can understand why.

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 817.

²Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 139.

³See Richard Batey, "Paul's Interaction with the Corinthians," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1985):139-43.

16:8 The Jews celebrated "Pentecost" in late May or early June, so Paul probably wrote 1 Corinthians in the spring of A.D. 56 (cf. 5:7; 15:20). It is not unusual that, since he was a Jewish believer with the evangelization of Jews on his heart, he would refer to important events in the Jewish calendar such as Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-21). Perhaps the early Christians paid more attention to the significant events in the life of the church than many churches do today. Churches that observe "the Christian year" tend to make more of these observances. The feast of Pentecost, of course, also marked the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).

16:9 Paul occasionally used the "door" as a metaphor for opportunity (cf. 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). He stayed in Ephesus three years to take advantage of his opportunities for effective service there (Acts 20:31). He did not regard "adversaries" there as an indication of a closed door or as a sign that God wanted him to move on to a more comfortable ministry. He followed his own advice and remained "firm, immovable" and "excelling in the work of the Lord" in Ephesus (15:58).

"Adversaries and opposition do not break the spirits of faithful ministers, but only enkindle their zeal."¹

16:10-11 Timothy's visit to Corinth from Ephesus was more certain than Paul's return visit. Paul had already sent him (and Erastus; Acts 19:22), or was about to send him, when he penned this epistle (4:17). Evidently Timothy's relative youth tended to make some people look down on him, and he tended to be fearful (cf. 1 Tim. 4:12). Paul advised the Corinthians, who judged by external appearances, to give Timothy the respect that he deserved for "doing the Lord's work" along with Paul.

It may have been Timothy's report of conditions in Corinth, when he returned to Ephesus, that moved Paul to go directly to Corinth himself, rather than waiting until he had visited Macedonia. Paul later referred to this visit as "sorrowful" (2

¹Henry, p. 18:26.

Cor. 2:1-5), because while he was in Corinth he encountered strong opposition (cf. 2 Cor. 2:1-8; 7:12; 12:14; 13:1-2).

16:12 This verse may contain Paul's final response to the questions that the Corinthians had asked him. It is the sixth instance of that key phrase *peri de* ("Now concerning"). Paul's relations with eloquent "Apollos" were perfectly friendly, as this verse reveals (cf. 1:12). We do not know why Apollos did not want to revisit Corinth with Timothy or whether he ever did visit that city again.

IV. CONCLUSION 16:13-24

The Apostle Paul concluded this epistle with a series of imperatives, exhortations, and news items.

A. FINAL EXHORTATIONS 16:13-18

Each section in this epistle concludes with some practical admonition. These verses constitute a summary exhortation for the whole letter.

16:13-14 Paul urged his somewhat unstable readers to be watchful ("on the alert") presumably with regard to danger from inside as well as from outside the church (cf. Acts 20:29-30). Most of the problems in this church evidently arose from within the congregation as a result of pagan influences. "Be on the alert" sometimes occurs with anticipation of the Lord's coming again, so that event (the Rapture) may have been in Paul's mind as well as the need to watch out for troublemakers (e.g., Matt. 24:42). His readers should also "stand firm in" their "faith" in God and in their commitment to His Word and will (cf. 15:58).

Rather than acting like immature children, the Corinthian believers should behave like mature "men" (cf. 1:12). This exhortation is a call to both bravery and maturity.¹ They should "be strong" in the Lord rather than weak in the faith (cf. Josh. 1:7-8).

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 1941.

"You show me a weak, wobbling believer, and I will show you a Christian not giving very much time to meditation upon the Word of God. Show me one who is a strong, devoted, earnest Christian, seeking only the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I will show you one who is living on the Book."¹

"And so, if you want strength, this is how you get it. Live in fellowship with Christ, walk in the Spirit, feed upon His Word, obey His Word, and then when the hour of trial comes, you will not be weak-kneed, you will not be vacillating, you will not be carried about like a leaf before the wind. You will have strength to stand, and you will be able to glorify God even in the fire."²

Above all, "love" should motivate and distinguish Paul's readers (ch. 13). This was the greatest need of this church. Verses 13 and 14 summarize what Paul expected of his readers in all that he wrote in this letter.

16:15-16 The Corinthians had a special problem with submission to authority, as we have seen. Many in the church wanted to do their own thing. Verses 16 through 18 would have encouraged them to appreciate some less flashy servants of the Lord.

