

THE BOOK OF 1 CORINTHIANS

Mike Glover

INTRODUCTION

The church in Corinth was dealing with some issues, some serious issues, from division, abusing their spiritual gifts, to questioning the resurrection. When the apostle Paul heard about the mess they were in, it must have broken his heart when he had to write to them.

He had heard of the abuses and contentions that had arisen among them, first from Apollos, and then from a letter they had written him on the subject, and also from some of the ‘household of Chloe,’ and from Stephanas and his two friends who had visited him.

Paul, therefore, wrote this letter for the purpose of checking the factious spirit and correcting the erroneous opinions that had sprung up among them, and fixing the many cases of abuse and disorderly practices that prevailed. If this church were in existence today, I’m not sure many would want to be associated with it!

THE CITY OF CORINTH

The city of Corinth is located on an isthmus that connects southern Greece to the Peloponnese, Achaia, **Acts 18:12**. The connecting isthmus is five miles across. Sailors, coming from Athens or Asia Minor, often stopped in Corinth, walking the five miles rather than sailing around the Cape of Malea.

Sailing around was, to some extent, a treacherous trip due to the strong Mediterranean winds. Because of the geographic location of Corinth, it was perfect for trade and commerce. Ships, on their way westward, would stop here. Quick population and economic growth were the results.

The city of Corinth was a city of great wealth. Wealth and population explosion gave way to an entertainment industry. The Isthmian Games were a main source of entertainment to the Corinthians. The games, similar in nature to the Olympic Games of neighbouring Olympia, occurred every other year. The apostle Paul referred to these games in **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**.

A city with economic success, a vast population, and world-renowned Olympic-style games would naturally attract a variety of religious movements. Most cities of this day were devoted to a particular god or goddess. Ephesus was devoted to the goddess Diana. The principal deity worshipped in the city of Corinth was Venus, the goddess of love and licentiousness.

Just to the south of the city was a giant rock formation rising 1800 feet above sea level known as the Acro-Corinth. A temple to Venus was erected on the northern side of this mountain. The temple employed one thousand female prostitutes for the worship of Venus.

The morality of Corinth was infamous. Every sin and vice known to mankind could be found there. It was a city with two seaports, one on either side of the narrow neck of land on which it was situated.

And because of this association with the sea and shipping and sailors, just like any major seaport today, it attracted a certain kind of women who were prepared to accommodate the seamen, and others, of course, who arrived at Corinth with money to spend after long periods at sea.

Drunkenness was commonplace, so that whenever a Corinthian was represented on the stage or in the theatre, it was as a drunkard. In fact, there was a well-known saying in those days which was used to describe a person living a wild, reckless life. ‘He lives as they live in Corinth’.

Barnes notes that many merchants lost everything they had in the city of Corinth, ‘worshipping Venus’. A common proverb of their day was: ‘It is not for everyone to go to Corinth.’ The city of Corinth reminds us of our modern-day Las Vegas, Nevada. It was the ‘sin city of their day.’

THE DATE

Paul says that he wrote from Ephesus, 1 Corinthians 16:5-8 / 1 Corinthians 16:19, which corresponds with his third missionary journey. He wrote the letter several years after his initial departure from Corinth in the fall of AD 51/52. It was written subsequent to Apollo’s stay at the city, Acts 18:25 / Acts 18:27 / 1 Corinthians 1:12, but after Timothy and Erastus had been sent by Paul from Ephesus to Macedonia, Acts 19:22, and after Timothy had been sent to Corinth, 1 Corinthians 4:17. The date was likely AD 55-56

THE AUTHOR

The author of the letter is the apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 1:1 / 1 Corinthians 16:21. The letter to the Corinthian brethren was an obvious response to two letters Paul had received during his three-year stay in Ephesus, Acts 20:31 / 1 Corinthians 16:8-9.

Paul refers to a letter he had received from the ‘household of Chloe’ explaining the contentions among the brethren there, 1 Corinthians 1:11. Again, in 1 Corinthians 7:1, he alludes to a letter that had reached his hands that was written by the church in Corinth.

These two letters outlined the sinful direction the Corinthian church was headed. Paul was well informed of the problems that were occurring among the brethren in Corinth before writing this first epistle.

THE CHURCH

Paul’s previous time in Corinth afforded him first-hand knowledge of what the brethren were faced with in their everyday affairs, Acts 18. The dissolute condition of immorality within the city of Corinth and false teachers brought an evil influence that had far-reaching effects among the brethren.

The church in Corinth had come to be divided with many problems in regard to following the authorised word of God. Today, we may refer to such a church as an open fellowship or liberal congregation.

The brethren were erroneously dividing themselves based on who had baptised them, 1 Corinthians 1:12-16 / 1 Corinthians 3:3-4 / 1 Corinthians 3:21 / 1 Corinthians 4:6.

Some Christians were guilty of tolerating sin in the church, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, defrauding each other in human courts, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, committing fornication, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, and not considering each other’s personal conscience, 1 Corinthians 8-10.

Furthermore, Christian women had lost sight of their God-ordained place in public, 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 and among God’s people in the church, 1 Corinthians 14:34-36. The Corinthians had perverted the Lord’s Supper by dividing up into social classes, 1 Corinthians 11:17ff, and faction was running rampant, 1 Corinthians 11:18.

The Corinthians were performing spiritual gifts for selfish reasons rather than for the profit of the whole church and thereby causing schisms in the church, 1 Corinthians 12:14.

The assembly of saints had come to be chaotic, 1 Corinthians 14:26-40, and there were false teachers telling people that there would be no resurrection of the dead, 1 Corinthians 15:12.

The apostle Paul could have easily given up on these brethren due to their multitude of problems; however, due to a great love for their souls, he systematically dealt with each sinful issue. We can do no less today when it comes to the body of Christ.

Though a church may have a multitude of ‘issues’, we nonetheless have the responsibility to systematically deal with each one. From the church at Corinth, because the church consists of human beings, no congregation is ever perfect! ‘Too many hypocrites in the church!’ Come inside! There is always room for one more.

OUTLINE

- Division. 1 Corinthians 1-4
- Immorality. One man was having an affair with his stepmother. 1 Corinthians 5
- Litigation. They were taking each other to Court. 1 Corinthians 6
- Problems with Christian marriage. 1 Corinthians 7
- The eating of meat from Pagan temples. 1 Corinthians 8
- Paul’s rights as an apostle. 1 Corinthians 9
- Their abuse of Christian liberty. 1 Corinthians 10
- Their abuse of the Lord’s Supper. 1 Corinthians 11
- Spiritual Gifts. Their purpose and their proper use. 1 Corinthians 12-14
- Doctrinal problems with resurrection from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15
- The collection and final words. 1 Corinthians 16

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The church in Corinth was dealing with some issues, some serious issues, from division, abusing their spiritual gifts, to questioning the resurrection. When the apostle Paul heard about the mess they were in, it must have broken his heart when he had to write to them.

He had heard of the abuses and contentions that had arisen among them, first from Apollos, and then from a letter they had written him on the subject, and also from some of the ‘household of Chloe,’ and from Stephanas and his two friends who had visited him.

Paul, therefore, wrote this letter for the purpose of checking the factious spirit and correcting the erroneous opinions that had sprung up among them, and fixing the many cases of abuse and disorderly practices that prevailed. If this church were in existence today, I’m not sure many would want to be associated with it!

THE CITY OF CORINTH

The city of Corinth is located on an isthmus that connects southern Greece to the Peloponnese, Achaia, [Acts 18:12](#). The connecting isthmus is five miles across. Sailors, coming from Athens or Asia Minor, often stopped in Corinth, walking the five miles rather than sailing around the Cape of Malea.

Sailing around was, to some extent, a treacherous trip due to the strong Mediterranean winds. Because of the geographic location of Corinth, it was perfect for trade and commerce. Ships, on their way westward, would stop here. Quick population and economic growth were the results.

The city of Corinth was a city of great wealth. Wealth and population explosion gave way to an entertainment industry. The Isthmian Games were a main source of entertainment to the Corinthians. The games, similar in nature to the Olympic Games of neighbouring Olympia, occurred every other year. The apostle Paul referred to these games in [1 Corinthians 9:24-27](#).

A city with economic success, a vast population, and world-renowned Olympic-style games would naturally attract a variety of religious movements. Most cities of this day were devoted to a particular god or goddess. Ephesus was devoted to the goddess Diana. The principal deity worshipped in the city of Corinth was Venus, the goddess of love and licentiousness.

Just to the south of the city was a giant rock formation rising 1800 feet above sea level known as the Acro-Corinth. A temple to Venus was erected on the northern side of this mountain. The temple employed one thousand female prostitutes for the worship of Venus.

The morality of Corinth was infamous. Every sin and vice known to mankind could be found there. It was a city with two seaports, one on either side of the narrow neck of land on which it was situated.

And because of this association with the sea and shipping and sailors, just like any major seaport today, it attracted a certain kind of women who were prepared to accommodate the seamen, and others, of course, who arrived at Corinth with money to spend after long periods at sea.

Drunkenness was commonplace, so that whenever a Corinthian was represented on the stage or in the theatre, it was as a drunkard. In fact, there was a well-known saying in those days which was used to describe a person living a wild, reckless life. 'He lives as they live in Corinth'.

Barnes notes that many merchants lost everything they had in the city of Corinth, 'worshipping Venus'. A common proverb of their day was: 'It is not for everyone to go to Corinth.' The city of Corinth reminds us of our modern-day Las Vegas, Nevada. It was the 'sin city of their day.'

THE DATE

Paul says that he wrote from Ephesus, [1 Corinthians 16:5-8](#) / [1 Corinthians 16:19](#), which corresponds with his third missionary journey. He wrote the letter several years after his initial departure from Corinth in the fall of AD 51/52. It was written subsequent to Apollo's stay at the city, [Acts 18:25](#) / [Acts 18:27](#) / [1 Corinthians 1:12](#), but after Timothy and Erastus had been sent by Paul from Ephesus to Macedonia, [Acts 19:22](#), and after Timothy had been sent to Corinth, [1 Corinthians 4:17](#). The date was likely AD 55-56

THE AUTHOR

The author of the letter is the apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 1:1 / 1 Corinthians 16:21. The letter to the Corinthian brethren was an obvious response to two letters Paul had received during his three-year stay in Ephesus, Acts 20:31 / 1 Corinthians 16:8-9.

Paul refers to a letter he had received from the ‘household of Chloe’ explaining the contentions among the brethren there, 1 Corinthians 1:11. Again, in 1 Corinthians 7:1, he alludes to a letter that had reached his hands that was written by the church in Corinth.

These two letters outlined the sinful direction the Corinthian church was headed. Paul was well informed of the problems that were occurring among the brethren in Corinth before writing this first epistle.

THE CHURCH

Paul’s previous time in Corinth afforded him first-hand knowledge of what the brethren were faced with in their everyday affairs, Acts 18. The dissolute condition of immorality within the city of Corinth and false teachers brought an evil influence that had far-reaching effects among the brethren.

The church in Corinth had come to be divided with many problems in regard to following the authorised word of God. Today, we may refer to such a church as an open fellowship or liberal congregation.

The brethren were erroneously dividing themselves based on who had baptised them, 1 Corinthians 1:12-16 / 1 Corinthians 3:3-4 / 1 Corinthians 3:21 / 1 Corinthians 4:6.

Some Christians were guilty of tolerating sin in the church, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, defrauding each other in human courts, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, committing fornication, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, and not considering each other’s personal conscience, 1 Corinthians 8-10.

Furthermore, Christian women had lost sight of their God-ordained place in public, 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 and among God’s people in the church, 1 Corinthians 14:34-36. The Corinthians had perverted the Lord’s Supper by dividing up into social classes, 1 Corinthians 11:17ff, and faction was running rampant, 1 Corinthians 11:18.

The Corinthians were performing spiritual gifts for selfish reasons rather than for the profit of the whole church and thereby causing schisms in the church, 1 Corinthians 12:14.

The assembly of saints had come to be chaotic, 1 Corinthians 14:26-40, and there were false teachers telling people that there would be no resurrection of the dead, 1 Corinthians 15:12.

The apostle Paul could have easily given up on these brethren due to their multitude of problems; however, due to a great love for their souls, he systematically dealt with each sinful issue. We can do no less today when it comes to the body of Christ.

Though a church may have a multitude of ‘issues’, we nonetheless have the responsibility to systematically deal with each one. From the church at Corinth, because the church consists of human beings, no congregation is ever perfect! ‘Too many hypocrites in the church!’ Come inside! There is always room for one more.

OUTLINE

Division. 1 Corinthians 1-4
 Immorality. One man was having an affair with his stepmother. 1 Corinthians 5
 Litigation. They were taking each other to Court. 1 Corinthians 6
 Problems with Christian marriage. 1 Corinthians 7
 The eating of meat from Pagan temples. 1 Corinthians 8
 Paul's rights as an apostle. 1 Corinthians 9
 Their abuse of Christian liberty. 1 Corinthians 10
 Their abuse of the Lord's Supper. 1 Corinthians 11
 Spiritual Gifts. Their purpose and their proper use. 1 Corinthians 12-14
 Doctrinal problems with resurrection from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15
 The collection and final words. 1 Corinthians 16

THE TEXT

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

Paul's apostleship was 'through the will of God', which means he was 'called', so this wasn't a career choice! He wasn't 'self-appointed'. In other words, it wasn't a human appointment. 'A chosen vessel', Acts 9:15-16, 'to make thee a minister'. Acts 26:15-18 / Galatians 1:11-14, with authority, Luke 10:16.

DOES GOD 'CALL' TODAY? HOW?

As the Gospel calls people to be Christians, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15, so Jesus called Paul to be an apostle. Jesus called Paul to be an apostle so that he may preach the gospel message to Jew and Gentile, Acts 26:16-18 / Galatians 1:15-16.

Many had challenged Paul regarding his apostleship, and for that reason, he was compelled to defend this fact on many occasions, 1 Corinthians 9:1-2 / 2 Corinthians 11:4-5 / 2 Corinthians 12:11-13.

Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul knows that he is not one of the twelve apostles, but he is on par with them because, like them, he is chosen by God.’

What is an apostle? It's the Greek word, 'apostolos', which is a 'delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders.' 'A messenger, ambassador, envoy'.

QUALIFICATIONS OF AN APOSTLE

1. Handpicked by Jesus, 1 Corinthians 1:1.
2. One who had accompanied Jesus during his days on the earth and had seen His resurrected body, Acts 1:21-22.
3. One who had received authority to reveal the will of God, Matthew 18:18 / Galatians 1:11-12.
4. Consider the fact that an ambassador is 'the highest-ranking diplomatic representative appointed by one country or government to represent it in another'.

Paul was an ‘ambassador,’ 2 Corinthians 5:20, who represented Christ and his government to a lost and dying world. Interestingly, the saint today is an ambassador for Christ, not an apostle, but those who represent and teach Christ in this world, Matthew 28:18-29.

Sosthenes was the chief ruler of the synagogue, Acts 18:17, on whom the Jews vented their anger before the Bema when Gallio, the Roman deputy, refused to listen to their complaint. Became a Christian and was with Paul in Ephesus, from where the letter was sent.

The Corinthians would be very familiar with Sosthenes because this incident was fresh on their minds; approximately four years had passed. Crispus is also described as a chief ruler who had already accepted the Gospel. As had ‘many Corinthians,’ Acts 18:8.

“To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.” 1 Corinthians 1:2

Notice Paul describes the church as ‘the church of God’, not ‘St Paul’s’ or ‘St Peter’s’ or ‘St Andrew’s’. Several scriptural names may be used to identify the church.

Other names in the Bible are ‘church of Christ’ is one. ‘The Body of Christ’, and ‘The Bride of Christ’. ‘The Family of God’. ‘The Kingdom of His dear Son’, ‘The church of the First-born’, and there are others.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Greek word has both a Gentile and a Jewish background. In its Gentile sense, it denotes chiefly the citizen-assembly of a Greek city... but it is its Jewish usage that underlies its use to denote the community of believers in Jesus. In the Septuagint, it is one of the words used to denote the people of Israel in their religious character as Yahweh’s ‘assembly.’”

We should avoid using the name ‘church of Christ’ in a way that makes it a denomination. For example, a lady described herself as ‘a Church of Christer’. Another lady said she was a member of ‘the Church of Christ Church’.

The word church, in Greek, is ‘ecclesia’, which means ‘an assembly of the citizens regularly summoned, to call an assembly’. Individuals are ‘summoned’ or ‘called’ into the church by the Gospel message, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14. Collectively then, the saints are termed the church, an assembly of those who have been called out of darkness and into the light of God, 1 Peter 2:9-10.

As ambassadors for Christ, the apostles preached the government of Jesus and those who wilfully submit to the terms of admission into this new government or kingdom, church, are citizens thereof, Ephesians 2:19.

The word ‘sanctified’ is equivalent to those of the church. To be sanctified is to be separate from things profane and dedicate to God, to consecrate and so render inviolable.

Since only what is pure and without blemish can be devoted and offered to God, Leviticus 22:20 / Deuteronomy 15:21 / Deuteronomy 17:1, sanctified signifies to purify and to cleanse externally, to purify by expiation, free from the guilt of sin, 1 Corinthians 6:11 / Ephesians 5:26 / Hebrews 10:10 / Hebrews 10:14 / Hebrews 10:29 / Hebrews 13:12, to purify internally by the reformation of soul.

When one is baptized into Christ he or she is sanctified, 1 Corinthians 6:11. Sins are forgiven Acts 2:38 / Acts 22:16. This cleansing of sins is made possible through the blood of Jesus Christ, Matthew 1:21 / Matthew 26:28.

Sanctification is not a moral action, it is a state of being.

Since God is light and in Him is no darkness, 1 John 1:5, those who would be in fellowship with him must of necessity be separated from all moral defilements, Isaiah 59:1 / 2 Corinthians 7:1.

This occurs at baptism, Acts 3:28 / Acts 22:16, and is maintained by humble, contrite hearts seeking forgiveness when sin occurs, Psalms 51:1-17 / Isaiah 57:15 / Acts 8:22-25 / 2 Corinthians 7:10-11.

The phrase, ‘in Christ Jesus’, simply means that our sanctification occurs because of Jesus, Hebrews 10:10-14. Those sanctified are those who are ‘called to be saints.’ Every true saint in the universal church has been called into this relationship, fellowship with God, through the gospel, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15.

The saint is sanctified, and the sanctified are those who ‘call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours.’ The phrase, ‘call upon’, is the Greek word ‘epikaleo’ which means to ‘invoke or appeal to’. ‘To invoke, adore worship, the Lord, i.e. Christ’.

The saint is one who is sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ through faith! Hebrews 13:12. This faith motivates one to make appeals to God. Without such faith, one can in no way be pleasing to God, Hebrews 11:6. The question that must be answered is, how can the Corinthians be viewed as sanctified saints of the church of God, while being found in sin?

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 1:3

When Paul writes to the congregations ‘Grace and Peace’. When he writes to Timothy, Titus and Philemon, ‘Grace, mercy and peace.’ Greetings reflect his feelings towards those to whom he is writing. Varying between affection and severity.

Lenski, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Grace is always first, peace always second. This is due to the fact that grace is the source of peace. Without grace there is and can be no peace, but when grace is ours, peace must of necessity follow.’

THANKSGIVING

“I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.” 1 Corinthians 1:4-6

Paul kept the Corinthian brethren in his daily prayers and was thankful for their obedient faith. The obedient had received God’s ‘grace’, which is the forgiveness of sins through baptism leading to the hope of heaven, Ephesians 2:8 / Ephesians 1:5-7 / Acts 2:38.

The spiritual blessing of grace, the forgiveness of sins and the hope of salvation are ‘in Christ,’ 1 Corinthians 1:4. Jesus provided the opportunity for man’s salvation through the cross, and therefore salvation is only through or in Him.

Because the Corinthians were recipients of God’s grace, they were enriched in Him, 2 Corinthians 8:9. Every saint who receives forgiveness of sins is rich in God’s grace. This rich state was because the Corinthians had a multitude of people who knew and understood the Scriptures and ably taught them, 1 Corinthians 1:5.

Corinth’s problems did not revolve around a lack of understanding on anyone’s part, as we shall look further into later. The ‘testimony of Christ’, that is the Gospel, was firmly established in them by truth-confirming miracles, 1 Corinthians 1:6.

“Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:7-9

Paul says they didn’t lack any spiritual gift, 1 Corinthians 1:7. 1 Corinthians 12:1-8 reveals the multiplicity of spiritual gifts that existed in the church at Corinth. The brethren had all the revelations available in a clear and

concise form so that they had no excuse for a lack of knowledge. The knowledge of the Gospel left the Corinthian Christians waiting, in hope, for the coming of Jesus, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.

The same word of God that reveals God's gracious message of salvation, 1 Corinthians 1:7, shall establish or confirm the Corinthians unto the end that they may be 'blameless' when Jesus comes to judge the world, 1 Corinthians 1:8.

The word 'blameless' means 'not accused, without reproach, void of offence'.

The word 'coming' or 'revealed' is the Greek word 'Parousia', and in Latin it is the word 'advent'. The word is very familiar in New Testament times, describing a Royal visit. The word means 'the being beside', and indicates the presence of the Emperor.

Citizens of the Empire had good reason to be familiar with it because the visit was paid for by the taxes and the contributions that were taken up to defray the expenses. Nevertheless, a visit was the cause of great celebration. Coins were struck, monuments were erected, sacrifices were offered, and it was declared a 'Holy' day.

A list found that detailed the costs of a 'coming' mentioned that a golden Crown was to be presented to the Emperor when he arrived. Another papyrus, found among the wrappings around the mummified body of a crocodile, recorded that a levy of corn had been imposed on a village by its chief and elders, to offset the cost of the Coming.

The saint of God is justified, acquitted of sins, through the grace of God, Romans 5:1-11. The blood of Jesus is the only thing that can make this possible, Matthew 26:28 / Hebrews 10:1-4.

Because any sin will separate man from God, Isaiah 59:1-2 / 1 John 1:5-10, saints must continue to pray for the cleansing of sins and maintain their fellowship with the Father, as Peter instructed Simon in Acts 8.

The word 'fellowship', 1 Corinthians 1:9, is the Greek word 'Koinonia', and it means joint participation. It is used in a marriage ceremony to indicate the sharing of the same interests. We are called into the 'fellowship of Jesus Christ,' therefore, we have the same interests.

God will not disappoint anyone who, by faith, calls upon his name, invoking forgiveness of past sins. The Gospel of Jesus Christ called us into this glorious fellowship with God and His Son, Jesus.

The saints of God shall share eternal salvation. The only thing that breaks this fellowship between God and man, and saint with a saint, is sin, 1 John 1:5-10 / 1 John 3:4.

A CHURCH DIVIDED OVER LEADERS

"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household, have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." 1 Corinthians 1:10-12

The word 'appeal', 1 Corinthians 1:10, is the Greek word 'parakaleo', and it means to 'call on, invoke, to call to, exhort, cheer, encourage'. The context of the verse indicates that instructions are the subject, Colossians 3:17.

Paul is calling upon the Corinthian brethren to do something in accordance with the will, authority or instructions of our Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle is calling the Corinthians, according to the authority of God, to the following.

1. 'Speak the same thing.' 1 Corinthians 1:10.

The Corinthian brethren held preachers and instructors of Christ in such high esteem that they considered themselves 'of' such teachers, 1 Corinthians 1:12 / 1 Corinthians 3:4. Paul encourages the brethren to be of Christ and to walk by His authority alone.

2. ‘That there be no divisions among you.’ 1 Corinthians 1:10.

Apparently, Judaism had made inroads in the body of Christ in Corinth as it had in other places, Acts 15. There cannot be unity among brethren when those brethren differ in matters of the faith.

The Corinthian brethren needed instructions in the realm of adiaphorous matters of indifference, 1 Corinthians 10 / Romans 14:1-6. Matters of indifference were mere opinions regarding matters such as what one should eat. Matters such as these should never divide brethren. The first of many problems experienced by the Corinthian brethren, as exposed by Paul, was their lack of unity.

3. The Corinthians were, therefore, exhorted to ‘be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment.’ 1 Corinthians 1:10.

To be ‘perfectly united’ is the Greek word ‘katartizo’, and it means ‘to adjust or put in order again, restore, to put nets to rights, mend them’. This phrase suggests that at one time the brethren were united, yet now are in a state of division. The admonition is to repair their thinking and to be one in Christ.

The words ‘same mind’ would indicate unity and are dependent upon the words of Jesus Christ. The words ‘same judgment’ again indicate a common stand in the authority of Jesus Christ. It is the words of Jesus that must unite Christians, John 17:20-26.

Word got back to Paul by the household of Chloe, 1 Corinthians 1:11, not Chloe herself, the fact that there were ‘quarrels’ among the brethren in Corinth. Contentions means ‘strife, quarrel, debate, contention’.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning Chloe.

‘This was doubtless some very religious matron at Corinth, whose family were converted to the Lord; some of whom were probably sent to the apostle to inform him of the dissensions which then prevailed in the Church at that place.’

Remember that Paul is writing to the Corinthians from Ephesus, A.D. 55-56. Apollos had already arrived in Corinth from Ephesus and preached mightily, Acts 18:24-25 / Acts 18:28. We are not told whether Peter had ever preached in Corinth, just as we are not told about Christ being in Corinth preaching, yet both influences were felt.

Here is a great example of how teachings can invade an area without the teacher present. These doctrines spread. The matter here is not that Paul, Apollos, Peter and Jesus were preaching different doctrines, but that the Corinthians were treating these Gospel preachers as philosophers and being more converted to the personality than the message.

They elevated preachers, and this attitude was in line with the Greek way of thinking. They had developed little cliques, which are always devastating for any congregation.

“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.)” 1 Corinthians 1:13-

16

The three questions Paul asks are answered with a simple, no, 1 Corinthians 1:13. The body of Jesus was not divided up on the cross, and therefore the Corinthians were not to be divided spiritually. To lay claims to Christianity through the name of any other than Christ is to greatly err. Our only glorying should be in Christ, Ephesians 3:21.

And so people are to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ, not Paul, Acts 2:28, but into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Matthew 28:119-20, and no one else.

In 1 Corinthians 1:14-16, Paul said he only had baptised Crispus, Acts 18:8, and Gaius, Romans 16:23, and the household of Stephanas. The household of Stephanas was of the first fruits of Achaia, 1 Corinthians 16:15.

If men were going to claim allegiance to preachers who baptised them, Paul wanted no part of it: ‘I thank God that I baptised none of you’. The Corinthians were suffering from ‘preacher-itis.’ The name of Paul or any other did not carry with it the authoritative power to forgive sins as did the name of Jesus Christ.

Notice that Paul did not have a perfect knowledge of those whom he baptised, 1 Corinthians 1:16. The important thing was his remembrance and knowledge of the teachings of Jesus as an apostle, John 14:26.

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” 1 Corinthians 1:17

Though baptism is necessary for salvation, it was not the purpose of Christ sending Paul. Jesus sent Paul to spread the good tidings of salvation to all who would obtain faith through hearing, Romans 10:17.

Baptism would necessarily be included in that message, Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15-16 / Acts 2:38 / Acts 22:16. These texts show how highly Paul regarded water baptism.

It is God’s specified way for the believer to identify publicly with his or her Lord, Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15-16 / Acts 8:16 / Acts 19:5 / Romans 6:3 / Galatians 3:27 / 1 Peter 3:21.

If Paul thought baptism wasn’t necessary, why would he himself be baptised and why would he preach elsewhere? People who come to this text to argue that baptism isn’t necessary for salvation have either already made their minds up about this, or they are not being sincere with the text.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul deliberately did not baptise his converts so there would be no question as to whose disciples they were. This was one way he kept Christ central in his ministry. Paul believed baptism was important, but it was valid whether he or any other believer administered it. He was not superior to other believers in this respect.’

The Gospel message would not be in the ‘wisdom of words’, such as grand philosophical arguments that were at the heart of those in and around Achaia, Acts 17:16-34.

Such words would include the manner of eloquence in which it was delivered, 1 Corinthians 2:1. If the Gospel message were treated as mere philosophy from the mouth of an eloquent speaker, its power would be void in the hearts of those who heard it.

Remember, it’s not the messenger but the message which is important. It’s the faith of the candidate for baptism which is important, not the faith of the one doing the baptism. The strength of the Gospel doesn’t lie in people with authority.

CHRIST CRUCIFIED IS GOD’S POWER AND WISDOM

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” 1 Corinthians 1:18-19

Here we find the second problem identified. The Corinthians misunderstood the nature of the Gospel. Here is another term for the Gospel, i.e., ‘the word of the cross.’ The word, ‘perish,’ in Greek is ‘apollumi’, and it means to ‘destroy utterly, kill, slay, waste’, Revelation 22:11.

Jesus divided humanity into two sections, i.e., those who love light and those who love darkness, John 3:18-19. The point is that each will continue in their own interest.

To those who are heading toward destruction, the Gospel message is nothing more than a set of rules or a discipline of philosophy. Yet those who claim faith in Jesus Christ understand that the Word of God is much more than a philosophy; it is ‘the power of God’ to save, Romans 1:16.

To illustrate his point, Paul quotes from Isaiah 29:14. The wisdom of the wise was their own creation, what they reasoned to be correct rather than what God revealed to be correct, Isaiah 29:13.

In this text, the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, was besieging Jerusalem and rather than calling on help from Jehovah, the supposed wise king made an alliance with Egypt. In this illustration, Isaiah 29, God destroyed the wisdom of the wise as He shall do in every age where men set their ideas above His revelation.

“Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.” 1 Corinthians 1:20-21

The wise may be the philosopher whose reasoning is of his own. The teacher of the law or scribe is the word ‘grammateus’, which means ‘a secretary, clerk, a writer, i.e., professionally scribe or secretary, town clerk’. The disputant or philosopher is the Greek word ‘suzetetes’, which means ‘to search or examine together with another, dispute with a person.’

How did God make foolish the wisdom of the world? The world seems to think it has the answers to creation, life and human existence, yet it is only theory. The Lord’s revelation reveals the beginning and end of man and therefore proves his deity, Isaiah 46:9-10.

Man’s wisdom leads to a life void of hope. Paul is making a comparison between the Gospel of divine origin and man’s immediate human reason. Many things of this earth have been figured out by human wisdom by such minds as Herodotus, Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, Hippocrates, Pythagoras, Einstein, Freud, etc. The truths of the Gospel, however, come from Gospel preaching, Romans 10:17.

Contrary to man’s ‘I think, and therefore it is truth to me’ ideology, the Lord reveals truth through the foolishness of preaching, Isaiah 55:8-9. Paul tells us that this preaching has as its source God, Galatians 1:11-12. Such divine instructions are received by those who hear and learn, John 6:44-51.

“Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

Here we have a threefold consequence of Gospel preaching. Jesus performed many signs while with the Jews that should have produced faith in them, John 20:30-31; however, they continued to ask for signs, 1 Corinthians 1:22 / Matthew 16:1. No sign was good enough for the unbelieving Jew. Jesus was a stumbling block to them. What is a stumbling block? 1 Corinthians 1:23. It’s the Greek word ‘skandelon’, and it’s where we get our word ‘scandal’. It means ‘the movable stick or trigger of a trap, trap-stick, a trap, snare; any impediment placed in the way and causing one to stumble or fall.’

Applied to Jesus Christ, whose person and career were so contrary to the expectations of the Jews concerning the Messiah, that they rejected Him and by their obstinacy made a shipwreck of salvation.

The Jews couldn’t accept the message that the Christ, the Messiah who died on a cross, 1 Corinthians 1:23. The Gentiles were more apt to consider words of philosophy than words of a crucified king.

The Gentile considered such preaching utterly foolish, 1 Corinthians 1:23. Why would a god want to die for mortals? The cross went against all human reasoning, John 12:34 / Galatians 5:11.

Though Jesus made many Jews stumble in disbelief and many Gentiles cast out His doctrine, counting it foolish, the ‘called’, 1 Corinthians 1:24 / 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, recognise Jesus and the Gospel message of Him to be the power of salvation, ‘Christ crucified’, 1 Corinthians 1:23 / Isaiah 55:8-9. God has no foolishness nor is there any weakness with Him, 1 Corinthians 1:25. The phrase is a simple indicator regarding the power and wisdom of God.

“Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:26-

31

A call for every Christian to see clearly who they are and to put the glory of life in its proper place, with God, 1 Corinthians 1:26. Who is it that responds to the Gospel’s call among you brethren? Not many are ‘wise’ by the world’s standards. Not many ‘influential’ listen to the Gospel’s call, listen to the Gospel’s call, 1 Corinthians 1:26. Not many “noble” obey the Gospel. 1 Corinthians 1:26. Why? Because they have in mind the things of the flesh being satisfied in life with what they have and see no need for Jesus, Jeremiah 9:23-26.

Paul asks them to look at themselves. Crispus and Gaius were noble. Notice the text says, ‘not many’, it doesn’t say ‘not any’. The Gospel is for everyone. It’s not who you are but what you are, a sinner in need of the Gospel.

Those individuals who appear to be foolish because they have accepted by faith their justification and access into the grace of God, Romans 5:1-2, are those whom God chose to put to shame the wisdom of the world, 1 Corinthians 1:27.

Those who possess knowledge of Jesus Christ and cause the hard-hearted philosopher to stumble shame the wise of the world. Godly conduct will do this! We are the conscience of the world.

Those who appear weak, base, and despised are the economically weak. These have no formal education, no mansions, and no material wealth that would cause the world to be interested in them.

Though the supposed weak seem helpless, they are empowered with great joy and hope in this life and therefore bring to nought the noble things of the world, 1 Corinthians 1:28.

The world despises the foolish, weak and basely; however, God has exalted these by their acceptance of the Gospel message. Since that which appears detestable to the world is truly exalted, God has effectively eliminated any boasting on the part of the world.

God has offered His Son, provided the forgiveness of sins through Jesus, and delivered the Gospel message for that salvation, 1 Corinthians 1:29-30. Those who are despised have their wisdom from above. Paul has shown what the Christian’s calling is not, human creeds, traditions of men, science or Philosophy, 2 Timothy 1:3, and now explains what it is.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

The word ‘righteousness’ means the state acceptable to God, which becomes a sinner’s possession through that faith by which he embraces the grace of God offered him in the expiatory death of Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 1:30.

SANCTIFICATION

The word ‘sanctification’ means purification, consecration; it is the effect of consecration, the sanctification of heart and life, 1 Corinthians 1:30.

REDEMPTION

The word ‘redemption’ means a release is affected by the payment of ransom, redemption, deliverance, and liberation procured by the payment of a ransom, 1 Corinthians 1:30. The wages of sin is death, Romans 6:23.

One who sins, that is, violates divine law, is under a curse, Galatians 3:10. Jesus redeemed man by paying the awful cost of sin by being crucified on the cross, Galatians 3:11-14. We are free from sin, John 8:32.

Since true wisdom and redemption are in Christ, we ought only to glory in Him and no other, Jeremiah 9:23-24. The call of the Gospel to those despised in the world results in salvation by faith. This message is simple and easily understood, 2 Corinthians 11:3.

If you want to boast, boast about Christ, 1 Corinthians 1:31, which is a quote from Jeremiah 9:23-24. Spurgeon, after preaching one time, had a man come up to him and say, ‘Mr Spurgeon, that’s the finest sermon on that topic which has ever been preached in this place’, to which Spurgeon replied, ‘I know, the devil told me that just as I had finished’.

SUMMARY

Paul begins this epistle by reminding the Corinthians of their sanctification in the Lord. They enjoyed fellowship in the Lord only through their ‘blameless’ state, 1 Corinthians 1:8.

Secondly, Paul calls upon the Corinthian brethren to put away divisions that exist among them so that they may maintain their state of sanctification. The household of Chloe had written Paul a letter outlining the current problems at the church in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 1:11.

The first problem identified was that of elevating one Gospel preacher above another. Such activity indicated a misunderstanding of the Gospel message. Paul clears this up by identifying such behaviour as worldly thinking.

The world sees only the here and now, whereas the saint of God sees with eyes of wisdom into eternity. Therefore, the things of God are despised among those who are rich, strong and filled with the world’s wisdom.

Though despised, the perceived weak and ignorant of the world who have accepted the Gospel’s call are the truly wise ones. The Gospel provides redemption, sanctification and fellowship with God. The wisdom of the world provides only temporal pleasures.

Where then should glory be placed? Should we glory in those things that will only last through this life, or shall we glory in those things that go on into eternity? Paul answers the question, ‘Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord’, 1 Corinthians 1:31.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

“And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom, as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus

Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power." 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians of the source of the Gospel. Paul first came to Corinth in 51 AD, Acts 18:1-17. As Paul communicated with the Corinthians regarding the Gospel message, it was not performed with any grand oratory skills, excellence of speech, and neither was it filled with the wisdom of this world, 1 Corinthians 2:1.

He's obviously learned from his mistake in Athens, Acts 17:22-31. That which Paul preached was the testimony of God, that is, divine revelation, which is wisdom defined.

Paul's only interest while in Corinth was to preach Jesus crucified, 1 Corinthians 2:2. While others spent their time learning various religious practices and philosophies of men, Paul focused on God's divine revelation. The cross of Christ is again emphasised as the central theme of the Gospel, 1 Corinthians 1:18.

Though Paul knew not how the Corinthians would receive the message of the Gospel, he preached, with fear, weakness and trembling, 1 Corinthians 2:3 / Acts 18:9-10. As our voice today quivers with heart-thumping trembling, we preach to others, hoping they will be receptive.

Morgan, in his commentary, says the following.

'So great was his sense of weakness and fear, and so profound his lack of trust in himself that he quaked, he trembled. Those are the secrets of strength in all preaching.'

That which separated the message Paul proclaimed from the philosophers of his day was the matter of confirmation. The philosophers persuaded men with swelling oratory and appeals to human wisdom. The apostle Paul persuaded the Corinthians with miraculous manifestations of the Spirit, 1 Corinthians 2:4-5.

The purpose of such work was to confirm faith in the Corinthians, Mark 16:17-20 / Hebrews 2:3. The Corinthians had apparently slipped back into their old ways of hearing the tones and talents of speakers rather than looking to the confirming miracles that accompanied the apostles in their preaching.

GOD'S WISDOM REVEALED BY THE SPIRIT

"We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." 1 Corinthians 2:6-8

God's wisdom is identified, revealed, and understood. This wisdom was spoken by the apostles and prophets, Ephesians 3:1-5. This Gospel is for those who are 'mature', it's the Greek word, 'teleios', which means, 'the perfect, i.e. the more intelligent, ready to apprehend divine things', 1 Corinthians 2:6 / Ephesians 4:13 / 1 Corinthians 14:20 / Philippians 3:15.

The despised of this earth are viewed by God as perfect and therefore enjoy fellowship with Him, 1 Corinthians 2:6 / 1 Corinthians 1:19 / 1 John 1:5ff. This perfection is made possible by the grace of God, Ephesians 2:8 / Hebrews 10:1-18. God's view of His redeemed is a 'mature' man's view of the redeemed, as depicted in the words 'despised, weak and foolish,' 1 Corinthians 1:27-31.

The word 'mystery,' 1 Corinthians 2:7, is 'musterion' in Greek, and it means the secret counsels which govern God in dealing with the righteous, which are hidden from ungodly and wicked men but plain to the godly.

In the New Testament, God's plan of providing salvation for men through Christ, which was once hidden but now is revealed, 1 Corinthians 2:7 / Romans 16:25. At a point in the past, God's wisdom remained 'hidden', but is now revealed for all to know, Ephesians 3:1ff / 1 Peter 1:20.

God ‘destined for our glory before time began,’ 1 Corinthians 2:7, means this Gospel message for our glory.

Foreordained is the Greek word ‘proorizo’, and it means to determine beforehand.

Though God had predetermined to reveal a saving Gospel message to man, it was delivered over a long period of time in bits and pieces. It could not be fully understood until it was completely revealed, 1 Peter 1:10-12. The revealed message has the power to bring us glory with God.

Jesus is indeed the ‘Lord of glory’, 1 Corinthians 2:8. This statement assumes the deity of Jesus. The rulers of this world had no knowledge of Jesus and proved this to be the case by killing Him on the cross. Once again, this verse shows that the wisdom of man is opposite to that of the wisdom of God.

“However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived”—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.

This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.” 1 Corinthians 2:9-13

In 1 Corinthians 2:9, Paul quotes from two sources, Isaiah 64:4, and Isaiah 65:17. The point is that man could never conceive nor perceive the wisdom of God unless it was revealed. 1 Corinthians 2:10 tells us that God has revealed His wisdom and therefore all can know of the efficacy of the saving blood of Jesus Christ.

The word ‘revealed,’ in Greek is ‘apokalupto’, and is a key term, 1 Corinthians 2:10. It means to uncover, to disclose, reveal, to reveal one’s whole mind, to be disclosed, made known. Clearly, God has revealed His mind, the wisdom of God, and intended for man to understand.

The mind of God was revealed, ‘through the Spirit’, 1 Corinthians 2:10. The Holy Spirit is a member of the Godhead, Colossians 2:9, whose work is revealing the mind of God to the apostles and prophets. Jesus had proclaimed that this would be the Holy Spirit’s work, John 16:13-15, and Paul confirmed these words in Ephesians 3:1-5.

As a member of the Godhead, the Spirit is a different individual who shares the same purpose with the Father and Jesus, as is indicated by John 17:21 and here 1 Corinthians 2:10. The Holy Spirit, as part of the Godhead, ‘searches the deep things of God,’ 1 Corinthians 2:10.

He investigates and understands, by His omniscience, all the knowledge of the Godhead and then reveals these things. The word ‘God’, which is ‘Theos’, is comprised of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Paul uses an illustration to get across the point of revelation. No man can know what is in my mind unless I tell the matter, 1 Corinthians 2:11. Likewise, no man can know the mind of God, lest the Holy Spirit reveal the mind of God, 1 Corinthians 2:11.

The point is clear: Paul is not saying that the Holy Spirit inhabits the body of God in some mysterious way. Paul is rather saying that we cannot know the things of the Godhead, lest the word of God be revealed by the Spirit. Revelation, then, is a work of the Holy Spirit.

The ‘spirit of the world’, 1 Corinthians 2:12, appears to be a phrase indicating human reason as opposed to that which has been revealed by the Holy Spirit, ‘the spirit which is from God,’ i.e., divine revelation. Paul spoke of this in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25.

Herein we see the purpose of divine revelation, and once again, it goes against those among us who would say we cannot know the truth. God has revealed His mind to us through the workings of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:1-4 / Hebrews 1:1-2 / 2 Peter 1:21.

Apparently, the originator of the plural pronoun ‘we’ and ‘us’, **1 Corinthians 2:12-13**, is the apostles who delivered the teachings of the Holy Spirit to mankind. Here, once again, is a contrast between human reasoning and divine revelation! **Revelation 22:10**.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘We’ is emphatic in the Greek text. All believers have received the Holy Spirit, **1 Corinthians 12:13 / Romans 8:9**. He helps us understand the mind of God and the things God has given us. This Spirit is vastly different from the spirit (viewpoint) of the world. Unbelievers cannot understand the things of God as believers can because they have no one who can help them perceive these supernatural things.’

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘As a man’s own spirit best understands his inner thoughts, so the Spirit of God alone can grasp divine truths, **1 Corinthians 2:11**, and alone can interpret to those within whom he dwells ‘the things that are freely given to us by God’ (RV).’

With human reason comes inconsistency of perceived truth. Truth is determined by the individual, and therefore, truth is different for each individual. The man who follows this ideology has effectively isolated himself from others.

Man becomes autonomous and can clamour about any law that violates his perceived truth. Not so with the one who follows one set of divine revelation, **1 Corinthians 2:13**. We, the saints of God, are united in divine truth!

“The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, “Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.” **1 Corinthians 2:14-16**

The word ‘person,’ **1 Corinthians 2:14**, in Greek is ‘psuchikos anthropos’, which means concerned with life only, animal, the natural man. Combining this definition with the individual who considers the spiritual words of divine revelation foolishness, **1 Corinthians 2:14 / 1 Corinthians 1:18**. It is apparent that the ‘person’ or ‘natural man’ is one who is dependent upon human reasoning as his rule of life.

Why can the ‘natural man’ not know divine revelation? Simply because he has no interest in gaining knowledge of the divine and therefore can in no way know them while in this state of ignorance! Such a one is ‘spiritually discerned’, **1 Corinthians 2:14**.

The word ‘discerned’ or ‘judged,’ in Greek is ‘anakrino’, and it means to scrutinise, i.e. by implication, investigate, interrogate, determine, ask, question, discern, examine, judge, search.

The point is clear, the non-spiritually minded individual who depends on human reasoning for autonomous truth cannot know divine truth because knowledge of divine truth comes by scrutiny, investigation, interrogation and examination of divine revelation. This is an endeavour that the worldly-minded individual will not take the time to do.

Who is the true fool then? The Book of Proverbs contrasts the foolish with the wise. It is the foolish who have no desire for righteousness, while it is the disposition of the wise to seek after it and apply it to their lives.

Johnson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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.’

The individual who searches out the Scriptures through investigation, interrogation and examination will know divine truth, **1 Corinthians 2:15 / 2 Timothy 2:15**.

Such an individual cannot, in divine reality, be judged by the one who depends upon human reason for self-truth. The world may judge the Christian as being a religious fanatic or one who puts false hopes in a future heaven; however, it matters not in reality. Humanism reveals the mind of the natural man clearly.

The Humanist Manifesto II of 1973 states the following.

‘Traditional theism, especially faith in the prayer-hearing God, assumed to love and care for persons, to hear and understand their prayers, and to be able to do something about them, is an unproved and outmoded faith. Salvationism, based on mere affirmation, still appears as harmful, diverting people with false hopes of heaven hereafter. Reasonable minds look to other means for survival.’

No matter what man may say or come up with, it will never change one word of God’s. The firm foundation of God will always stand, and there will always be men and women who lovingly hold to it, **2 Timothy 2:19**.

If we Christians have the ‘mind of Christ’, **1 Corinthians 2:16 / Philippians 2:5**, we inferentially can know His divine revelation. The word ‘Lord’, **1 Corinthians 2:16**, is the Greek word ‘kurios’, and it is used in this verse as opposed to ‘God,’ ‘Theos’ in **1 Corinthians 2:12**.

‘Kurios’ is defined as ‘supreme in authority’. Kurios is used six hundred and eighty-seven times in the New Testament and is applied to the godhead as is Theos, **Revelation 22:5-6 / Revelation 22:20-21**.

The purpose of the verse is clear. The humanist does not and cannot know the mind of God and can in no way instruct God who created him in truth. Those who examine and investigate the word of God know divine revelation, **1 Corinthians 2:16 / Isaiah 40:13**, and can in no way be judged by the humanist.

The mind of Christ is the mind of the Kurios, and therefore, we see the deity of Christ! These things being true regarding divine revelation, the Christian must not worry about what the humanist thinks about him. Truth reveals the humanist error, and he too shall bow before the Lord at the end of times, **Philippians 2:10**.

SUMMARY

Paul writes to the Corinthians that they may be ‘blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,’ **1 Corinthians 1:8**. The current state of the Corinthian brethren is revealed in chapter one.

They were divided due to a faulty view of the gospel message. Paul sets out to clear up the nature of the Gospel. The word of God was not to be treated as a set of philosophies delivered by favoured individuals, **Acts 17:21**.

Paul explains that truth is ‘not in words which man’s wisdom teaches’, **1 Corinthians 2:13**. The ‘word of the cross’, **1 Corinthians 1:18**, will more readily be accepted by the perceived weak, foolish and poor of the world.

Those who are despised by the rich and powerful see the true nature of the Gospel. The message of the cross was confirmed in their mind by the ‘demonstration of the Spirit and power,’ **1 Corinthians 2:4**.

The perfect, mature, **1 Corinthians 2:6**, will continue to receive the preaching of Jesus. The glorious Gospel ‘revealed through the Spirit’ is received by the spiritual man that the world considers foolish and despised, **1 Corinthians 2:10-16**.

Chapter two sets forth the contrast between the true foolish, that is, the natural man, and the wise, that is, the spiritual man. The natural man is only interested in the things of this life. He cannot know the will of God because he rejects investigation, examination and searching of the scriptures.

Though the Corinthians had at one time obeyed the Gospel unto sanctification, many apparently found themselves with the same mind as those of the world regarding the Gospel message.

Chapter three will reveal more of these symptoms of the overall problem of division in the church in Corinth. That problem is a lack of spiritual knowledge and understanding, [1 Corinthians 3:1-3](#). Such a condition has always and always will have a destroying effect on God's people, [Hosea 4:1](#) / [Hosea 4:6](#).

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION

“Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.” [1 Corinthians 3:1-2](#)

THE PROBLEM OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

This chapter should begin with the word ‘and,’ because Paul says Cloe’s report must be true because they haven’t grown, [1 Corinthians 1:11](#). Recall that Paul had identified the person, the natural man, those unwilling and uninterested in searching out the truth and the ‘spiritual’ man, those willing and interested in searching out the things of God, [1 Corinthians 2:14-15](#).

The aorist tense of the verbs ‘could not address’ points to a previous action, [1 Corinthians 3:1](#). Apparently, Paul is referring to the time when he first came to Corinth in 51 AD and preached the Gospel, making many converts and establishing a church.

Now, five years later, AD 56, Paul still cannot speak to the Corinthians about the weightier matters of the Gospel; they were still on milk and not solid food, [1 Corinthians 3:2](#) / [Hebrews 5:12](#) / [1 Peter 2:2](#).

We don’t know why they haven’t grown, possibly because the leaders of the church weren’t feeding them properly or possibly because they didn’t want solid food. This shows the importance of the church being fed and being fed the right kind of food.

The point is clear, five years was enough time for the Corinthians to grow spiritually, yet they were stagnating! Let us all press to maturity in the knowledge of Christ rather than letting the years roll by in apathy toward the word of God, [2 Peter 3:18](#). Five years is plenty of time for each of us to be grounded in truth as we investigate, interrogate, examine, scrutinise, and search the Scriptures.

“You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?” [1 Corinthians 3:3](#)

Paul now gives the proof of their lack of spiritual growth and worldly wisdom. A stinging rebuke yet done with love. The problem is ‘you are still worldly’. The word ‘worldly,’ in Greek, is ‘sarkikos’, and it is defined as ‘fleshly and sensual’. Apparently, Paul is continuing the idea of the ‘natural man’ from [1 Corinthians 2:14](#).

Paul tells the Corinthians that their problem is that they don’t have a real interest in the word of God, and as such, they are in no better shape than the world, which is spiritually judged.

The proof of Paul's accusation is their reported works, i.e., 'jealousy and quarrelling.' Later, Paul will reveal the source of their jealousy in the realm of spiritual gifts, 1 Corinthians 12-14. Here, he also mentions quarrelling.

Apparently, the Corinthians were approaching the word of God as a status symbol.

Those baptised by the more popular preachers, 1 Corinthians 1:13-17, and those who had attained the more desirable spiritual gifts looked down on others. Such behaviour exposed their true self; they were 'acting like mere humans.' Simply put, they were worldly-minded.

"For when one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not mere human beings? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task." 1 Corinthians 3:4-5

Paul revisits the initial problem of elevating one man above another as though the Corinthians were no different than those Stoics and Epicureans around them who spent their whole day waiting to hear some new doctrine from some new person, Acts 17:16-22.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'This section of verses makes it very clear that it is possible for genuine Christians to behave as and to appear to be unbelievers, Matthew 13:24-30 / Matthew 13:36-43. The Corinthians' conduct indicated carnality, not lack of eternal life. Prolonged immaturity as a result of carnality is a condition all too prevalent in modern Christianity. Often we mistake carnal Christians for natural men, unbelievers.'

Paul exposes the foolishness of being 'of' a mere man, 1 Corinthians 3:4. The glorying needed to be taken away from men and placed back on God, where it belonged, 1 Corinthians 1:31.

To replace the misguided zeal, Paul reveals the true nature of any gospel preacher. Each one who labours for the Lord is a 'minister,' a servant, 1 Corinthians 3:5.

The word 'minister,' in Greek, is 'diakonos', and it simply means servant. The lowly man of God who preaches to others is simply a lowly servant of the Lord and should in no way be exalted among brethren.

"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building." 1 Corinthians 3:6-9

THE ARGUMENT IS COMPLETE

If it is God who gives the increase as opposed to the teachers planting and watering as servants, naturally God should receive the glory, 1 Corinthians 3:6. As a seed grows by the labour and toil of the farmer, so the child of God grows by the labour and toil of the preacher or teacher.

Yet the farmer and the preacher are mere servants. They are not responsible for the actual growth that occurs within the mind of the saint. God gives the increase in the minds of people through the word of God, 1 Corinthians 3:7. God is to receive glory because He creates the seed and brings about the growth or life. Likewise, God is the originator of truth.

The preacher that establishes a church in a new field and the preacher that builds upon that foundation are 'one,' 1 Corinthians 3:8. This certainly does not mean that Paul and Apollos were one being no more than Jesus and the Father were one being, John 17:21.

THE ONENESS IS IN PURPOSE

The purpose of Paul and Apollos' preaching was the salvation of souls. The two were united in this one fact. The relationship between God and the preachers is defined. 'We, fellow-workers with God, You, God's field God's building', 1 Corinthians 3:9. Paul and Apollos were 'God's fellow-workers,' that is 'sunergos' in the faith. The Greek word is defined as 'working together, joining or helping in work, helping a person in a thing, of the same trade as another, a fellow-workman, colleague'. Paul and Apollos shared in the same trade, i.e. the work of preaching the Gospel.

The Corinthian brethren were God's 'field', God's 'georgion', 'farms, tilled land', 1 Corinthians 3:9. The Corinthian brethren were also identified as, 'God's building', God's 'oikodome', 'a late form of oikodomema, a building, structure', 1 Corinthians 3:9.

Christians are compared to a cultivated field and a building or structure belonging to God. The seed of the Gospel ought to land in cultivated fields, that is, in the mind receptive to the message. The foundation of the building is the truth, Ephesians 2:20.

Paul is saying that he and Apollos shared in the work of preaching, which produces a farm or structure identified with God. They simply went to the fields or construction site and planted the seed or built a building, i.e., the Christian.

As mentioned a moment ago, the 'we', 1 Corinthians 3:9, refers to the apostles in a direct sense, and to preachers generally in an indirect sense! The church does not belong to the 'minister', 'pastor', 'preacher' or 'evangelist.' It does not even belong to the 'elders' to whom the care of the Church has been committed.

All of these are servants and tools used by God, and the final control of the church is God's. What truly matters is what God wants, not what the preacher wants!

Sadly, today, even in the Lord's church, some congregations have lost sight of this truth, and some have never really understood it! In some congregations, the 'preacher' behaves in a manner that suggests that he believes that he is 'in charge', taking the authority of the elders.

A congregation is blessed when it has someone who is able to devote his life to its welfare and interests and the work of evangelism, but when a preacher is granted the privilege of filling this role, he should never lose sight of the fact that God did not authorise the creation of an organisation in which a 'one-man ministry' operates.

This is widely seen in the denominational world, where a distinction is created between 'the Clergy' and 'the Laity'. The word 'clergy' is from 'kleros', which means 'God's lot'. The word 'laity' is from 'laos', which means 'the people'. And so, a distinction is made between the 'ministers' and the 'congregations'.

In the Lord's church, the spiritual life and the physical needs of the congregation are the responsibilities of the elders and deacons who have been appointed, Acts 20:28, according to the instructions of the Holy Spirit, as found in 1 Timothy 3:1-9, and Titus 1:5-9, and these supervisions extend to all who have been given responsibilities in the congregations.

Elders 'watch for your souls, as those who must give an account,' Hebrews 13:17. Paul says, in effect, 'Look! Peter Apollos and I are just servants of God, in that which belongs to Him, so you should not seek to elevate us above our station! Leave our names alone!'

LAYING THE FOUNDATION OF THE BUILDING

“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”
1 Corinthians 3:10-11

Remember that in the earlier chapters, the problem of the party spirit was dividing and therefore endangering the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is one. It has only one foundation, and that foundation is Christ Himself.

Not Paul, Peter, Apollos, or any other teacher whom they may favour. Or after whom they are calling themselves. They should be ‘of one mind and one spirit’, Philippians 2:2, perfectly joined together and ‘speaking the same thing’. Division in the congregation is always the greatest danger confronting the church. Opposition from the world and persecution are far less dangerous than disunity among those who claim to follow Christ. Remember His prayer for unity? John 17:23.

The ultimate result of division in a congregation is that the witness of the church is affected, and the growth of the Kingdom of Christ is hindered. And it will not go unpunished. There is no greater sin that a Christian can commit than to be the cause of division in the Church, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 / 2 Corinthians 6:16.

Paul had never encouraged believers to call themselves his followers. If anyone whom he had baptised was using his name in this manner, they should understand that to baptise was not the work with which he was commissioned.

In fact, he had baptised very few whom he could name and, perhaps, a few others whose names he did not recall! 1 Corinthians 1:14-16. His task was to preach the Gospel of Christ, leaving others to baptise the converts, 1 Corinthians 1:17.

As for the other preachers who had visited Corinth, each one had contributed to the growth of the Corinthian Church. He, Paul, had begun the building on the One Foundation. Others had followed and continued the building.

He had sown the seed, planted it, and others had tended the plant after he had left. But God was the One who brought the work to fruition. He produced the harvest! The farm or building that was planted or constructed by Paul, Apollos, and Cephas identified them as ‘wise master builders,’ 1 Corinthians 3:10.

Fee, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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 uncongenial materials and are therefore in danger of attempting to lay another foundation as well.’

The ‘master builder’, the ‘architekton’, is ‘a chief artificer, master builder, director of works, architect, engineer’. Such an engineer of sound buildings knows that a foundation is important.

When Paul laboured in Corinth in AD 51, he preached Christ, and Him crucified, 1 Corinthians 2:1-2. Paul took God’s grace, the message of justification and sanctification through the blood of Jesus Christ, Romans 5:1-2 / Titus 2:11, and built a divinely ordained foundation that the child of God was to be planted or built upon.

After Paul left Corinth, there would be other preachers and teachers to ‘build on it,’ 1 Corinthians 3:10. That which other teachers built upon was the foundation of truth. Christians who were spiritual would be interested in learning more, i.e., building upon their own personal understanding and knowledge.

Christ is the foundation of the church, 1 Corinthians 3:11 / Isaiah 28:16 / Matthew 16:18 / Romans 9:33 / 1 Peter 2:6. Once the foundation is laid, let no man lay another foundation of human reasoning! 1 Corinthians 3:11 / Ephesians 2:20. The doctrine of Christ was to be upheld, and each Christian built up in the knowledge of that teaching and none other, 1 Peter 2:5 / 2 John 9-11.

SERVICE AND REWARDS

“If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.” 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

Rosscup, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The six materials in 1 Corinthians 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 1 Corinthians 3:13-14. 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.’

This passage is sometimes used in sermons and studies to teach that Christians should take care to ‘lay up treasure in Heaven’ because we shall be rewarded according to the quality of the service we have performed for the Lord, and the credit we have ‘laid up’ in Heaven.

I recall many years ago, hearing someone tell a ‘preacher’s story’ about a man who, on arriving in Heaven, was surprised and disappointed to discover that the ‘house’ assigned to him was far less grand than the one assigned to someone else. The story says that, when he complained, he was told, ‘We can only build with the material you send up!’

It surely does not need to be pointed out that the scriptures contain nothing that gives credence to this simplistic tale! Nevertheless, the discussion of these verses often revolves around the question, Do they teach that there will be different rewards in heaven? If they do, doesn’t this mean that there will be different classes and therefore inequality in Heaven?

Such a discussion is both unsound and unproductive, because 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, have nothing to do with the service of the ordinary Christian, or with rewards in heaven, nor was that ever their intention, because that is not the issue with which Paul was dealing or writing about, although, sadly, this is a fact which a great many Christians fail to understand.

Whenever the discussion of ‘rewards’ is raised, it means that the fundamental, most basic, rules that must always be observed when studying the Scriptures have been ignored.

The American writer and poet ‘Rudyard Kipling’ wrote the classic ‘The Jungle Book’ and the ‘Just So stories’, excellent children’s books. He also wrote, ‘I keep six honest serving-men, (They taught me all I knew) Their names are What and Why and When, And How and Where and Who?’

This little verse contains a wealth of advice to anyone studying anything! I put this very simply: when we study the Scriptures, we should always ask, WHO is the writer? To WHOM is he writing? WHAT is the subject about which he is writing? And WHY does he write this?