"Stephanas" and his "household" were Paul's "first fruits" (converts) in the Roman province of "Achaia," the province in which Corinth was located (1:16). They had given themselves unselfishly to serving the Corinthians. They were probably loyal to Paul. Paul urged his readers to appreciate Stephanas and the members of his household for their "ministry to the saints," and not to ignore them, but to submit humbly ("be subject") to them. They should treat others "such as these" believers with similar honor. Service, not status, should be the basis for honor in the church.

¹Ironside, p. 558.

²Ibid., p. 560.

16:17-18 "Stephanas" had recently visited Paul in Ephesus with two other Corinthian believers: "Fortunatus. and Achaicus." They may have brought with them the questions that Paul had answered in this letter as well as information about conditions in the church. Travelers carried all the mail except government business in the ancient biblical world.¹ These men had all given refreshing ministry to Paul, as they typically did in Corinth. Paul wanted the Corinthians to be sure to give them the honor that they deserved ("acknowledge such men").

B. FINAL GREETINGS AND BENEDICTION 16:19-24

"The letter now concludes with a series of standard (for Paul) greetings (vv. 19-22) and the grace-benediction (v. 23). But Paul cannot quite give up the urgency of the letter, so he interrupts these two rather constant elements of his conclusions with one final word of warning to those who have been causing him grief, this time in the form of an extraordinary curse formula (v. 22). The apparent harshness of this warning is matched by the equally unusual addition of a final word of affirmation of his love for them (v. 24), found only here in his extant [surviving] letters. Thus even to the end the unique concerns that have forged this letter find their expression."²

16:19 Several "churches" in the Roman province of "Asia" had come into existence while Paul used its capital city, Ephesus, as his base of operations (Acts 19:10). References to "Asia" in the New Testament consistently refer to the Roman province of Asia, which lay in the west and southwest of the geographical region of Asia Minor (modern western Turkey).

The names of "Aquila and Prisca" (Priscilla) usually occur in the reverse order in which they appear here in the New Testament. Evidently their friends, of which Paul was one, felt free to use both orders. This suggests that they served the Lord as a harmonious team. They had lived in Corinth after leaving Rome

¹Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 140.

²Fee, *The First ...*, p. 834.

(Acts 18:2), and it was apparently there that Paul had first met them. Later they had left Corinth to travel to Ephesus with Paul and had settled in that city (Acts 18:18-21). "Their house" in Ephesus then became a meeting place for "the church" (cf. Rom. 16:5). Church buildings were unknown until the third century.¹

16:20 The "holy kiss"—holy because saints (1:2) exchanged it—was a common practice among believers, and it still is today in some parts of the world.

"The holy kiss (cf. 2 Cor. 13:12; Rom. 16:16; 1 Thes. 5:25 [*sic*, 26]; 1 Peter 5:14) was primarily a symbolic expression of the love, forgiveness, and unity which should exist among Christians. As such, it became associated with the celebration of the Lord's Supper as a prelude to its observance (cf. Justin *Apology* 1. 65. 2). It was a mark of the familial bond which united believers. There is no indication that it was restricted to one's own sex in the New Testament era (cf. Luke 7:37, 45). The suggestion to separate the sexes for the exchange of the kiss arose in the late second century due to concern about criticism from non-Christians and the danger of erotic abuse (cf. Athenagorus *Supplication* 32; Clement of Alexandria *Pedagogue* 3. 81. 2-4)."²

16:21 Paul customarily dictated his letters and an assistant wrote them down (cf. Rom. 16:22). However he usually added a word of "greeting" at the end in his "own hand" that authenticated his epistles as coming from him (cf. Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17). All of what follows is probably what he added.

16:22 Normally Paul used the Greek word *agape* for "love" (except in Titus 3:15). Here he used *phileo*. He probably equated loving "the Lord" with obeying all that he had commanded in this

¹Barclay, *The Letter ...*, p. 187

²Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 548.

letter. "Accursed" means under God's judgment (cf. Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Thess. 3:14-15).

"...using traditional language whose origin is uncertain, Paul offers one last warning to those who persist in deviating from his gospel, and now especially to those who might refuse to obey the injunctions of this letter."¹

"Maranatha" is an Aramaic expression meaning "Our Lord, come." Probably Paul did not translate it into Greek because believers commonly spoke it in Aramaic in the services of the early church (cf. Rev. 22:20). Since it was Aramaic the word probably originated in the land of Israel where people spoke that language. They likely exported it to the Greek-speaking congregations that retained its form.