Many erroneous doctrines have been born because someone has taken a text or a passage ‘out of context’, with the result that the Scriptures have been misapplied and used to support theories they were never meant to support.

The early preachers of what became known as ‘The Restoration Movement’ in America sometimes spoke about preachers in the denominational world who were guilty of ‘stealing the promises’.

They were preachers who failed to ‘handle right the word of God’, 2 Timothy 3:15, and as a result, they took specific promises that were made to specific individuals at specific times, or in specific circumstances, and applied them to today.

Incidentally, there are several ‘3:16’ verses, besides the most familiar John 3:16, that are well worth examining. 1 Timothy 3:16 is another and Jeremiah 3:16 has a lot to tell us!

When we study 1 Corinthians, we know to whom Paul is writing, and we read from his first letter, the problems with which he has been called on to deal. The question we now ask is, about whom is Paul speaking in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15?

To answer this question, we go back to that first letter and think again about the first problem at Corinth with which Paul dealt at the beginning of his letter. We see it was the dangerous division that had been created among the Corinthian Christians because they had formed themselves into groups and parties that were named after the different teachers and preachers who had visited the church in Corinth after his departure.

You will remember that he was the one who began the work in Corinth and who established the church. In 1 Corinthians 1, he deplores the disunity that, after his departure, had developed in the congregation, which had subsequently been reported to him by those whom he describes as ‘of the household of Chloe’, 1 Corinthians 1:11-12. This leads him to comment on the immaturity of the Corinthian Christians, and he says that, although he had taught them, they still needed simple instruction, which he describes as ‘milk’, 1 Corinthians 3:2, because they were not sufficiently spiritually mature enough to be able to receive and digest the ‘strong meat’ of deeper spiritual truth. In fact, he does not hesitate to tell them that their behaviour demonstrates that they were still ‘babies in Christ’, 1 Corinthians 3:1, which is a phrase that effectively describes immaturity.

What they needed to understand was that these men, Peter, Apollos, and even Paul himself, were merely nothing more than teachers, whose duty it was to carry the Message, 1 Corinthians 3:4-7, who shouldn’t be elevated above their station in the manner in which they were being elevated by the church in Corinth.

In 1 Corinthians 3:9, he describes himself and these other preachers as ‘God’s fellow-workers’, whilst they, the Corinthians themselves, are ‘God’s field.’ That is, he uses what we might call ‘an agricultural’ illustration. Then, in 1 Corinthians 3:10, he uses another illustration, that of the work of the builder, and he describes himself as a ‘builder’ for God, building on the ‘Foundation which God Himself has already laid’, which, he says, is Christ Himself, 1 Corinthians 3:11.

Now, when we come to 1 Corinthians 3:12-13, we see that he says that there will come a time when the work of every teacher and preacher will be tested, and he says, in effect, the following.

‘I am not talking about you, the member of the congregation, I am talking about the responsibilities of the teachers and preachers’. He says, on that Day, the effectiveness of their ministry, i.e., the work of the preachers and teachers, will be tested ‘as by fire’.

It will help us to understand this analogy if we bear in mind that, in the course of his travels among the great cities of his day, Paul must have seen many beautiful buildings in such cities as Ephesus, from where he sent this letter, Corinth and Rome itself.

These were grand cities with magnificent buildings that were built of expensive materials such as marble or granite, and columns decorated with gold and silver.

Nearby, he would sometimes see in the very shadow of these magnificent buildings owned by the rich and influential, the miserable hovels that were the homes of the poor and the outcasts, hovels made of mud, wood and straw, that call to mind the poverty-stricken areas seen today, on the outskirts of such South America as Rio San Javier.

When there was a fire in the city, and, as history testifies, fire was an ever-present danger in those days, the fine, well-constructed buildings survived, but the poor hovels inevitably perished. As a matter of fact, history records that such a fire actually destroyed the city of Corinth itself, less than a hundred years after Paul wrote this letter.

And so, here, Paul declares that ‘The Day of the Lord’, that is, when the Lord returns, the occasion will be like such a fire which will prove the quality of the work done by those who preach and teach, those who bear the responsibility of proclaiming the Message, 1 Corinthians 3:12-13. God Himself will evaluate the work of each ‘builder’, and His ‘evaluation’ will be like such fire.

Wall, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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, Luke 19:11-27 / 1 Corinthians 1:8 / 2 Corinthians 5:10 / Philippians 1:6 / Philippians 1:10 / 2 Timothy 1:12 / 2 Timothy 1:18 / 2 Timothy 4:8 / Revelation 22:12.’

If a teacher’s work has been effective and has produced lasting results, it will be as though it has survived the fire, and he will receive the Lord’s ‘well done’, 1 Corinthians 3:15-16 / Matthew 25:23 / 1 Corinthians 9:25 / Philippians 4:1 / 1 Thessalonians 2:19 / 2 Timothy 4:8 / James 1:12 / 1 Peter 5:4 / Revelation 2:10 / Revelation 3:11.

He doesn’t need the acclamation and admiration of the church members. But if his work is shown to have been ineffective, he will receive no commendation. God will not be able to commend him.

Paul significantly points out that this testing time will not affect a teacher’s salvation because ‘works’ have nothing to do with salvation, since salvation does not depend on works of any kind but on faith in the grace of God, Ephesians 2:8-9. Therefore, regardless of what happens to the work that has been done, those who serve God will still be saved. This passage in the letter, therefore, is designed to help Corinthians to acquire a proper understanding of the significance, value and responsibility of the work of those who preach God’s Word, and it brings into focus the admonition in James 3:1.

There is a lesson here for both the teacher and those whom he teaches. The danger exists that there will always be immature members of the church who become so impressed by particular preachers that they forget that a preacher is merely one who serves God in a particular field, who should not become so admired that he, himself is tempted to think more highly of himself than he ought to think.

And they should not become so fascinated by the preacher that they encourage him to think, by wearing his name, that he is in any way more ‘special’ than his brothers and sisters.

Any teacher, whether Paul, Peter or Apollos, or, for that matter, anyone else, who has a particular role in the life of the church of the Lord, is merely ‘God’s servant’.

It is important to remember that we are saved by the grace of God, revealed in the Good News, which tells us that Jesus died for our sins, offering Himself as the sacrifice which makes our forgiveness possible.

No matter what service a preacher renders, it has no merit where salvation is concerned, and, as for ‘reward’, to hear the Master say, ‘well done’, will be reward enough! Matthew 25:23.

“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.” 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

1 Corinthians 3:16-23 is a call for the Christian to understand who they are. Paul further identifies the Christian, earlier he compared them to a farm and building, 1 Corinthians 3:9.

Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and other preachers of truth had planted or built what the Corinthians currently stand for, i.e., truth, spirituality, and hope of eternal life.

The very truth that makes them what they are, puts them in a divine relationship with the heavenly Father, i.e., ‘the Spirit of God dwells in you’, 1 Corinthians 3:16 / 1 Corinthians 6:19.

The Corinthian Christians, by way of reconciliation and sanctification, 1 Corinthians 1:1-9, are now viewed as a ‘temple of God,’ 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. The word ‘temple’, in Greek, is ‘naos’ and means ‘the dwelling of a god, a temple’.

Consider Jesus’ use of the word ‘naos,’ ‘temple’ in John 2:18-22. Jesus spoke of his body as a temple. Apparently, the context of a building, 1 Corinthians 3:9, is still under consideration. The church is made up of living stones and illustrated as a temple that God dwells in, 1 Peter 2:5.

Again, ‘naos’ is defined as ‘of the spirit-filled body of the Christians, which is said to be a habitation of God, therefore a temple. On occasion, it may become the habitation of demons, an idol’s temple. Of spirit-filled Christians.’

The picture is one of man’s body being associated with an actual temple building that has God dwelling within, much like God’s divine presence in the Old Testament temple, 1 Kings 8:10-11.

How does the Holy Spirit dwell within the Christian? Someone may ask, ‘How does the Father, Jesus and Holy Spirit dwell as one?’ The answer seems simple: the Father, 1 John 2:24 / 1 John 4:12-16, Jesus, Ephesians 3:17 / Colossians 1:27, and the Holy Spirit, Romans 8:9-11 / 2 Timothy 1:13-14, dwell within the Christian through man’s acceptance and guidance in truth, Galatians 3:2 / Ephesians 3:17 / 1 John 2:5-6.

The word ‘destroy’, 1 Corinthians 3:17, in Greek is ‘phtheiro’, and it means to ‘ruin, waste, spoil, destroy’. If another ‘destroys’ the temple, God will ‘destroy,’ ‘phtheiro’ him. These are some serious words which people who cause division within the church need to take note of.

Johnson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There are three types of builders—the wise man, 1 Corinthians 3:12 / 1 Corinthians 3:14, the unwise, 1 Corinthians 3:15, and the foolish, who injures the building, 1 Corinthians 3:17.’

Apparently, the divisions that had occurred in Corinth had ‘destroyed’ the faith of some saints, and therefore Paul gives this serious charge. The point is that the saints, identified as a temple of God, may find themselves ruined or spoiled through sin.

The saints, each individual identified as a temple of God, are ‘holy,’ 1 Corinthians 3:17. The word ‘holy’, in Greek, is ‘hagios’, which is defined as ‘holy and pure’. ‘Pure, righteous; to separate, consecrate; cleanse, purify, sanctify; regard or reverence as holy; moral purity’.

Paul is helping the Corinthians remember their initial state of sanctification and responsibility to maintain this state of holiness, 1 Corinthians 1:2. This verse indicates that man can do the destructive work of Satan, 1 Peter 5:8.

“Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become “fools” so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”; and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.” So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.” 1 Corinthians 3:18-23

Clearly, self-delusion had taken place in the minds of brethren. Some thought within themselves that they were better off than other Christians because of who they followed and what gifts they had. True wisdom rests with God; man’s wisdom will never lead to eternal life and is therefore foolish, ‘humanism’, 1 Corinthians 3:18-19.

In the latter part of 1 Corinthians 3:19, Paul quotes from Job 5:13, the only time in the entire New Testament that the book of Job is quoted. God allows man to follow his own reasoning and then fall by their own reasoning. In such a fall, God has ‘taken the wise in their craftiness.’

Secondly, Paul proves his point in 1 Corinthians 3:20 by quoting from Psalms 94:11. Human reason is contrary to divine reasoning and is therefore useless, ‘futile’. Herein is Paul’s point driven home, ‘no more boasting about human leaders’, 1 Corinthians 3:21.

The preacher is only a servant who plants and waters the seed that God created. It is because of God that man is identified as a holy temple. It is because of God that man can have an eternal home. While preachers plant, God gives the increase. All glory consequently belongs to God.

Instead of thinking that they, the Corinthian Christians, belonged or were ‘of’ Paul, Apollos or Cephas, they should have noted that ‘all things’ belong to them, 1 Corinthians 3:21-22 / Romans 8:38-39 / Hebrews 1:14. Furthermore, the earth serves the needs of the saint of God, food, water, shelter, joy, etc.

Life and death, 1 Corinthians 3:22, serve the Christian in that it causes man to look forward to the remaining life and death when he shall be in the comfort of the bosom of Abraham, Luke 16:22.

In fact, Paul states that all things present and come to belong to the saint because we belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God, 1 Corinthians 3:23. Don’t glory in men when God has given all things to you that you may be supplied an entrance into heaven.

SUMMARY

Chapter three identifies, with precision, the problems in the church at Corinth that revolved around the current division. That problem is identified as ‘jealousy and strife’, 1 Corinthians 3:3. Paul explains that five years had passed since he had originally come to Corinth, preached the gospel, and established a church there, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3.

During these five years, the Corinthians ought to have grown spiritually; however, they had permitted the misdirected thinking of the world around them to misconstrue the gospel message, i.e., destroy their temple, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17.

Rather than influencing society, they had lived in the direction toward truth; the world around them had influenced them. Paul attempts to remedy the situation by speaking frankly to the brethren. He identifies the problem among the Christians in Corinth as having its foundation in their spiritual immaturity, 1 Corinthians 3:1-2.

The current jealousy and strife revolved around their putting undue significance on the preacher who had taught them and baptised them. Paul explains to the brethren that the preacher is nothing more than a mere ‘servant’ and should not be glorified as should God, 1 Corinthians 3:5.

The very foundation that their faith was established on was Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 3:11. Preaching truth builds a right building that has a true relationship with the heavenly Father, 1 Corinthians 3:16.

The preacher’s responsibility is to establish and build upon that foundation alone. Any reasoning apart from the foundation of Jesus Christ is ‘the reasoning of the wise’ in the world and not from God, 1 Corinthians 3:20. Again, let us therefore glory in God and not men, 1 Corinthians 3:21.

Fee, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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.’

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION

Paul reminded the Corinthians of their initial sanctification and responsibility to be ‘blameless’, 1 Corinthians 1:1-9. Such a state puts the Christian in an intimate relationship with the Lord, 1 Corinthians 3:16.

The apostle has also reminded the Corinthians of their responsibilities to be of the same mind rather than being divided, 1 Corinthians 1:10, and to place their hope and glory in God rather than man, 1 Corinthians 3:21.

Five years had passed since Paul had preached the gospel in Corinth, which resulted in the Corinthians’ belief and obedience. During this time, they had permitted the wisdom of the world around them to affect their approach to serving God.

Many had put their interest and energies in debating who it was better to have been baptised by, 1 Corinthians 1:12-17. Paul reminds them that when he first preached to them, it was not with any awe-inspiring oratory abilities, nor did he wow them with wisdom from this world, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

The words spoken by Paul were, ‘not of this world’, 1 Corinthians 2:6. Paul’s words originated from the mind of God, 1 Corinthians 2:7-13. Those who put their trust in men and the wisdom of this world could not possibly know these high and spiritual thoughts, 1 Corinthians 2:14.

Those who were willing to search, investigate, and give their time to knowing the mind of God would certainly find and know it, 1 Corinthians 2:15. Unfortunately, the Corinthians were more like the natural man who had no hope of knowing truth, rather than the spiritual man who could know the truth, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3.

Those Corinthians who had put their faith in preachers and teachers who had baptised them needed to understand the proper work and place of these men in relation to their spiritual welfare. These men were mere planters and those who watered, but it is God who gives the increase, 1 Corinthians 3:6-15.

Paul closes the chapter by saying, ‘no more boasting about human leaders,’ 1 Corinthians 3:21. A great lesson that we can see in the study of 1 Corinthians is the fact that Paul was willing to systematically deal with all the Corinthian errors.

Today, many give up on a church in a given city, stating that there is no way to untangle their mess. Through a spirit of great love for men’s souls, the Apostle Paul approaches the Corinthians’ problems one at a time.

PREACHERS, MINISTERS OR STEWARDS ARE TO BE JUDGED BY THAT WHICH THEY PREACH

“This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself.” 1 Corinthians 4:1-3

While the Corinthians were being tempted to elevate one man over another, Paul tells them to consider them as ‘ministers and stewards,’ 1 Corinthians 4:1. The minister, servant of God, is a ‘steward of the mysteries of God.’ The word ‘steward’ in Greek is ‘oikonomos’, and it means ‘one who manages a household, generally, a manager, administrator’.

The word ‘us’ must refer to ministers in general and not only to the apostles. Consider the context, 1 Corinthians 1:12-23 / 1 Corinthians 2:7 / 1 Corinthians 3:4-6 / 1 Corinthians 3:10 / 1 Corinthians 3:15 / 1 Corinthians 4:1 / 1 Corinthians 4:6.

That which the preacher, minister, is managing as an administrator and steward, one who manages another's property, finances, or other affairs, is the 'mysteries of God,' 1 Corinthians 4:1. The mystery of God is none other than the Gospel message itself, Romans 16:25-26.

How does the minister manage or act as an administrator of truth? Obviously, the minister does so by guarding the purity of truth from human wisdom, opinions, and personal conviction, 1 Corinthians 4:2 / 1 Timothy 6:20. Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'The most important quality in a steward is that he manages his master's affairs so the desires of his lord materialise, Matthew 25:14-30 / Luke 16:1-13 / Luke 19:11-27 / 1 Peter 4:10. He must be faithful to his master's trust. For Paul, this meant remaining faithful to the gospel as he had received it and preached it, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.'

An interesting side point is the relationship between the preacher and the elders of a local church. The elders are to shepherd, manage and feed the brethren, and the preacher is to manage only the word of God. When the elders have found a preacher who manages the word of God properly, 1 Corinthians 4:6, they have found a tool to feed the brethren.

A person of great means may hire a steward to manage his money. Such a case would demand that the steward be trustworthy and have the owner's best interests in mind.

Likewise, God expects this in his preachers of the gospel. The word 'faithful', in Greek, is 'pistos' and it means to be trusted or believed, of persons, faithful, trusty, true, trustworthy, worthy of credit.

TWO THINGS TO CONSIDER

When hearing a man preach, the listener has the responsibility to determine whether the preacher is trustworthy, i.e., do his words equate to the word of God?

Secondly, the eldership of a local church would be wise to investigate and scrutinise the man who would serve as a minister, preacher, or steward of the gospel among the flock they shepherd. The preacher is to manage the gospel message.

This man will not try to add gimmicks or alluring tactics, but one who simply preaches the whole counsel of God, 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 / Acts 20:27. Neither will this man try to assume the authority of the elders and manage the flock, other than what his responsibility toward all Christians is.

The word 'judge', in Greek, is 'anakrino', and it means to examine closely, to question, interrogate, to inquire into a fact, used at Athens in a technical sense.

1. To examine magistrates as to their qualifications.

2. Of the magistrates, to examine persons concerned in a suit, to prepare the matter for trial. Interestingly, Paul 'judged' a man in the next chapter, 1 Corinthians 5:3. One must take note of the Greek words.

The word 'judged' in 1 Corinthians 5:3 is 'kekrika', and is defined as to determine, resolve, or decree. Apparently, in the context of this verse, Paul is saying that his actions are on trial by the standard of God's word and not man's.

Let any and all say what they want, i.e., you are foolish, weak and despised among men; however, the true examination of each man comes from God! Therefore, Paul says I cannot even examine my own self apart from the word of God, 1 Corinthians 4:3.

This is an important point of reason when making a judgment about who a false teacher is. Many men may have various opinions regarding a particular teacher; however, it is the Word of God that makes the true judgment upon the man.

“My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time, each will receive their praise from God.” 1 Corinthians 4:4-5

Paul’s point is that if man judges or examines him apart from the word of God, their conclusions are faulty. Likewise, as a preacher, I may examine myself and find that I think I’m a pretty good guy; however, my sincerity and consciousness matter nothing in light of God’s true judgments. Paul says I am not acquitted from sins by my own human reasoning.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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 about it often, 2 Corinthians 1:14 / 2 Corinthians 5:10 / Philippians 2:16 / 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 / 2 Timothy 1:12 / 2 Timothy 1:18 / 2 Timothy 4:8.’

a. Paul understood that a clear conscience did not justify a man in the eyes of God.

b. Before Paul became a Christian, he did many things with a clear conscience, thinking that it was good, Acts 26:9 / 1 Timothy 1:13.

c. One’s conscience does not, therefore, determine the state of the soul. Truth alone justifies, Romans 5:1-2.

The real truth is that the Lord Jesus is examining, that is ‘judging’ Paul and all of us and therefore it matters not what others think of you or me. What matters is what the Lord’s examination of us produces.

Paul makes clear the distinction between judging men’s hearts and making righteous judgments. Human estimation, examination and judgments are worthless when God’s standards are not applied, John 7:24.

Paul is not saying that we are not to judge anyone at any time. Such an interpretation would prove Paul and Jesus’ teaching to be inconsistent, 1 Corinthians 5:3 / Matthew 7:15-20.

Apparently, the judgments made here are the examinations of various preachers and are concluded by human reasoning that one is better than the other, and whoever is not ‘of’ that preacher is lesser than a Christian than I.

Such is not spiritual thinking. Sometimes our righteous judgments are faulty due to our inability to ‘make manifest the counsels of the hearts’, but not so with God, 1 Corinthians 4:5-6. God sees into the heart of man and will one day make the right judgments of all humanity.

“Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” 1 Corinthians 4:6-7

In 1 Corinthians 4:6-13, Paul uses sarcasm to deflate the ego of the Corinthians and cause them to repent of their divisive ways. The ‘these things’, 1 Corinthians 4:6, are obviously the ‘mystery of God’ that Paul and other preachers had been entrusted with as ministers and stewards.

The entire phrase, ‘I have applied these things’ is one word in Greek, ‘meteschematisa’ meaning, to change the form of a person or thing; to transfer as in a figure.

Clearly, Paul says he has spoken these words regarding the nature of the gospel in order to change the Corinthians’ view of Apollos and himself. Let all glory in God and not in any man, 1 Corinthians 4:6.

What the Corinthians and any others need to know is that the preacher teaches the student from one foundation. The student, therefore, learns not to pedestal the teacher but rather to ‘not go beyond the things which are written,’ 1 Corinthians 4:6.

In other words, let us focus on divine revelation rather than our own reasoning. Dependence on human reasoning caused the Corinthians to be ‘puffed up for the one against the other’, 1 Corinthians 4:6. Paul will speak about this again and again, 1 Corinthians 4:18-19 / 1 Corinthians 5:2 / 1 Corinthians 8:1 / 1 Corinthians 13:4.

The issues of division, jealousy, and strife are occurring because they have left the doctrine of Christ for human reasoning. The Corinthians had been given many gifts of the Spirit and, therefore, had areas of spirituality that differentiated them from each other. Paul asks a question, ‘Where did you get these gifts?’ 1 Corinthians 4:7.

Paul basically asks them, Have you so soon forgotten that it was Paul’s preaching of the gospel message upon his first visit in 51 AD that gave you the faith and gifts you now have? This verse reveals a deeper problem in Corinth. The brethren looked at the preacher with eyes of pride and then turned to themselves in pride.

Everyone wants to be the hero, the one with abilities that exceed all other peers, that once in a lifetime figure that has risen above the human suffering and quagmire of earthly living. To be looked upon as great feeds the ego of one who looks to the things of this life alone.

“Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you! For it seems to me that God has put us, apostles, on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honoured, we are dishonoured! To this very hour, we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment.” 1 Corinthians 4:8-13

Paul uses sarcasm in three forms. What we must see at this point is that the Corinthians’ error in judgment regarding elevating one preacher over another and looking to spiritual gifts with pride was a serious issue that worked Paul up.

1. The Corinthians had considered themselves to be ‘full,’ 1 Corinthians 4:8.

The idea is that they felt they were spiritually self-sufficient and in need of nothing, seeing that they were baptised by a certain preacher and had been endowed with a gift.

2. Secondly, Paul sarcastically says the Corinthians are ‘rich,’ 1 Corinthians 4:8.

a. Monetarily? No!

b. The Corinthians considered themselves to be rich spiritually, seeing they were baptised by a certain well-known preacher and had a gift, when in reality they were very poor, 1 Corinthians 3:1-4.

3. Thirdly, he says they had reigned as kings, as they considered themselves completely self-sufficient and in need of nothing, 1 Corinthians 4:8.

They acted as though they no longer needed the man who laid the foundation and built upon the foundation of Christ’s church in the city of Corinth. Paul says in reality, you are not all of this, but it would be great if you were.

An evolution or metamorphosis has occurred in the minds of these divisive brethren, and Paul exposes it. The vain glory of life had left the preachers and inflated the minds of the Corinthians with delusions of greatness.

While the apostles suffered at the hands of lawless men who opposed their inspired message, the Corinthians lavished praise on their self-perceived success.

Many today suffer nothing and go about gloating that they are great Christians with marvellous knowledge, while preaching brethren are thrown under the bus, so to say, 2 Timothy 3:12.

The apostles were ‘doomed to death’, in Greek, ‘epithanatos’, sick to death, at death’s door, 1 Corinthians 4:9. The cause, ‘for’, which is ‘hoti’ in Greek, describes their doomed state: ‘we are made a spectacle unto the world, both to angels and men,’ 1 Corinthians 4:9.

The word ‘spectacle’, in Greek, is ‘theatron’, a place for seeing, especially a theatre. The apostles were on stage for the world and angels to see their fate of death, 1 Corinthians 4:9 / 2 Corinthians 2:14.

While the Corinthians lavished on their gifts and their perceived greatness, the whole of creation watched the apostles be executed one by one for the cause of Jesus Christ.

The apostles shared in no glory; on the contrary, they were viewed as ‘fools, weak and those of dishonour,’ 1 Corinthians 4:10. These terms remind us of those Paul described as the true converts of 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.

The Corinthians had moved from viewing others as important to seeing themselves as individuals who demanded respect and honour due to who baptised them and the gifts they possessed.

They had overlooked the content of the message that brought them into a relationship with God, identified as a farm, building, or temple, 1 Corinthians 3:9 / 1 Corinthians 3:16.

The apostles were individuals who truly sought the welfare of others through the gospel message. So, the sarcasm continues, we are the perceived weak among the carnally minded; however, God knows those who are truly His, 1 Corinthians 4:10.

The Corinthians had glorified the state of being a Christian as a status symbol, saying, ‘I am of ...’ ‘I have such and such gifts.’ While the Corinthians were playing Christian, the apostles were living the Christian life of suffering and hard labour for the sake of souls, 1 Corinthians 4:11.

Morris, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Greeks despised people who did manual labour, as Paul had done in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 9:4-18 / Acts 18:3 / Acts 18:5 / 2 Corinthians 11:9 / 2 Corinthians 12:13-17, they regarded it as the work of slaves.’

The ministers and stewards of truth were suffering while the Corinthians basked in glory. While the Corinthians basked in the radiant glory of each other’s teacher and spiritual gifts, the apostles were ‘reviled, persecuted and defamed’, being viewed as the ‘filth of the world, the offscouring of all things,’ 1 Corinthians 4:12-13.

Though viewed as such, they attempted not to repair their reputation for the sake of saving face but continued in faith, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ that souls may be saved. They worked hard yet were viewed as filth, 1 Corinthians 4:12-13.

The Corinthians had lost sight of the message of the cross. While they glorified themselves, the ministers and stewards of God’s word continued to preach the gospel message. Was Paul’s work in Corinth being ‘burned’? 1 Corinthians 3:15. Paul was not going to let this happen!

REMARKS REGARDING THIS FIRST PROBLEM AMONG THE BRETHREN IN CORINTH

“I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you, as my dear children. Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you to imitate me. For this reason, I have sent to you Timothy, my son, whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.” 1 Corinthians 4:14-17

Paul’s intention of using sarcasm and such harsh language was not to shame but to get the Corinthians to think the right thoughts regarding the gospel, teachers of the gospel, and their own salvation.

The word ‘shame’, 1 Corinthians 4:14, is the Greek word ‘entrepo’, and it means to turn toward, give heed to, pay regard to, to respect or reverence. Never would Paul make one feel comfortable in his or her sin, and neither should any preacher.

With a spirit of tenderness, forbearance, patience, and longsuffering, the apostle deals with his beloved brethren’s error, 1 Corinthians 4:15. Rather, Paul sought to ‘admonish’, that is ‘noutheteo’ in Greek, which means to admonish is to ‘warn or advise’.

Any parent would do the same when their child is in harm’s way. We would not comfort them in their folly but warn them of the danger. The brethren at Corinth were Paul’s ‘beloved children’ 1 Corinthians 4:14. He was not going to let his work among them burn up or be identified as vain. People’s souls were at stake, and Paul was a lover of men’s souls.

Paul did not desire the Corinthians to call him their father; however, their faulty view of teachers demanded this statement, 1 Corinthians 4:15. Catholics today call the priest ‘father’, which is a contradiction of the command Jesus gave in Matthew 23:9.

By father, Paul meant he ‘begot them through the gospel,’ 1 Corinthians 4:15. Paul had planted and watered the seed of the gospel, and the Corinthians had obeyed; it is in this fashion that Paul was their father in faith, 1 Corinthians 4:17 / 1 Timothy 1:2.

As the spiritual father of the Corinthians, through preaching the gospel message, Paul admonishes them to ‘imitate’ or mimic those things which he does and says, 1 Corinthians 4:16 / 1 Corinthians 11:1. The Corinthians were being misled by the mindset of the world around them.

Paul is bringing them back to the original foundation of truth that they heard and obeyed. Here is the authority of God in writing. The apostles spoke the mind of God, the commandments of God, 1 Corinthians 14:37, and therefore man is to follow what they do and say, Philippians 4:9.

Seeing that the Corinthians had fallen from the truth that was initially delivered to them, Paul writes this letter and intends to send Timothy to them. He loved Timothy and described him as faithful in the Lord, 1 Corinthians 4:17.

Evidently, Paul expected this letter to reach Corinth before Timothy arrived, Acts 19:22 / 1 Corinthians 16:10.

Paul was in Ephesus, intending to visit the brethren in Corinth. It is very likely that when Timothy came, he delivered the second epistle to the Corinthians and edified the brethren as Paul mentions here, 1 Corinthians 4:17. The truths of the gospel were preached universally to all churches, 1 Corinthians 4:17.

One church did not have a monopoly on truth. Church autonomy is not violated, therefore, when a preacher of one area preaches truth in another area. Every local church is to be united by the truth of God’s word, 1 Corinthians 1:2 / 1 Corinthians 7:17 / 1 Corinthians 11:16 / 1 Corinthians 14:33 / 1 Corinthians 14:36.

“Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?” 1 Corinthians 4:18-21

Possibly some of those who said they were ‘of Apollos’ or ‘of Cephas’, 1 Corinthians 3:5, were saying that Paul was too fearful to come back to Corinth, 1 Corinthians 4:18. Paul’s coming, however, would not be in persuasive words of human reasoning but in the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 4:19.

Whether the kingdom of God referred to 1 Corinthians 4:20, is the church, Colossians 1:13-14, or the future abode of the saints, 2 Peter 1:11, is not designated. However, the church and heaven are established in and by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to save men’s souls, Romans 1:16.

Recall that Paul was their ‘father in the faith’, 1 Corinthians 4:15. As the one who initially preached the gospel to them and came to be, in a sense, their father, he now asks how he should come to them as a parent. The unruly child is due to the rod of correction.

The word ‘rod,’ 1 Corinthians 4:21, is the Greek word ‘rhabdos’, which is a stick as a means of punishment. As children in faith who are unruly, only the rod would bring them back to the right mode of thinking, Proverbs 23:13-14.

The Corinthian’s manner of life shall determine the nature of Paul’s visit, whether he comes with a rod or a spirit of love and gentleness, 1 Corinthians 4:21 / Matthew 11:29.

Would they continue to elevate one man over another? Would they continue to permit the reasoning of this world to govern their spiritual service to God? Would they continue to be divided?

Would they continue to look to themselves as someone great due to having a particular man baptise them and having various gifts? The results of this teaching letter would determine how Paul’s next visit would be.

Paul would not physically beat them, but he would beat them with his words of truth, 2 Timothy 4:1-5. Any preacher worth his salt must beat with the word of God as a rod of correction at times if brethren are to change.

Sometimes the preacher needs to be beaten! Truth must prevail in the hearts of all. The obedience of the Corinthians would find Paul’s visit in gentleness, 1 Corinthians 4:21 / Matthew 11:29.

SUMMARY

The brethren in Corinth had divided themselves based on who initially baptised and preached to them. They also had received spiritual gifts, which they permitted to induce an air of self-importance.

1 Corinthians 4 illustrates the progression of carnal thinking. The Corinthians’ association with certain ministers and their gifts brought them to self-aggrandisement rather than humility and mutual service to other lost men.

1 Corinthians 4:1-6, sets out to ‘transfer’ the interest of the Corinthians from the preacher and self, back to the Lord and his word. The significance of preachers cannot, however, be altogether diminished.

To have the Corinthian mind be transferred from carnality to spirituality, Paul had to deflate their overinflated estimation of themselves, 1 Corinthians 4:6. They had begun to think too highly of themselves due to who baptised them and their own personal spiritual gifts. Paul uses sarcasm to puncture the view of self-aggrandisement.

The Brethren had begun to view themselves as spiritually sufficient when, in reality, they were in deep poverty in relation to spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and direction.

Paul closes the chapter with tender words of care and concern, 1 Corinthians 4:14. There had to be a change in their spiritual growth, the existing divisions and their view of gospel preachers.

Paul aimed to uproot human reasoning and get their minds back on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, they are admonished, as we, to look, listen and emulate the life and teachings of the apostles, 1 Corinthians 4:16-17.

Paul did not want to have to return to the Corinthian brethren with the ‘rod’ of correction, 1 Corinthians 4:21. The book, to this point, illustrates the importance of ministers and stewards of truth to continue working with brethren in truth.

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION

The error of contentions and jealousy plagued the Corinthian Christians, [1 Corinthians 1:11](#) / [1 Corinthians 3:3](#). The brethren had considered the man who had taught them and baptised them as somewhat of a status symbol that elevated some over others, [1 Corinthians 1:12](#) / [1 Corinthians 3:4](#).

Paul refers to this line of thinking as the ‘wisdom of the world’, [1 Corinthians 2:6](#), and being ‘carnal’, [1 Corinthians 3:3](#). Rather than growing in spiritual wisdom, the Corinthians had permitted the carnal thinking of their surroundings to dictate their approach to serving God, [1 Corinthians 3:1-7](#) / [Acts 17:16-23](#).

Paul explains that the ministers and stewards of God’s word are simple planters or labourers, but it is God who created man and gives man hope through the gospel message, [1 Corinthians 3:8-9](#).

The Corinthians needed to remember their intimate relationship with God through their obedience to the gospel; i.e., they represented a temple that houses God, [1 Corinthians 3:16](#).

Paul appears to bring into the discussion of the Corinthian error of contention and jealousy the idea of self-promotion through the various gifts they received through the apostles, [1 Corinthians 4:7](#).

Some of the Corinthians actually thought of themselves as greater than others due to who baptised them and what spiritual gift they possessed. Paul, through sarcasm, deflates the egos of these brethren.

Again, the apostle reminds the Corinthians that they have the responsibility to follow the example and teachings that Paul set forth and taught while among them, [1 Corinthians 4:16-17](#). The next problem in line to deal with is the sin of tolerating brethren who refuse to repent of sinfulness, [1 Corinthians 5](#).

INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING THE UNREPENTANT SINNER

“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father’s wife. And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this? For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this.” [1 Corinthians 5:1-3](#)

The household of Chloe had ‘reported’, declared or disclosed to Paul that the church in Corinth was having problems with contentions and jealousy, [1 Corinthians 1:11](#) / [1 Corinthians 3:3](#). Now Paul discusses a matter that others are talking about.

The word ‘commonly’, [1 Corinthians 5:1](#), ‘holos’ means ‘wholly, altogether, on the whole, speaking generally, in short, in a word’. The Greek word ‘holos’ is found only three other times in the Scriptures, [Matthew 5:34](#) / [1 Corinthians 6:7](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:29](#), and in all four uses the word appears to indicate ‘on the whole or altogether.’ It is probable that Chloe’s household was not the only one reporting the sin in this chapter, and therefore, Paul’s point is that many are saying this thing about the tolerance of sin in Corinth.

The Corinthians’ reputation was that of being contentious, jealous, and now tolerant of sin among its members. The sin they were tolerating was ‘sexual immorality’, ‘fornication’, [1 Corinthians 5:2](#), which is the Greek word, ‘porneia’ ‘prostitution, unchastely, fornication, of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse’.

The ‘porneia’ under consideration is identified as a form of incest in the last clause of [1 Corinthians 5:1](#). A man is sleeping with his father’s wife,’ [Matthew 5:27-28](#) / [Matthew 5:32](#) / [Matthew 15:19](#) / [Matthew 19:9](#) / [Mark 7:21](#).

Paul's language in verse one indicates the utter heinousness of the sin, 'even pagans do not tolerate', 1 Corinthians 5:1. Even Roman law forbade unions of this kind; they are naturally abhorrent. One does not need Christianity to repudiate them.

Man, by his very nature, understood that such sexual unions were wrong, Romans 1:26-28. Recall that at the end of 1 Corinthians 4, we had noted the seriousness of the sin the Corinthians were in. Paul is chastising the brethren as any good minister or steward of the word of God would, 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

Rather than 'mourning' in horror that one among them was in sin, the Corinthians were 'proud', that is 'pephusiomenoi' in Greek, which means 'to bear oneself loftily, be proud', 1 Corinthians 5:2. The reaction to the sin is not surprising. Paul has admonished the Corinthians up to this point to rid themselves of human reasoning.

A second case in point of their rejecting divine revelation and using human reasoning is found in their attitude toward the sinner of this chapter. Human reasoning may say, 'let us not be controversial,' 'let us not judge another,' 'let us be loving toward all and all will give account for their own evil deeds,' 'let that congregation make their own judgment in the matter,' and a multitude of other human reasoning may come into play.

The Lord said, however, doesn't tolerate sinners in the church, Revelation 2:20. The attitude of pride may be identified as a misunderstanding of Paul's instructions to the Corinthians in a previously lost epistle.

Rather than being inflated in their fleshly minds over the matter, they should have 'put out', that is, taken away the fornicator, from among you, ' 1 Corinthians 5:2.

To 'put out' in Greek is 'exairo', and it means to 'to lift up, lift off the earth' or 'to lift up or take away out of a place; to remove one from a company'. The objective of this chapter will be to illustrate the space that must exist between the erring Christian who will not repent and the faithful of God.

Notice 1 Corinthians 5:3, Paul was in Ephesus as he writes, 1 Corinthians 16:8, and therefore, 'absent in body.' Paul's being 'present in spirit' indicates the universality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If Paul was 'present in spirit' with the Corinthians, would not the Corinthians be 'present in spirit' with Paul in Ephesus?

TRUTH UNITES ALL CHRISTIANS IN ALL PLACES

Church autonomy has no government over truth. Truth is not bound to only one church, 2 Timothy 2:9. Truth is what unites all brethren for all time, John 17:20-21.

Paul has called upon the Corinthians to emulate 'my ways which are in Christ,' 1 Corinthians 4:17 / Philippians 4:9, so that the Corinthian brethren could certainly return the 'judgment' of a sinner in another congregation without violating that church's autonomy.

This is not to say that we would force another church to pull the trigger of discipline because only they know their efforts in the area of longsuffering and teaching, 1 Thessalonians 5:14. The point is that a judgment is made regarding the sin! The judgment of when discipline is up to that local church and its elders.

"In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you have come together with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, that this man is to be handed over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may have forgiveness in the day of the Lord Jesus". 1 Corinthians 5:4-5

THE CONTEXT

1 Corinthians 5:1 deals with the case of the man in the Church in Corinth, who was involved immorally with 'his father's wife'. It seems clear that the father had married a second time, and the son was having an affair with the woman who was now, legally, his stepmother. This is why Paul expressly and carefully describes her as 'his father's wife', rather than 'his mother', 1 Corinthians 5:1.

The seriousness of this situation is revealed and stressed when the apostle points out that, as immoral as Greek society was in those days, the conduct of this kind was despised even by the pagan Corinthians.

He does not go into great detail to explain why the congregation had neglected to take action to deal with the situation, apart from rebuking them for their indifference, but he does say that their failure to act constituted a danger to the entire body, 1 Corinthians 5:6.

In 1 Corinthians 5:2, he lays down the course of action that they must adopt. Asserting his apostolic authority, he commands that the guilty man must be 'removed' from among them, which means excluded from their fellowship. Notice 1 Corinthians 5:4, as I mentioned above, Paul was in Ephesus as he writes, 1 Corinthians 16:8, and therefore, 'absent in body.' Paul's being 'present in spirit' indicates the universality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If Paul was 'present in spirit' with the Corinthians, would not the Corinthians be 'present in spirit' with Paul in Ephesus? Since nothing is said about the woman involved in the offence, we must assume that she was not a member of the church, and the congregation, therefore, did not have the authority to deal with her.

What Paul orders is effectively the excommunication of the guilty man, and he describes this course of action as 'delivering the man to Satan,' 1 Corinthians 5:5. Outside of the church, which is the kingdom of darkness, Colossians 1:13, this man, cut off from the people of God, will again be in the domain of Satan, and, consequently, in grave spiritual danger.

Here is a direct command from an apostle, 1 Corinthians 14:37. The phrase, 'in the name 'en to onomati' of our Lord Jesus', is an indication of or by the authority of Jesus. 'Onomati' is 'by name', 'the name of the author of a commission, delegated authority, or religious profession'.

By the authority of Jesus Christ, the Corinthians were to 'gather together', 1 Corinthians 5:4, in Greek, it's the word, 'sunago', 'to bring together, gather together, collect, convene', with Paul's 'spirit', which means according to the truth that Paul has delivered regarding the matter, 'with the power of our Lord Jesus, 1 Corinthians 5:4, that is, with authority.