"It is strange to meet with an Aramaic phrase in a Greek letter to a Greek Church. The explanation is that that phrase had become a watchword and a password. It summed up the vital hope of the early Church, and Christians whispered it to each other, identified each other by it, in a language which the heathen could not understand."²

"It would appear, then, that the fixed usage of the term 'Maranatha' by the early Christians was a witness to their strong belief in the imminent return of Christ. If they knew that Christ could not return at any moment because of other events or a time period that had to transpire first [i.e., the Tribulation], why did they petition Him in a way that implied that He could come at any moment?"³

"Maranatha" can also mean "Come, Lord," or "The Lord is coming."

¹Fee, *The First ...*, pp. 837-38.

²Barclay, *The Letter ...*, p. 188.

³Showers, p. 131. Cf. Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 17, 20.

16:23-24 Paul concluded this strong but loving epistle with a prayerful benediction of "the grace of the Lord Jesus." Note that this letter also began "Grace to you" (1:3).

"Grace is the beginning and the end of the Christian [*sic*] gospel; it is the single word that most fully expresses what God has done and will do for his people in Christ Jesus."¹

Paul also added assurance of his own "love" for all the believers in Corinth, not just those who supported him.

¹Fee, *The First ...*, p. 839.

Appendix 1

What ends a marriage in God's sight?

Jesus' teaching

Matthew 5:27-32

Adultery is a sin. v. 27 (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18)

1. Lusting after someone sexually is a form of adultery, so it is sin. v. 28
2. Therefore Jesus' disciples need to deal with sexual temptations seriously. vv. 29-30
3. Moses allowed the Israelites to divorce. v. 31
4. People who divorce and then remarry someone else for reasons other than sexual immorality commit adultery. v. 32
5. Remarriage by the innocent party in a divorce does not result in adultery if the guilty party was sexually unfaithful. v. 32
6. (Marital unfaithfulness, Gr. *pornea*, means having sexual intercourse with anyone other than one's spouse.)
7. Summary: Divorce is permissible, but it is never God's best (Mal. 2:16).

Matthew 19:9

(Same as points 5-7 above.)

Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18

(Same as point 5 above.)

Paul's teaching

1 Cor. 7:11-16

1. Christians who divorce have two options: remain unmarried or be reconciled. vv. 11-12

2. Christians who are married to non-Christians should not initiate a divorce. v. 13
3. Christians who are married to non-Christians should not refuse to grant a divorce if their mate insists on getting one. vv. 14-16

1 Cor. 7:39-40

1. Death ends a marriage in God's sight. v. 39
2. Widows and widowers are free to remarry other Christians. v. 39
3. But they may be happier if they remain unmarried. v. 40

Appendix 2

Summary of my understanding of spiritual gifts

It seems to me that the New Testament presents spiritual gifts as abilities that God gives Christians. Every ability that any human being has is God-given, so in one sense all human abilities are spiritual gifts in that they are gifts of God. In this sense, non-Christians as well as Christians have spiritual gifts: gifts given to them by God. All that anyone has comes from God and is a gift of His grace. God gives people abilities at birth and at various times after birth.

But in the sense in which the New Testament uses the term “spirituals” (1 Cor. 12:1; Gr. *charismata*), they refer to gifts (or abilities) that pertain particularly to spiritual life and ministry. Therefore such natural abilities as manual dexterity, athletic prowess, intellectual quickness, musical genius, etc., are not what is in view in the New Testament discussions of spiritual gifts. What is in view is abilities with which Christians can function in the spiritual realm of life, and in the church, serving Christ.

The lists of these gifts in the New Testament seem to allow for other gifts besides those listed. This seems clear since the gift of celibacy is called a *charisma* (1 Cor. 7:7), and yet it does not appear in any of the lists of spiritual gifts. Since faith, hope, and love are abilities with which Christians can function in the spiritual realm of life, and in the church, serving Christ, I consider them spiritual gifts, in addition to their being fruits of the Spirit. Furthermore, they occur prominently in the heart of Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14.

The gift of apostle and the gift of prophet are especially difficult to understand because they have both a technical meaning and a general meaning in the New Testament. There were official Apostles and Prophets, but there were, and still are, unofficial apostles and prophets. (I am capitalizing the words or not capitalizing them deliberately in order to highlight the distinction between the two types of apostles and the two types of prophets.)

Technically, the Apostles totaled 13, being the Twelve plus Paul. They were individuals who saw Christ and whom Christ personally appointed to establish the church (1 Cor. 9:1). In the general sense, apostles are, by

definition (Gr. *apostolos*), those sent out with a message. In this sense, there have been many apostles, not only in the first century but throughout the history of the church. The New Testament refers to Barnabas, Timothy, and others, in this sense, as apostles (Acts 14:4; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). The function of all apostles, both official Apostles and functional apostles, was to plant and establish new churches.