Let us first consider the gathering. It is an authorised assembly for the purpose of discipline against the unrepentant sinner. When all see the proceeding, all shall fear, 1 Timothy 5:19, the error is exposed, Ephesians 5:11, and all now know who the sinner is, 2 Thessalonians 3:14.

In such an assembly, the sinner is 'delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.' 1 Corinthians 5:5. To 'deliver', in Greek, is the word 'paradidomi', and it means 'to give or hand over to another, to give up to justice'. The sinner is handed over to Satan for the 'destruction of the flesh', 1 Corinthians 5:5.

The word 'destruction', in Greek, is 'olethros', and it means 'ruin, destruction, death'. The current state of the flesh is ruin; however, the future state of the spirit remains hopeful through repentance.

Sin separates man from God, Isaiah 59:1-2. One so separated is 'ruined' in the eyes of God in that he or she has no fellowship with God, 1 John 1:5-7. Satan's rule is over darkness and is alienated from Jehovah God, so that one who chooses ruin is made to know that he lives in the flesh as one of Satan's. Such a horrid reality must drive one to repent that he or she may be reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ. Peter's admonition to Simon in Acts 8.

Apparently, this event is an official act or ‘work’ of the assembled congregation so that the sinner may be saved ‘in the day of the Lord Jesus,’ 1 Corinthians 5:5, which is when the Lord comes to judge men for their deeds done in the flesh, Revelation 20:10-15.

Keener, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The church’s refusal to act against the offender in 1 Corinthians 5:2 provides the most striking example of their arrogance and doubt that Paul would execute discipline, 1 Corinthians 4:18. Here, therefore, he does execute discipline, 1 Corinthians 5:5. They may doubt his ‘power’, 1 Corinthians 4:19-21, but he acts by Jesus’ power, 1 Corinthians 5:4.’

The clear division of man is seen here in that he is flesh and spirit. While in the flesh, the sinner belongs to Satan, yet the spirit is intended to be saved only through contrite humility, Isaiah 57:15. At this point, the instructions are to ‘put out’ the sinner from among you and deliver his soul to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.

THE CHURCH’S RESPONSIBILITY

This action by the Church has a purpose. It is designed to bring the guilty man to his senses so that he opens his eyes and recognises the seriousness of his position and comes to repentance. This is what is meant by ‘the destruction of the flesh’.

It means that the man must recognise and acknowledge the sinfulness of his conduct, and, with the help of God, ‘put to death’, Colossians 3:5, his sinful physical desires. He may then ask to be restored to fellowship. Failing to do this, he stands in danger of losing his soul.

EXCOMMUNICATION NOT NECESSARILY FINAL

It is important to recognise that this act of ‘ex-communication’ is not meant to be ‘amputation’. Serious and painful as it undoubtedly is, it is a course of action intended only for the good of the offender.

In other words, it is not meant to be ‘terminal’, but to be remedial, 1 Corinthians 5:13 / Matthew 18:17 / 2 Corinthians 2:6 / 2 Thessalonians 3:6 / 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15.

When a congregation excommunicates an offending person, it is taking the final step in its endeavour to bring him to recognise his sin and change his life. The door must always be kept open for the offender to repent and desire to return.

THE OUTCOME IN THIS CASE

In 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, Paul reveals that Corinthian Christians acted on his advice, took action and banished the man from the fellowship, and the action was effective.

The guilty man repented, and in his second letter, the apostle tells the Corinthian church that they should restore him to fellowship, and, since he was evidently heartbroken and sorrowful because of his sin, they must comfort and be gracious to him. ‘Reaffirm your love for him’, they are told, 2 Corinthians 2:8.

If the congregation neglected to respond to his obvious repentance in a positive manner and did not take the man back, Satan would make the most of what would undoubtedly be looked upon by enemies of the faith as lovelessness and self-righteousness in the Christians, and the man himself might be ‘overwhelmed with excessive sorrow’, 2 Corinthians 2:7.

This teaching continues to be relevant. An interesting fact is revealed in 2 Corinthians 2:6. Apparently, there were some in the Corinthian church, who influenced, perhaps by a misguided sense of charity, or by the desire to show tolerance, who did not agree with the ex-communication of this immoral man, and the decision to disfellowship him is described by Paul as ‘punishment by the majority’, with which, we should note, he was in full agreement, 2 Corinthians 2:6.

VERY LITTLE HAS CHANGED!

Congregations still find that they have among them members who shy away from the exercise of scriptural discipline. Nevertheless, if we consistently followed the teaching of the Word in the matter of church discipline, not only would our assemblies be stronger both spiritually and numerically, but they would also be happier and more loving.

Wiersbe, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Church discipline is not a group of ‘pious policemen’ out to catch a criminal. Rather, it is a group of broken-hearted brothers and sisters seeking to restore an erring member of the family.’

INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING THE REST OF THE CHURCH WHO ARE TOLERATING THE SN RATHER THAN EXPOSING AND DISCIPLINING THE SINNER

“This pride of yours is not good. Do you not see that a little leaven makes a change in all the mass? Take away, then, the old leaven, so that you may be a new mass, even as you are without leaven. For Christ has been put to death as our Passover. Let us then keep the feast, not with old leaven, and not with the leaven of evil thoughts and acts, but with the unleavened bread of true thoughts and right feelings.” 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

The Corinthians had ‘gloried’ over the circumstances of fornication rather than putting the sinner away, 1 Corinthians 5:6. Such action was a worldly, fleshly, or carnal way of reasoning, 1 Corinthians 2:6 / 1 Corinthians 3:3.

Your human reasoning says tolerate and leave alone is contrary to divine revelation. Divine reasoning reveals that ‘a little leaven leavens the whole lump,’ 1 Corinthians 5:6.

The word ‘leaven’ in Greek is ‘zume’, which means yeast, leaven, a little yeast ferments the whole lump of dough, 1 Corinthians 5:6 / Galatians 5:9, the influence of apparently insignificant factors in the moral and religious sphere. That which seemed by human reasoning to be insignificant was a big deal with God. The word ‘leaven’ is often used to describe sinful doctrines contrary to the teachings of Jesus, Matthew 16:6-12.

The Pharisees were known to teach as their doctrines the precepts of men, Matthew 15:9. The whole lump apparently represented the church as a whole. Their tolerating the sins of the fornicator was an indication of an attitude foreign to divine revelation.

The word ‘get rid’, 1 Corinthians 5:7, is the Greek word ‘ekkathairo’, and it means ‘to cleanse out’. Paul is saying cleanse your mind of human reasoning and doctrines, Matthew 16:6-12.

The ‘new batch’, 1 Corinthians 5:7, would be free from the contaminations of leaven or sinful men. It would also include being free of the doctrines and reasoning of men.

The words, ‘as you really are’, 1 Corinthians 5:7, imply that Christians are cleansed by the blood of Jesus and sanctified. Paul says, Get busy and be what you are supposed to be! They are ‘unleavened’, 1 Corinthians 5:7. Apparently, the adjective ‘unleavened’ is clean and separate from sinners and human reasoning, representing what they are in relation to being a new lump in the future.

So that at present they ‘may be a new batch’, 1 Corinthians 5:7, if they purge out the old leaven. The Corinthians cannot be leavened and unleavened at the same time!

To understand the allegory used in 1 Corinthians 5:7, we must take our minds back to Exodus 12 and the last plague God sent to Egypt. That last plague was the death of the firstborn of all of Egypt. Death was to come not only to the firstborn among men but among their flocks as well.

The Hebrews were not to be affected by this last plague if they followed God’s instructions. They were to take an unblemished lamb, male, one-year-old on the 10th day of the first month, Exodus 12:5.

Four days later, on the 14th, they were to kill the lamb and spread its blood over the doorpost of their house, Exodus 12:7. When God came to kill the firstborn in Egypt, He would see the blood and pass over that house, Exodus 12:13.

The Israelites were to celebrate this event in subsequent years, and it was called the ‘Passover’ and the subsequent ‘Feast of Unleavened Bread.’ On the 14th day of the first month of the year, the people of God were to rid their house of leaven, day 10-14, and eat unleavened bread for the next seven days, Exodus 12:15-18 / Exodus 13:6-7.

The unleavened bread represented them being free or separated from sin. The allegory now makes sense. If Christ, the sacrificial Lamb, has already been killed, how is it that there is leaven among you? 1 Corinthians 5:7. This is a call to put sin and sinners away, i.e., space that they may be clean and the sinner shamed.

THE ALLEGORY OF THE FEAST OF PASSOVER CONTINUES

To keep the feast, 1 Corinthians 5:8 / Exodus 23:15 / Exodus 34:18 / Deuteronomy 16:6, was to purge out all leaven, sin. Paul names ‘malice and wickedness’ and contrasts it to the unleavened bread of ‘sincerity and truth.’

The word ‘malice’ in Greek is ‘kakia’, which means moral badness, defect, and the word ‘wickedness’ is the Greek word ‘poneria’. The call is to put away sinfulness and no longer tolerate it among the brethren. Put away human reason and be sincerely, purely dependent upon the truth.

A PREVIOUS EPISTLE

“In my letter I said to you that you were not to keep company with those who go after the desires of the flesh; But I had not in mind the sinners who are outside the church, or those who have a desire for and take the property of others, or those who give worship to images; for it is not possible to keep away from such people without going out of the world completely: But the sense of my letter was that if a brother had the name of being one who went after the desires of the flesh, or had the desire for other people’s property, or was in the way of using violent language, or being the worse for drink, or took by force what was not his, you might not keep company with such a one, or take food with him. For it is no business of mine to be judging those who are outside; but it is yours to be judging those who are among you; as for those who are outside, God is their judge. So put away the evil man from among you.” 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

2 Corinthians 7:8 states, 'For though I made you sorry with my epistle, I do not regret it.' This is a reference to the 1 Corinthians epistle. The epistle alluded to in 1 Corinthians 5:9 is a lost epistle that we have no record of. Herein, we find and pinpoint the problem of the Corinthians.

Paul had said in this lost epistle, 'not to associate with sexually immoral people,' 1 Corinthians 5:9. The phrase, 'not to associate with' is one word in Greek 'sunanamignumi', meaning 'to mix up together, to keep company with, be intimate with'.

The Corinthians had been commanded not to mix and mingle with sexually immoral people as though there was no wrong in their lives. The inference is that the Corinthians were not mixing and mingling with sinful people of the world, yet treating brethren who were fornicators as though all were ok. They had the issue mixed up.

If we are not to mix, keep company or associate with any and all who are unrepenting sinners, Paul says, 'It is not possible to keep away from such people without going out of the world completely,' 1 Corinthians 5:10.

The world is filled with greedy and swindlers, or idolaters; it is impossible to avoid them. Quite to the contrary, we would not want to avoid them anyway, but rather teach them, Matthew 5:13-16 / Matthew 28:19-20.

Twice now, Paul said, 'I wrote unto you,' 1 Corinthians 5:9 / 1 Corinthians 5:11, and both verses allude to that previous epistle. With the admonition at hand, the apostle has now warned these brethren twice.

As we study 1 Corinthians 5:11, 1 Corinthians 5:5 must be kept within our minds. The object of all disciplinary action is correction, Proverbs 13:24. There is an apparent distinction made between the erring Christian and the erring of the world, that is, the non-Christian, 2 Peter 2:20-22.

The heart of the erring child of God is hardened further against the gospel in this second state than it was before the first obeyed the gospel. It will be more difficult to bring them to the truth now than when they were in their first lost state.

Total and entire social associations are to cease with such a one 'no company' and 'with such a one, not to eat', 1 Corinthians 5:11. The apparent reason for the separate treatment is, first and foremost, the sinning brother is to feel the shame of this social separation from other brethren, 2 Thessalonians 3:14.

Under such pain of shame, it may be that he is driven to repent, 1 Corinthians 5:5. That the church remains pure and clean, undefiled, through associations between some brethren who would be tempted to mix and mingle with the unrepentant man's sins, 2 Corinthians 7:1 / Ephesians 5:26-27.

That no place is given to the unregenerate of the world to blaspheme the name of God. A church comprised of unrepenting sinners is a church where the world sees no difference between the lives of the members of the church.

Why then should they change? It seems apparent that the phrase 'such people', 1 Corinthians 5:11, would include any Christian anywhere who would persist in such sinful living, 1 Timothy 1:20. Paul wrote in the previously lost epistle that very thing. One must concede, however, that the context of the previous epistle is not revealed.

Paul is dealing with a local church's problem in 1 Corinthians 5. It seems doubtful that discipline was at the heart of the matter in his previous epistle, 2 Thessalonians 3:14 / 1 Thessalonians 5:27.

All brethren of all times are to read and adhere to the principles of God's divine revelation, and those who do not, those who are Christians, are to be totally avoided for the three causes stated above.

The fact, however, that in 1 Corinthians 5, we have an assemblage of people in a congregation for the purpose of administering the said discipline helps us understand that 1 Corinthians 5 is speaking of church work and not an individual's work in the universal church.

The apparent context demands that the judging under consideration is disciplinary judging, putting away the unrepentant one. If this were not true, then Paul contradicts himself in 1 Corinthians 6:2. Those who are members of the body of Christ are the ones under consideration.

How can I ‘put away’ or ‘withdraw’ from one of the world who is not even in the church? Paul’s point is that God will discipline these individuals; our concern, in the area of discipline, is with erring brethren.

Finally, Paul returns to the original admonition regarding the unrepentant fornicator in the church, ‘put away the wicked man from among yourselves, 1 Corinthians 5:12-13. The space must be there for his soul to be saved, Deuteronomy 13:5.

SUMMARY

Paul could have very well been discouraged after reading a letter from Chloe’s house, along with hearing various reports from others regarding the multiplicity of the Corinthian errors.

One today may feel that it would be impossible to untangle the erroneous mess that churches get themselves into. Paul, however, with a spirit of love, sets out to systematically deal with each of the Corinthian problems.

The brethren of the church in Corinth had not only come to be ‘puffed up’ in relationship to who baptised them and their spiritual gifts, 1 Corinthians 4:6 / 1 Corinthians 4:18-19, but also in their tolerance of a brother living in fornication, 1 Corinthians 5:2.

They actually ‘gloried’ in the fact that they had done nothing with the fornicating brother. The apostle speaks frankly and to the point, instructing them on how to remedy the situation and maintain their state of being ‘unreprovable’ before the Lord.

They were to put out the fornicator, and all other persistent sinners, from them and not have company with him until he repented of his wickedness. Paul has effectively laid the groundwork for further accusations against the Corinthian brethren.

Not only are they guilty of elevating one preacher above another and developing a sense of self-sufficiency and arrogance through spiritual gifts, but they are also tolerating sin in the church.

The cause is clear: a lack of spiritual understanding and a carnal approach to serving God, 1 Corinthians 3:1-2. 1 Corinthians 5 helps us understand the process by which we must “put away” the wicked members from us.

1 Corinthians 5 sets forth instructions for official church discipline in the sense that the work is done by the authority of Jesus Christ, as all the brethren are ‘gathered together’ for the act, 1 Corinthians 5:4.

Further instructions regarding discipline in the local church are given in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The apostle Paul instructs the Thessalonians in the area of erring brethren, 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Six months to one year later, Paul again writes, in 2 Thessalonians 3:6. Once more, Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3:14.

From these passages, it is clear that the faithful have a responsibility to try to teach the erring out of their sin. The period of teaching out of sin is called ‘longsuffering’, but longsuffering has its limits.

The Lord never intended the church to be ‘ever-suffering’ as is indicated in the admonition to the church in Thyatira, Revelation 2:20-25. That church ‘suffered’ the woman Jezebel to the point that she carried away other disciples with her false teaching.

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION

Paul continues to systematically deal with the sin in the church in Corinth. The Corinthians were guilty of divisions and contention, jealousy and strife, 1 Corinthians 1:11 / 1 Corinthians 3:3.

Furthermore, the Corinthians were guilty of tolerating sinful men who were named as members of their local congregation, 1 Corinthians 5:1-12. 1 Corinthians 6 examines the next problem in line. The Corinthian Christians were taking each other to human courts to sue each other.

Secondly, 1 Corinthians 6 exposes the sin of fornication that had existed among the brethren. Paul would not quit on these brethren. As a loving father, he would continue to expose all the dark deeds that may be presented before Jehovah in holiness.

THE CHRISTIAN AND LAWSUITS

We must consider this chapter in light of the cultural background of that time. The Greeks loved to go to court, and they took great pleasure in listening to court proceedings.

A very excitable people by nature, they found the cut and thrust of legal debate very exhilarating. In normal court proceedings, the two parties would select a third party, the arbitrator, for a private settlement. If this didn't settle the matter, they would take it to court.

All persons over sixteen years of age were required by law to sit on juries. The first kind of court was known as the 'forties'. If a case was not settled here, it went before a jury consisting of two hundred and one citizens. That is, if the sum of money involved was less than fifty.

If it were more than fifty, there would be a jury consisting of four hundred and one people. Some cases have been recorded where the jury consisted of one thousand to six thousand jury members. Thus, a person's entire time could be taken up in the law court.

The Jews, however, did not have this problem. Their trials were held before the local elders in the Synagogues. In fact, the Jews were forbidden to use Gentile courts. If a Jew did this, he was considered guilty of blasphemy. It was because of this that the Romans permitted the Jews to settle certain matters for themselves, Acts 18:15.

Remember also that the Jews could have dealt with the case of Jesus, but because they sought the death sentence, it was necessary for them to go to a Gentile court. This reveals the depth of their hatred for the Lord.

THE REBUKE

"If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How many more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers!" 1 Corinthians 6:1-6

1. The word 'dispute', in Greek, is 'pragma'; this term was especially for lawsuits, 1 Corinthians 6:1.

1 Corinthians 6:2-3 is the first of six rhetorical questions Paul is going to ask: 1 Corinthians 6:9 / 1 Corinthians 6:15-16 / 1 Corinthians 6:19.

Paul stated the fact in the question. The 20th Century New Testament says, ‘Can it be that when one of you has a dispute with another, he dares to have the case tried before a heathen?’

2. Notice Paul calls them the ‘Lord’s people’, or ‘saints’, KJV, 1 Corinthians 6:1-2.

Paul is emphasising that Christians are fellow members of the Lord’s family. They do not belong to the World. Their ethical standards are completely different from those of pagans. Furthermore, in Greek Courts, lawsuits always involved oaths that were made in the name of pagan gods.

3. ‘Ungodly’, 1 Corinthians 6:1, and ‘unbelievers’, 1 Corinthians 6:6, this is the Greek word, ‘adikon’, which means ‘men not right with God’.

‘Unbelievers’, in Greek, is ‘apiston’, which means non-believer. Paul is not saying that they would not receive justice in Greek courts. He is insisting that they should not be there!

Notice in 1 Corinthians 6:2-3, ‘the saints will judge the world’, ‘we are to judge angels. There are four explanations that are offered for a supposed contradiction between 1 Corinthians 6:2 and 1 Corinthians 5:12.

1. The world is first to be judged by the Lord, and then His people act as assessors.

2. Somehow, the disciples will share in giving judgement.

3. Christian conduct is itself an ongoing judgement of the world.

4. Christians to become magistrates and judges.

Perhaps Paul was quoting their own proud boast. 1 Corinthians 6:2-4 may be an appeal to the ‘knowledge’ of the Corinthians. In their conceit, maybe they had boasted of their expectation of becoming the judges of men and angels. Paul says, if you expect to do this, surely you can settle your disputes among yourselves! Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Earlier, Paul wrote that the Corinthians were judging him, 1 Corinthians 4:3-5 / 1 Corinthians 4:7, which was inappropriate in view of God’s final judgment. Now they were judging in the courts, which was inappropriate since the saints will participate in eschatological judging.’

IN WHAT WAY WILL CHRISTIANS JUDGE ANGELS?

What did Paul mean in suggesting that Christians will ‘judge the world’ and also ‘angels’? Paul introduces doctrinal questions to argue why litigation should stay within the local church. He asks the question, ‘do you not know’, 1 Corinthians 6:2. This is the first of six times Paul asks this in chapter six. Paul’s appeal in the context here is an argument to not go to court with a fellow believer.

WHAT DOES THE SAINTS WILL JUDGE THE WORLD MEAN?

The idea of saints judging the world refers to a future judgment. This is an argument from a major premise to a minor premise. In other words, Paul is asking, if Christians will one day judge the world, cannot Christians judge a small issue between two Christians on earth? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?

The word ‘if’ means ‘if, and it is true,’ so it’s a fact that Christians will one day judge the world. The sense likely is the same as that conveyed in Hebrews 11:7, where Noah is said to have ‘condemned’, ‘pronounced a sentence on’, the world.’ That is, by his obedient example, he stood in bold contrast to the disobedient world, hence, effectually condemning those people.

Paul is saying that believers will judge the world one day in the future. If they have this massive responsibility in the future, it’s only logical that they can judge on a much smaller scale an issue between two believers. Christians have the capacity to move beyond ‘my friend, right or wrong.’ Objectivity, this goes beyond subjective friendship or politics in the local church.

WHAT DOES WE SHALL JUDGE ANGELS MEAN?

This isn’t easy to figure out exactly what Paul means here, but it seems like Paul is continuing to enhance the contrast between going before a public non-Christian court and going before the local church by indicating that Christians will judge angels. How many more things in this life!

Paul continues the argument from the greater to the lesser by arguing that if Christians will judge the higher being of an angel, he most certainly can judge a lesser being of a human.

Perhaps similarly, as in the case of Noah, Paul is suggesting that those who remain faithful to Christ, by their example, will condemn evil angels, who didn’t maintain their integrity, as well as the ungodly world, Matthew 25:41 / 2 Peter 2:4 / Jude 6.

Whatever all this means, don’t miss the main point of Paul’s argument. If the church is to be employed by God in ‘judging’ on such a grand scale, surely wise Christian people ought to be able to judge between brethren who are in conflict, rather than permitting such dissensions to proceed to lawsuits, and thus damaging the church’s influence in society.

Paul is reminding these Corinthian Christians that they, who know all about judging angels in the last day, how about judging some of these petty disputes you are disgracefully airing in the courts of the pagans!

And in your practice of resolving these little earthly matters, how is it that you set the pagan judges over such trivialities, such judges being of no account at all in the church, as they’re not members of it?

And this is why Paul exclaims, in 1 Corinthians 6:5, ‘Is there no wise man among you?’ What he is saying is that Christians ought to really follow the Jewish practice instead of, as he so bluntly describes it, a ‘going to the unrighteous’, 1 Corinthians 5:6.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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.’

What right has the ungodly to deal with the affairs of the righteous? There is a principle that has to be borne in mind. The mention of judgement in 1 Corinthians 6:6-13 naturally leads to teachings on this subject. Believers were involved in lawsuits before pagan judges.

THE ALTERNATIVE TO LAWSUITS

“The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters.” 1 Corinthians 6:7-8

Why do people go to court? They do it to assert or to demand their ‘rights’. What is Paul’s solution? He asks, ‘Why not suffer wrong?’ 1 Corinthians 5:7. It is much better to suffer wrong than to do wrong. If you follow the practice of the ‘unrighteous’, you are no better than the unrighteous, 1 Corinthians 6:8.

Moffatt, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Even to have lawsuits with one another is in itself a token of defeat. Why not let yourselves be wronged? But instead of that, you inflict wrong practices and frauds and that on members of the brotherhood!’

This chapter lays down a principle that is applicable today. ‘If someone has wronged me, what do I do?’ Matthew 18:15-20.

1. Pray for him.
2. Do good to him. If he is sick, visit him.
3. Show love for love’s sake. Never let the act of wrong done to you make you do an act of wrong to him.

Pride is insisting on your rights. If a brother with whom there is a problem is spiritually immature or weak, he may need discipline to try to settle the problem as Christians. He needs to face his responsibilities. And you may have to suffer wrong, as Matthew 19:20 / Revelation 3:2 reveals.

Vindication, you want to be seen as right! But one day, if you remain faithful, people will see that you are right because you will stand at the right hand of Jesus. By the fact that you are found to be righteous and vindicated, you will be.

According to Paul, the saint who takes legal action in a court of law against fellow saints has already suffered ‘defeat’, no matter what results from the lawsuit, Matthew 5:39-41. He has suffered the failure of love, fellowship, and brotherhood.

THE UNRIGHTEOUS

“Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” 1 Corinthians 6:6-10

The Greek word for ungodly is the word ‘kikol’, as in 1 Corinthians 6:1, but the word ‘wrongdoers’, the same word in Greek, applies to anyone who behaves in an unrighteous way, and there were those in the Corinthian church to whom Paul applies the word. Some at Corinth were persisting in an unrighteous warning that this could lead to final condemnation.

He then goes on to say in [1 Corinthians 6:9](#), ‘Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God?’ Paul says they will not enter into the full or final experience of salvation, [1 Corinthians 15:50-51](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:53](#) / [2 Peter 1:5-11](#) / [Acts 14:21-22](#). Therefore, behaving in such a manner puts your own soul in jeopardy.

Acro-Corinth had one thousand so-called ‘sacred’ temple prostitutes. The Emperor Constantine decreed that all the pagan temples must be handed over to the Christians, 326-327 AD. Helena, Constantine’s mother, was Christian. Constantine himself came to Britain and was in charge of the Roman army based in York.

There are many sins described throughout the Scriptures, all of which will determine our eternal fate if they haven’t been forgiven by the blood of Christ, [Acts 2:38](#) / [1 John 1:9](#).

We should see sin as God sees sin. He hates sin, and He despises sin because sin separates us from Him and causes us to become spiritually dead, [Isaiah 59:2](#) / [Romans 6:23](#). It doesn’t matter what the sin is; if anyone hasn’t had their sins forgiven, they won’t receive eternal life.

WRONGDOERS

Paul doesn’t mess around with his words here, especially when he uses the word ‘wrongdoers’, which is the Greek word ‘adikos’, also used in [1 Corinthians 6:1](#). Paul uses that word and applies it to anyone who behaves in an unrighteous way, [1 John 5:17](#).

In other words, there were some Christians in Corinth who were persisting in an unrighteous manner, and he warns those people that this unrighteous behaviour could lead to their final condemnation.

We don’t need to wonder what kind of unrighteous behaviour these Corinthian Christians were practising, because Paul now goes on to tell us exactly what is involved in unrighteous behaviour.

SEXUALLY IMMORAL

The sexually immoral, ‘ pornos’, are those people who practice illicit sexual intercourse; this refers to all sexual sin, [Galatians 5:19-21](#) / [Ephesians 5:4-5](#) / [Revelation 21:8](#).

The people who practice this sin think only of themselves; they only think about fulfilling their own sexual desires and pleasures, [Matthew 5:32](#) / [Matthew 19:9](#) / [Acts 15:20](#) / [Acts 15:29](#) / [1 Corinthians 5:1](#) / [Ephesians 5:3](#) / [Colossians 3:5](#) / [1 Thessalonians 4:3](#). Anyone who practices sexual immorality won’t inherit the kingdom of God.

IDOLATERS

Idolaters, ‘eidololatries’ were simply those who worshipped idols. These were the Christians who created their own religion and their deities in order to fulfil their own desires, [1 Corinthians 10:14](#) / [Colossians 3:5](#) / [1 Peter 4:3](#) / [Revelation 21:8](#) / [Revelation 22:15](#).

In Corinth, they worshipped Aphrodite, the goddess of fertility, and worshipping her consisted of sexual immorality. Anyone who practices idolatry won't inherit the kingdom of God.

ADULTERERS

Adulterers, 'moichos' were those who practised unlawful intercourse with the spouse of someone else. These were the Christians who broke their marriage vows to stay faithful to their husbands or wives by having sexual intercourse with anyone else other than their husband or wife, [Matthew 5:27-28](#) / [Matthew 5:32](#) / [Mark 10:11](#). Anyone who practices adultery won't inherit the kingdom of God.

MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN

Men who have sex with men, 'arsenokoites', were those men who had sex with another male, homosexuals, this also includes lesbians, men who have sex with other women, and those who practice bestiality, that is, those who have sex with animals.

These were the Christians who practised unnatural sex with other people, [Romans 1:24-27](#). Anyone who practices unnatural sex with another won't inherit the kingdom of God.

THIEVES

Thieves, 'kleptes', were those who stole from others. They were the Christians who lived in such a way that they didn't work for a living; they lived off what they had stolen from others.

If someone steals from another person or even uses false information to gain more benefits from the government, they are a thief. Anyone who practices theft won't inherit the kingdom of God.

THE GREEDY

The greedy, 'pleonektes' were those who had a materialistic spirit, [Romans 1:27-32](#) / [Colossians 3:5-7](#). They were the Christians who were just interested in gaining more material goods for themselves by any means, even if that meant hurting their neighbour in the process or ignoring other people's feelings and needs, [Ephesians 5:11](#). Anyone who practices greed won't inherit the kingdom of God.

DRUNKARDS

Drunkards, ‘methusos’ were simply those who got drunk. In those days, drunkards received the Death Sentence if they were. 1. Drunk at night. 2. Drunk around the harbour, or in public baths. 3. If their wine contained less than 2 or 3 parts of water. Breakfast usually consisted of bread dipped in wine.

They were the Christians who drank alcohol simply to lose their senses. They had become addicted to alcohol and relied on it to help them through the day, rather than relying on God to help them through the day, 1 Corinthians 11:21 / 1 Timothy 3:3 / 1 Timothy 3:8. Anyone who continually gets drunk won’t inherit the kingdom of God.

SLANDERERS

Slanderers, ‘loidoros’ were those who spoke against others; they were foul-mouthed people. These were the Christians who used abusive words to bring down others and raise their own personal agendas and opinions. Anyone who practices slander won’t inherit the kingdom of God.

SWINDLERS

Swindlers, ‘harpax’, were those who robbed with violence. These were the Christians who would stop at nothing to get what they wanted. They make friends and see others as a means to make any kind of financial or material gain for themselves. Anyone who practices swindling won’t inherit the kingdom of God.

These are not the only sins mentioned where a person practising them won’t inherit the kingdom of God, Galatians 5:19-21 / Ephesians 5:3-5. Remember, the church began with converts from the synagogue, Acts 18:8, but Jews living in pagan countries had a high standard of morality. There were many converted pagans in the church.

THEN AND NOW!

“And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything.” 1 Corinthians 6:11-12

1. In 1 Corinthians 6:11, Paul says, ‘some of you were’, not all, but some.

2. Now they are ‘washed’, ‘you washed yourselves clean’, but you let the Lord wash you clean, Acts 22:16 / Revelation 7:14.

3. Now they are ‘sanctified’, the word in Greek is ‘hagiazō’, and it means to set apart for God’s possession and use, saints, 1 Corinthians 1:1 / 2 Timothy 2:21.

4. Now they are ‘justified’, the Greek word is ‘dikaō’, and it means to declare righteousness. The common legal word for ‘acquittal’.

Paul says that the church in Corinth WERE the practices of some of those people before they became Christians, 1 Corinthians 6:11. He says the same to the church in Galatia, Galatians 4:3 and Ephesus, Ephesians 5:8.

The truth is, we're all recovering sinaholics, we've all got our past, and we've all got our baggage, and we've all got our struggles. Some sins are more obvious than others, but we all have them, and we all need to remind ourselves that it shouldn't surprise us if the church is full of sinaholics; it's a hospital for the sinfully sick.

There are a few people who want to justify and excuse their sinful behaviour by telling us that they can't help who they are, they were born that way. We know that no one is born a sinner, we choose to sin, we learn it from others.

But to justify our sinful behaviour by saying 'I can't help it, that's just the way I was born', is as logical as saying 'I'm going to rob a bank because I was born a thief' or 'I'm going to kill someone because I was born a murderer'.

The point is, if people are going to use that argument to defend their behaviour, then they can't argue against anyone else who practices any of the sins listed above, because they will argue the same.

If people are born adulterers, drunkards and liars, etc., then Paul wouldn't be able to tell them, they won't inherit the kingdom of God. The sad truth is that God's Word clearly tells us that if anyone is involved in any sin, then that sin will lock that person out of heaven forever, Revelation 22:15.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Paul's point in this whole section, 1 Corinthians 6:1-11, was that genuine Christians should not continue in or return to the sinful practices that mark unbelievers. We should become what we are because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. This appeal runs throughout the New Testament and is latent in 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.'

1 Corinthians 6:12 tells us it's never lawful to sin. Greeks considered the body a tomb or the shackles of the soul. They believed that they should let it fulfil its appetites. If hungry, let it eat! If it experiences a sexual craving, indulge in it. In the Christian view, your body belongs to Christ.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'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.'

THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN HOLINESS

"You say, 'Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.'" The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your bodies." 1 Corinthians 6:13-20

Paul moves on to discuss two subjects that were part and parcel of pagan worship. The offering of sacrifices to idols and the practice of immorality. He discusses both of these matters in the context of Christian liberty.

It is almost certain, because of the inverted commas used by the translators, that Paul is repeating something that someone else has said. Someone is saying, 'all things are lawful.'

‘Very well!’ Paul says, ‘but not all things are helpful’, 1 Corinthians 6:12. And you are telling me now that God made food for the stomach, and the stomach for the food? That’s perfectly true, Mark 7:19. And God is going to destroy them both, the food and the stomach! 1 Corinthians 6:13.

It may even be that there were people in Corinth who were quoting something that Paul had himself said at some time, and they were now saying, ‘You taught us that! You said we are free from the law.’

Fee, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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.’

They were practising the theory which is the basis of the doctrine of ‘Once Saved, Always Saved.’ This is the doctrine that, in effect, says, ‘it doesn’t matter what we do. Once in grace, always in grace!’ But even the statement itself, ‘I have the right to do anything’, is false.

There are clearly unlawful things. Those who believed this were taking the freedom that Paul preached, and declared that they were not bound to the Jewish law and were applying it to everything, even to immorality.

Paul now says, You are right in the case of eating meat. You may eat it, or you may leave it alone. But immorality is a different matter. Yes, your stomach was intended to eat meat, but your body was not intended for immorality, 1 Corinthians 6:13.

The food that you eat doesn’t make you unclean, because your system is designed to cope with food. And remember, both body and food will perish when your body dies. God will destroy both, 1 Corinthians 6:13.

But immorality is different; it is not just like taking a meal, because God did not design the body for immorality, 1 Corinthians 6:13. At the very deepest level, sexual intimacy is much more than a physical thing. It is not just like a hunger for food; it has spiritual and moral significance.

Immorality, as the psychologist knows, affects the personality of the people involved; it defiles them. While your body and the food you take in will one day perish, your person, your personality, your soul, the real you, will not perish. So there is a world of difference between eating meat and practising immorality. You may exercise your freedom of choice in one, but not in the other.

Fee, in his commentary, says the following concerning 1 Corinthians 6:14.

‘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.’

The problem is immorality, 1 Corinthians 6:13-18. The prohibition is previously emphatically stated in 1 Corinthians 5:9-12 / 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Paul now gives the reasons for living purer, chaste lives.

The background to the problems is immorality related to the worship of pagan deities. The one thousand prostitutes from the temple, who were maintained, kept by the city of Corinth, who came down from Acro-Corinth into the city, were always ready for sexual activity, which was claimed to be ‘worship’ offered to their gods. Paul gives us the spiritual basis for holiness of life in 1 Corinthians 6:15.

J. B. Phillips’s version of 1 Corinthians 6:15-17 says the following.

‘Have you realised the almost incredible fact that your bodies are integral parts of Christ himself? Am I then to take parts of Christ and join them as a prostitute? Never! Don’t you realise that when a man joins himself with a prostitute, he makes with her a physical unity? For God says, ‘the two shall be one flesh’. On the other hand, the man who joins himself to God is one with Him in spirit.’

Prostitution, 1 Corinthians 6:15-16, is wrong because when a Christian has sexual relations with a prostitute, he or she takes what belongs to God, Genesis 2:24, and gives it to someone else. This is stealing from God, 1 Corinthians 6:17.

Prostitution affects the person spiritually and psychologically. Bad habits are those which are unnatural. There are other sins that Paul describes as ‘outside of the body’, overeating is a sin because it is eating in excess, and immorality is inherently sinful, 1 Corinthians 6:18.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘No other sin has this result. All other sins are outside or apart from the body in this sense. ‘Every sin that a man commits is outside the body, could be another incorrect Corinthian slogan that Paul proceeded to correct, 1 Corinthians 6:12-13.’

A baby craves food, not cigarettes! Old ideas, ‘churched’, sprinkled, child of God, member of the body of Christ and an inheritor of heaven. ‘Unchurched’, a child of the devil, a member of Satan, and an inheritor of hell. Being a Christian is being married to Christ; immorality violates that union, and so is unfaithfulness to the divine husband.

We should ‘flee from sexual immorality’, from the verb ‘pheugo’, which means to flee from, 1 Corinthians 6:18. The word is the present imperative tense, which indicates something to be doing now and to keep on doing! 1 Corinthians 10:14 / 2 Timothy 2:22.

In the temple, Aphrodite’s immorality was regarded as consecration. Paul says for the Christian, this is a dreadful violation of sanctity, 1 Corinthians 6:19. In 1 Corinthians 6:19, the individual Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit, Romans 8:9-11 / Galatians 4:6 / 1 John 3:24 / 1 John 4:13. Christian conduct should reveal the presence of the Holy Spirit. Notice, ‘the Holy Spirit within you,’ 1 Corinthians 6:19. In 1 Corinthians 3:16, the church, congregation, is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning the Holy Spirit.

‘He is a gift to us from God, 1 Thessalonians 4:8. He is the best gift God has given us thus far. Consequently, we have a moral obligation to the Giver. Moreover, because He indwells us, we belong to Him.’

You are the property of Christ, 1 Corinthians 6:19, ‘bought with a price,’ 1 Corinthians 6:20. The price He paid was the death of His only Son, Romans 3:24-25 / Ephesians 1:13 / Ephesians 1:7.

The perceptive answer to immorality is to ‘flee’ from it, 1 Corinthians 6:18. The perceptive answer is to use the body for purposes the master approves, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 / 1 Corinthians 6:12.

The Christian slave cannot accept bondage to any appetite, desire or object, because he is Christ’s absolute possession, 1 Corinthians 6:20. We should honour God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.

CHAPTER 7

INTRODUCTION

The date of this epistle has been placed at 55-56 AD. Nero Claudius Caesar was the Roman Emperor. During the later reign of Claudius, Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero Germanicus, 51 AD, all Jews were commanded to depart from Rome, Acts 18:2.

Growing tension existed between the Romans and the Jews. The Jews insisted that Jehovah God is the only God, whereas the Romans viewed their emperors as deities and demanded that all of Rome worship them.

Ann. XV. 44, says the following.

‘Those who confessed (i.e., to being Christians) were arrested, and then, as a result of their information, a large number were implicated not so much on the charge of incendiarism as for hatred of the human race. They died by methods of mockery; some were covered with the skins of wild beasts and then torn by dogs, some were crucified, some were burned as torches to light at night. Whence (after the scenes of extreme cruelty) commiseration was stirred for them, although guilty of deserving the worse penalties, for men felt that their destruction was not on account of the public welfare but to gratify the cruelty of one (Nero).’

The tension between Romans and Christians is likely the ‘distress’ under consideration in 1 Corinthians 7:26, during the days of Nero. This chapter deals with marital obligations in view of the distress upon the Christians.

In 1 Corinthians 7, we are going to see if a legal divorce has taken place, then couples don’t need to separate and go back to their former husband or wife, Deuteronomy 24:4, because God accepts them where they are.

If that former divorce is legal and binding, they are free to remarry, and Paul is not only going to teach us that God allows divorced people to get married, but he commands it.

In the Biblical world outside of Palestine, there were different types of marriages under the Roman Empire. All of these were recognised as legal forms of marriage, even though they are quite different from our own British culture.

CONTUBERNIUM

1. There is a form of marriage which is called ‘Contubernium’.

The word Contubernium means dwelling together, or the tent companionship, where we have a man who owned many slaves and he would kind of breed them. He would take a woman and hook her up with a man and say, ‘you’ll breed’ and they would stay together for as long as the master wants them together.

If the master sells that couple to another master and he decides to move her to another man, then they become married, as far as people are concerned, under the Roman Empire. Contubernium is where a master decides between slaves who will have sex with each other and who will live together as husband and wife.

USUS

2. Another form of marriage is called ‘usus’, which is a marriage of common people under the Roman Empire.

The word usus means the act of making use of something. This is what the typical average person did, we would call it in our culture, common-law marriage. In the Roman Empire, if a man took a woman and lived with her for twelve months, they were considered married in the eyes of the people.