Likewise, the New Testament also uses the word prophets in a technical sense and in a general sense. Technically, Prophets were individuals who received new authoritative revelation from the Lord and communicated it to God's people. This sometimes involved foretelling the future. In the general sense of the word, prophets spoke forth words from the Lord: words of exhortation, edification, and consolation (1 Cor. 14:3). In this sense prophets led in the worship of God (cf. 1 Chron. 25:1). This kind of prophesying was giving, not new revelation, but just a message that the Lord had laid on the prophet's heart to share. This is what Agabus did in Acts 21:11 and what Philip's daughters did (Acts 21:9). There are no Prophets in the church today, but there are many prophets. Preachers typically do what prophets in the New Testament did when they exhort, encourage, and comfort Christians with their words. Old Testament prophets were of both types: official Prophets, and functional prophets.

Official Apostles	The Twelve and the Apostle Paul Communicated new revelation
Functional (unofficial) apostles	Church planters and missionaries Communicated edification, exhortation, and consolation

The list of gifted people that God gave the church in Ephesians 4 appears to be in the order of their importance to the church throughout its history. The Apostles and Prophets established the church, the body of Christ, and evangelists and pastor-teachers have built on that foundation. The list in 1 Corinthians 12 also appears to be in order of importance. This seems clear since, in the context, Paul was arguing that all gifts are important, not just the Apostles and Prophets, who were very prominent and usually highly regarded.

The difference between the gift of prophesying and the gift of teaching, in the early church, was that prophesying involved sharing a word that the Lord had laid on the heart of the prophet, but teaching involved the interpretation and explanation of the Scriptures. Paul allowed women to prophesy in the church meetings, but not to teach, because teaching was the more authoritative gift compared to unofficial prophesying (1 Cor. 11:5; 1 Tim. 2:11-12). "Teachers" occurs after "Prophets" in the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 because official Prophets are in view, not unofficial prophets. Official Prophets had more authority than teachers.

Regarding the cessation of the sign gifts it seems to me that the best argument for their cessation is from church history. While Scripture states and implies that the gift of tongues, for example, would fade away (1 Cor. 13:8; Eph. 2:20; Heb. 2:3-4), it does not say when. Some of the church fathers who lived in the early generations following the Apostles, however, referred to the fading out of these phenomena. (See my note on Acts 19:6 in my Notes on Acts for some references in the Fathers.) So the conclusion that tongues, and the other sign gifts, have ceased is a deduction based on several Scriptures (like the doctrine of the Trinity is a deduction), rather than the teaching of any one verse or verses.¹

The practice of speaking in tongues in private is something that Paul did not discuss at length, but it is something that some Christians advocate. Paul wrote that speaking in tongues in private edifies the one speaking in tongues, but it does not edify the church (1 Cor. 14:4). In the whole discussion of tongues in this passage, Paul was speaking about speaking in a foreign language. He was also speaking about the regular exercise of this ability. If the gift of tongues has ceased, and I believe it has, then the point is moot: we do not exercise an ability in public or in private that is no longer available to Christians. Nonetheless some claim that they have the ability to speak in foreign languages in private. If they cannot interpret their tongues, Paul's admonition to keep silent applies to the private practice as well as to its public use, because it is not building up the speaker spiritually. What Paul meant when he wrote that the person speaking in a tongue in private edifies himself is, I believe, that he or she is encouraged that he or

¹See also Cliff Allcorn, "On the Futility of Accepting the Charismatic Sign Gifts for Current Use," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 16:49 (December 2012):61-79; Walvoord, *The Holy ...*, pp. 173-88; Gromacki, *The Holy ...*, pp. 218-25.

she has been given this ability, and that person feels a measure of happiness as he or she does so.

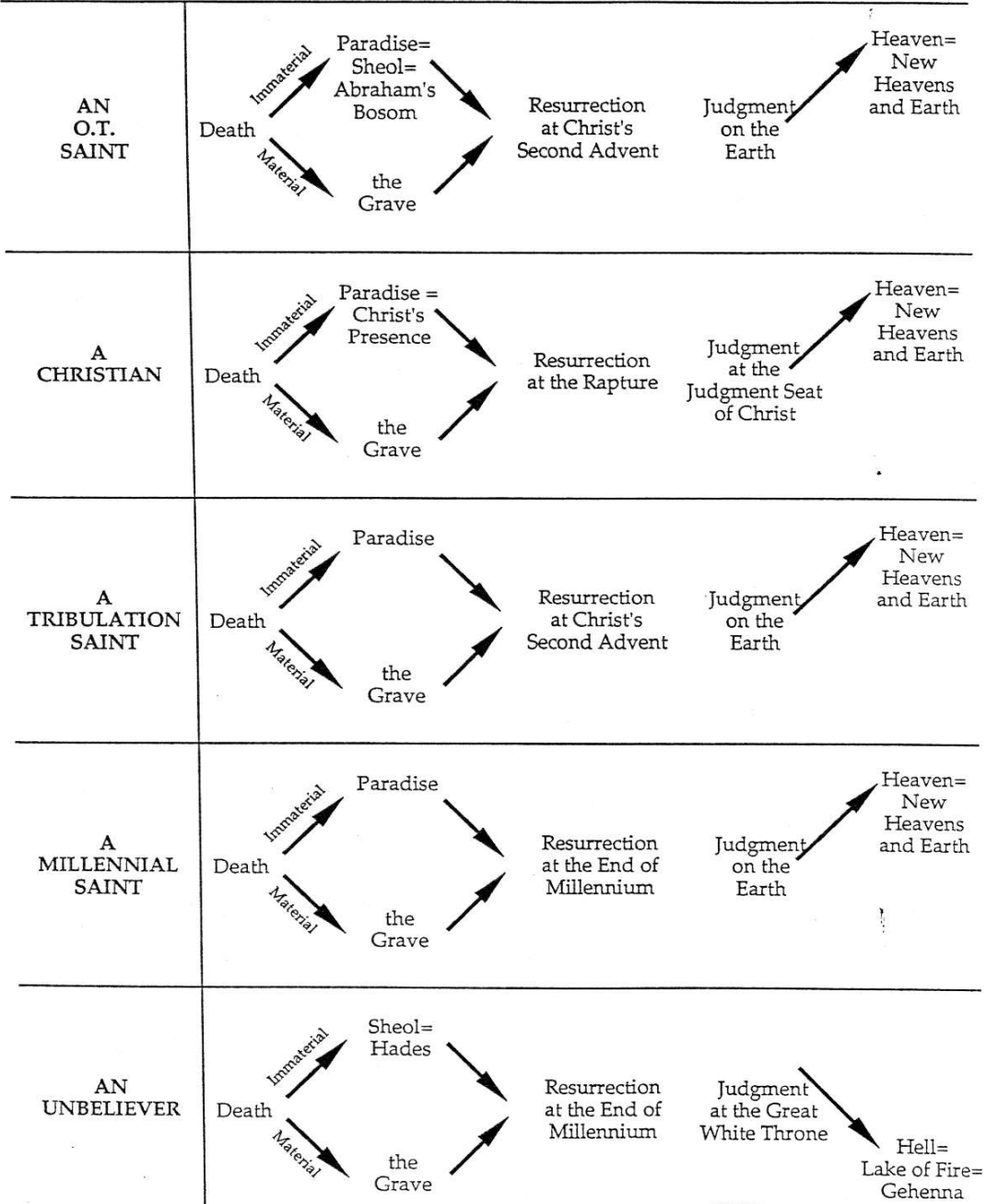
I also make a distinction between the *phenomenon* of speaking in tongues (or healing, or performing miracles, etc.), and the *gift* of speaking in tongues, etc. The *phenomenon* describes random instances in which people have spoken in tongues, often much to their own surprise. This typically happens only once or a few times in a person's life. The *gift* describes the ability to speak in tongues frequently and at will (subject to the Holy Spirit's control). Today we describe a person as gifted if that one has a continuing ability to demonstrate proficiency in some practice, and I think this accurately reflects the gifts of the Spirit in the New Testament. The difference is not only in the duration, however. The phenomenon is something that God initiates in a more direct way than is true in the exercise of the gift, in which the gifted person plays a more assertive part, though empowered by the Spirit. Whereas I do not believe the gift of tongues (or healing, or performing miracles) is in the church today,¹ I do believe that God enables a few individuals to speak a language that they have not studied (or to heal another person, etc.) on rare occasions.² I regard these as divine *interventions* rather than examples of divine *giftedness*. Perhaps the tongues spoken on the Day of Pentecost illustrate divine intervention rather than gifted Christians using their gift. We do not have enough information about whether the Christians who spoke in tongues on the Day of Pentecost had the continuing ability to do this or not. I suspect that they did not and that this was a case of divine intervention.

¹See R. C. Trench, *Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord*, pp. 49-62.

²See J. B. Philips, *Your God Is Too Small*, pp. 32-36, for his discussion of "God-in-a-box."

Appendix 3

WHAT HAPPENS TO A PERSON AFTER HE DIES



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