There was no legal document, there was no exchanging of vows, and there is just an agreement between the two of them to live together. When they lived together for a full year, they were considered husband and wife.

COEMPTIO IN MANUS

3. In the Roman Empire, there was another form of marriage called ‘coemptio in manus’.

Coemptio in manus is basically marriage by sale. There may be a father who has a daughter, and he wants to get her related to somebody else, so he sells her to another family. Remember that in ancient society, families formed their own trade unions, their own guilds.

For example, if you were a tent maker but you couldn’t make the tent pegs, you would sell your daughter to the tent peg maker’s son, which would become the easiest and cheapest way to get tent pegs, and that forms a relationship that yields a union between the two families.

CONFARREATIO

4. The last one that was recognised in the Roman Empire was ‘Confarreatio’.

This was the type of wedding that went on between nobility, it was a big affair, the girl dressed up, they had rings for each other to wear, they exchanged vows, and they had flowers. This sounds like what goes on today.

It’s from this particular type of marriage in the Roman Empire that our tradition filtered down to the way we do marriages today and recognise it as a legal, binding marriage.

All four of these kinds existed in the Roman Empire. When Paul goes out and preaches the Gospel, and when he comes into a community and begins to talk to people, there are going to be men who are married because they bought their wives.

There are going to be men and women who live together because their master has mated them, and there are going to be people who have agreed to live together and have been living together for three or four years, but there has been no official ceremony. There are going to be some nobility who have gone through all the pomp and circumstance of getting married.

ARE ALL OF THESE RECOGNISED BY GOD?

These people who have lived together for ten months but are not considered legally married yet, because you have to live together for twelve months, what do they do?

Would Paul say, ‘You have to become nobility, you have to go through the nobility ceremony to make it legal!’ What’s his response? How do you treat them? Do they need to separate from each other?

Remember, Corinth was an exceptionally corrupt city, it had a horrible reputation, and it was the capital of sexual sin in that first century. You name it, it went on in Corinth.

In fact, if you wanted to call somebody a downright ugly name, you called them a ‘Corinthian’. No one could be considered a more corrupt individual than to be called a ‘Corinthian’. Obviously, when Paul comes and establishes a church in Corinth, there are going to be people who have all kinds of backgrounds when we think about sex.

There are going to be temple prostitutes, adulterers, homosexuals, all kinds of marriages and divorces and remarriages; it’s going to be a mess from a sexual standpoint. This raises some questions regarding marriage in the minds of these people at Corinth.

‘Now concerning the matters about which you wrote.’ 1 Corinthians 7:1

In the first six chapters, Paul wrote about what he wanted to talk about, the problems that he saw there at Corinth, and now, beginning in this chapter, and going through the rest of the book, he’s going to be addressing some issues that were important to these Corinthians.

They had contacted him with these questions; unfortunately, we don’t have the questions, but we do have the answers. When we examine the answers, we can know what the questions were.

IS SEX UNSPIRITUAL?

The first question that comes as Paul addresses the sexual mess at Corinth is, ‘Is sex unspiritual?’ Remember, they came out of all kinds of spiritual corruption, as we have already mentioned.

If it was sexually abnormal, it happened at Corinth. These people who have now converted to Christianity suddenly have this question raised. They must have thought that sex must be bad, it must be corrupt, it must be an evil thing, and so we probably ought to avoid it, shouldn’t we? Isn’t sex bad? Shouldn’t a true Christian avoid sex?

PAUL’S ANSWER

‘It is well for a man not to touch a woman.’ But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. This I say by way of concession, not of command. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind.’ 1 Corinthians 7:1-7

Paul addresses the issue of celibacy in this chapter. Should we just cut off from sex altogether?

1. We are told that ‘celibacy is good’, 1 Corinthians 7:1.

That is a sexual euphemism, that’s another way of saying it’s good not to have sexual relations or not to be married, so you have that legitimate right. The reason he said that is because ‘of the present crisis,’ 1 Corinthians 7:26. When he writes to the Corinthians, there is something going on that it would be better for these people not to be married because of the pressure that it would bring on them.

We will look at this passage in more detail a little later, but for now, he’s saying that if they are married, and this persecution comes, and they see their wife being tortured, it would be a motivation for them to renounce Jesus in order to stop her from suffering.

Because of the present crisis, they are better off not getting married to keep that pressure off them as they face loyalty to Jesus in a time of persecution. He isn’t saying that marriage, in and of itself, is bad; this is an observation made based on what is happening at that point in time, but he does say that celibacy is good.

2. He says that ‘celibacy is tempting’, 1 Corinthians 7:2.

We are born with sexual drives; some people’s drives are stronger than others, but we all have them. If they cannot control them, Paul says they are better off getting married, even in the face of the present crisis.

Even with this persecution that is coming on the church, they will be in a better condition to go ahead and get married and have normal sexual relations than to try to be celibate and be tempted into immorality. Celibacy is good, but celibacy can be tempting.

That is always true in any sexually oriented society, then and now. We live in a sexually oriented society; if a man is determined to be celibate but can't control himself, then Paul's counsel to him would be to get married. Use God's legitimate method for relieving the sexual drive.

3. Paul says that 'celibacy is wrong for married couples,' 1 Corinthians 7:3-7.

That seems like a strange piece of advice, but remember, there were people who were married, people who came to Jesus and suddenly came to this conclusion that sex must be bad. They were saying what they needed to do was to never have sex again, Paul says, 'No, that's wrong.

There is to be the satisfaction of our partner's needs, and to abstain is to commit sin. We have a responsibility to meet the needs of our partner, that's why God created the institution of marriage.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'In view of the temptation to commit fornication, each partner in marriage needs to fulfil his or her sexual duty to the spouse. Part of the responsibility of marriage is to meet the various needs of the partner, Genesis 2:18, including sexual needs.'

Notice he talks about the wife's body and the husband's body. If we go back to look at the end of 1 Corinthians 6, we'll see a tie here. If we draw a line under the word 'body' in 1 Corinthians 6, you will find that it occurs several times, and then Paul goes straight into marriage.

Why did he pick marriage first? Because he says we're talking about the body, he says they are to use their body to meet their partner's sexual needs. There is a continuity of thought between 1 Corinthians 6-7. Celibacy, Paul says, in a marital relationship isn't to be practised.

Here's what the Talmud has to say. The Talmud is the Jewish commentary on the oral and writs. 'If a man vows that he will not have intercourse with his wife, the school of Shammai allows him two weeks; the school of Hillel, one week.' Where Paul said they aren't to deprive each other, they aren't to be celibate except for a period of time, and it has to be done by mutual consent.

Now, how long is 'a set time'? Shammai says you can do that for two weeks; again, this is the Jewish culture. Hillel, who was the more liberal person, says only one week. 'If by the end of that period the man does not annul his vow and resume cohabitation with his wife, he is compelled to divorce her.'

In other words, it was the viewpoint of the rabbis that if a husband and wife lived together, and a man couldn't meet the sexual needs of his wife after two weeks, he had to divorce her. Why?

So she could get married to somebody who would meet her sexual needs, and vice versa. A woman could also free herself from marriage by vowing to withhold herself from her husband.

If a wife didn't like her husband, she could refuse to give him sex for two weeks and under the Law, as far as the rabbis were concerned, he had the right to because he had a right to be married to somebody who would meet his sexual needs.

If she persists in her attitude and divorces her without payment of the 'catuba', which is like giving the dowry back, she surrenders it. The Jewish rabbis considered two weeks to be the maximum set period of time.

Paul doesn't give that to us, he just says it's to be for 'a set time', and it is to be by mutual consent. He says you don't withhold sex and use it as a weapon in war in marriage. Wives shouldn't use it to get leverage on their husbands or wives, don't refrain from having sex because you are angry with your husband.

Paul says that if there is the abstinence of the sexual relationship, it must be by mutual consent and only for a set time, and that is for 'the purpose of prayer', 1 Corinthians 7:5. It's for the development of one's spiritual life, but then they come back together.

1 Corinthians 7:3 literally says they should keep on fulfilling their marital duties. A husband should keep on fulfilling his marital duties. Then he says in 1 Corinthians 7:6-7, if they practice celibacy, it will be because celibacy is a gift. Notice Paul says, 'I say this as a concession,' 1 Corinthians 7:6. Remember, in the Greek New Testament, there are no punctuation marks. We don't know where one sentence ends and the next one begins; that has to be decided by the translator.

There are no question marks, commas, periods, parentheses or any of that stuff; the translator had to make a judgment. I think there is one we can make here that will help us understand what he's saying. He says, 'I say this as a concession, and not as a command'.

I don't think that is what he is referring to. I think we ought to punctuate it this way. At the end of 1 Corinthians 7:6, there should be a colon instead of a period, 'I say this as a concession, not as a command.'

What is it that he says? 'I wish all men were as I am.' In other words, he isn't commanding everybody to be celibate; he could say, I wish everybody were single, it's going to free them up for their spiritual development, although he will talk about that later in the chapter.

He's saying that celibacy isn't a command, it's a matter of concession, it's a gift of God, 1 Corinthians 7:7. Some people have the gift of celibacy; they have the ability to remain single and don't have an overpowering sexual drive that needs to be satisfied.

What did Jesus say about that? 'Some men were born as eunuchs, some were made to be eunuchs, and some decide to be eunuchs as an act of will, but not everybody can receive that,' Matthew 19:12.

Paul said, 'Some people have that gift, and some don't.' Most don't, and in the marital relationship, we don't practice celibacy. The husband and the wife meet each other's sexual needs.

Sex isn't unspiritual, even in a corrupt society that perverts sex and misuses sex; sex in and of itself isn't bad. It's created by God, it's intended to be used, and it's intended to be fulfilled within the marriage relationship. So that is the initial question that Paul deals with here. Is sex a sin?

SHOULD THOSE WHO WERE FORMERLY MARRIED REMARRY?

The next question that Paul raises, we could ask it this way: Should those who were formerly married remarry? To understand this, we need to think about marital status. Let's begin with the word 'virgin', which Paul will use in this chapter.

What is a virgin, 'parthenos'? A simple definition here is a person who has never been married. Again, we're talking about marital status, which is what this chapter is about. A virgin is a person who isn't married nor has ever been, so we would say has never had sex; they have never entered into that relationship.

Secondly, there is the other end of that spectrum. Who is a widow, ‘chera’? One who has been freed by death, they had been married but are no longer married because their mate has passed away.

Next, we have ‘married’, ‘gamos’, we know what that is; they are not free, but they are free to have sex with each other. The final category Paul mentions is the ‘unmarried’ ‘agamos’.

WHO ARE THE UNMARRIED?

I believe that the unmarried are the divorced. Some say that’s people who have never been married, but not correct; it’s the virgins who are the people who have never been married. The word ‘unmarried’ in Greek is the word ‘agamos’; the Greek word ‘gamos’ gives us our word marriage.

We have ‘monogamy mono’, ‘one’; ‘gamos’, ‘monogamous’, one marriage. Polygamy, ‘poly’, many, many marriages. ‘Gamos’ means marriage, and ‘agamos’ means unmarried.

A person can’t be ‘agamos’ unless they have been ‘gamos’. A person can’t be unmarried unless they have been married, any more than a person can untie their shoelaces until first of all they were tied. The word ‘agamos’ occurs four times in the New Testament, and they are all in this chapter.

AGAMOS AND GAMOS

Notice later in 1 Corinthians 7:32-33, we have two broad categories contrasted, people who are married, ‘agamos’, and people who aren’t married, ‘gamos’. It says nothing about their marital status; it only compares whether they have been in the act of marriage or not.

Look at the next verse, which is the pivotal verse, 1 Corinthians 7:34. Paul makes a distinction between the unmarried person, ‘agamos’ and the virgin, ‘parthenos’; they aren’t one and the same, they are two different people. He puts both of them together in opposition to the married woman. Look at the following verses, 1 Corinthians 7:8, and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

She had been married, ‘gamos’ and was told not to separate, but if she does decide to separate, she is to remain unmarried, ‘agamos’, 1 Corinthians 7:8 / 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

That shows me that a person has to be ‘gamos’ first, then when they leave their mate, they are then ‘agamos’. That tells me that being unmarried in this case means being a divorced person.

In this chapter, Paul talks about married people. He talks about two categories of married people. He will give instructions to virgins, to widows and to the ‘agamos’, to the divorced people. Those are the only categories that exist in the marital relationship, and Paul has advice for all of them.

If we deny that ‘agamos’ refers to divorced people, then we have a huge segment of society that existed in the first-century church, just as surely as it does today, which had no counsel from Paul. But if we understand the ‘agamos’ to be the divorced person, then this chapter has counsel for every category of marital relationships.

THOSE WHO ARE UNMARRIED AND THE WIDOWS

‘To the unmarried and the widows, I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.’ 1 Corinthians 7:8-9

Here are two categories of people who have been formerly married, ‘agamos’, one is free by death, the other, ‘gamos’, is free by divorce. Paul’s counsel has already been said in 1 Corinthians 7:1, ‘it’s better not to marry’. Now he tells these people who were formerly married, but now are free by death or by divorce, that they shouldn’t get married. He says it’s ‘good’ for them to stay unmarried. Again, this is because of the present crisis that is going on in the first century, 1 Corinthians 7:26.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning whether Paul was married previously, 1 Corinthians 7:8.

‘Paul evidently was not a married man when he wrote this epistle, 1 Corinthians 7:8. 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.’ Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is supposed that the apostle speaks here of men who had been married, in the word ἀγαμοί, (unmarried), but were now widowers; as he does of women who had been married, in the word χηραι, (widow), but were now widows. And when he says ὡςκαγὼ, ‘even as I’, he means that he himself was a widower; for several of the ancients rank Paul among the married apostles.’

Who is the person who has the greatest struggle with sexual sin? It’s the widow, ‘chera’. It’s the man who has experienced it; if a man has experienced sex, it’s harder for him to turn it down than a man who has never had it, 1 Corinthians 7:9.

Here you have a widow, and here you have a divorced person; they are both used to having their sexual needs met, and now, because of death or divorce, those needs aren’t being met.

Paul says it’s good for them, because of what is happening in our culture right now, the current crisis, that they don’t get married, ‘but if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.’ 1 Corinthians 7:9.

Keener, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Burning’ was a very common description of unfulfilled passion in Greek and Roman literature.’

I don’t think Paul is talking about people who have never been married and people who have been married and lost their mate by death. He’s talking about both categories that have experienced sexual fulfilment.

He says to the person who was formerly married, ‘gamos’, but now is unmarried, ‘agamos’, the person who is divorced and the person who has lost their mate by death. If they can’t control themselves, if they need their sexual needs met, get married!

That’s a pretty clear command of Scripture to divorced individuals to remarry. He didn’t say anything about the reason why, he didn’t ask if it was a valid, a ‘scriptural divorce’, he said if they’re divorced, get married to meet their sexual desires if they need to.

Remember that this was written against a backdrop in which Paul said it would be better to remain single. It would be better not to get married, but if their needs must be fulfilled, if it’s tempting them to commit sin sexually that God doesn’t want them to commit, then get married to meet those needs legitimately.

Paul says that he counsels younger widows to get married, not to be put on the church roll, but to get married. Here, he says it’s because of the present crisis, 1 Corinthians 7:26.

Years later, evidently, when that crisis has passed, he says, ‘I teach younger widows to get married’ in a discussion he has on widows there in 1 Timothy 5:14.

I believe that the grace of Jesus Christ that saves the soul also saves the body from a lifetime of frustration and anxiety. In Matthew 19:1-9, Jesus isn't dealing with divorce; He's dealing with 'abandonment'.

He says if a man 'abandons' his wife and goes out and marries somebody else when he is not legally divorced from his first wife, then he commits adultery when he marries.

If she has been abandoned and has no legal divorce, 'apostasion', and she marries somebody else, then they commit adultery. That doesn't apply when there has been a death or when there has been a legal divorce.

That's why Paul can say here to divorced people, as well as widows, get married if you must. Paul doesn't contradict Jesus' words; those two passages of Scripture fit perfectly together.

What is his counsel to the formerly married? Should they remarry? Paul says it would be better to remain single because of what's happening in their culture, but to avoid sexual sin, go ahead and get married.

CHRISTIANS WHO ARE MARRIED

'To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not DIVORCE his wife.' 1 Corinthians 7:10-11

What are the alternatives for those who are married? This falls into two categories that we need to observe here. In 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, he's going to be dealing with two Christians who are married.

The married couples who were both Christians were thinking, they are both Christians now, they both have come to believe in Jesus, but when they first got married, no one told them it was a permanent deal. No one told them they couldn't just slip in and out of it whenever they wanted to.

They didn't understand God's laws, they are now asking if they could get a divorce and hunt around until they find somebody that they are really sure that they want to spend the rest of their life with. Paul addresses these questions in this section.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'The Lord Jesus Christ gave instruction concerning what believers are to do in marriage when He taught during His earthly ministry, Matthew 5:27-32 / Matthew 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 when Paul appealed directly to Jesus' teachings, 1 Corinthians 9:14 / 1 Corinthians 11:23 / 1 Timothy 5:18.'

It's here we come to some difficulty in understanding, the two words used by Jesus, 'apoluo', which is practical divorce, send away or abandonment, where you didn't live with them anymore, and 'apostasion', which was a certificate of divorce, which was the official document granting a divorce, Matthew 5:31-32.

Those two words don't occur in this chapter. If you're using the N.I.V., you will find the word 'divorce' used many times, but neither of the two words that Jesus uses is used in this chapter. He uses different words, so we're going to have to try and figure some things out and see if we can come up with a consistent interpretation.

When Paul says, 'to the married, 'gamos', I give this command, not I but the Lord,' 1 Corinthians 7:10, he is addressing a situation that Jesus addressed back in Matthew 19:1-9.

When Jesus spoke in Matthew 19, He was speaking where both people were part of a covenant relationship with God because He was speaking to Jews, and all Jews were in a covenant relationship with God; both the husband and the wife would have both belonged to God.

Now, as Christians, both belong to God as part of the covenant. So, what are our options? ‘A wife mustn’t separate from her husband’, 1 Corinthians 7:10. The word for ‘separate’ here is the very same word that Jesus used when He said, ‘what God has joined together, let not man separate’, Matthew 19:6. It means, ‘to divide’, it gives us the idea of divorce. He says a wife mustn’t separate from her husband; if she does, she has to remain unmarried, ‘agamos’ or her other option is to be reconciled to her husband.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following extracts will prove that the law among the Jews was very loose relative to the firmness of the marriage bond.

‘A woman might put away or depart from her husband by giving this simple reason to the elders, who would give the following certificate. “In ____ day of ____ week, of ____ year, A., daughter of B., put away before us and said: My mother, or my brethren, deceived me, and wedded me or betrothed me, when I was a very young maid, to C., son of D.; but I now reveal my mind before you, that I will not have him.’

Notice Paul also says that ‘a husband mustn’t divorce’ his wife,’ 1 Corinthians 7:11 / Deuteronomy 24:1. The word he uses here is ‘aphiemi’, and it means ‘to send from’, ‘to send forth’. It’s like the word ‘apoluo’, which meant, ‘to lose from’, which gave us the idea of abandonment, Matthew 5:31-32.

This word ‘aphiemi’ means to ‘send from’, ‘to send away’. Paul is dealing here with the same issue of a practical divorce rather than a legal divorce, that is a husband mustn’t abandon his wife and go off and leave her.

Unfortunately, he doesn’t deal with the issue of what if they do? What if a wife does separate from her husband and marries someone else? What if a husband divorces his wife? What happens if he marries again? That issue isn’t addressed by Paul.

Just like Jesus, Paul is giving us the ideal here; he’s telling us what it is because they are both Christians. He’s giving them the ideal that they are to strive for permanency in their marriage relationship; divorce isn’t to be an option. Christians should never consider that as an alternative; they should never think that if they can’t get along, they’ll just get a divorce.

Paul is saying that where you have both believers in a marriage relationship, divorce should never be considered as an option. He is not even going to talk about it because they are to remain together, that is what they’re to work on, and that is what they’re to strive for.

WHAT IF DIVORCE DOES HAPPEN?

I think Jesus’ counsel comes in in these cases, where Jesus says, if divorce does take place, it must be a legal divorce. They can’t just put her away; they can’t just abandon her. They have to make it legal, Matthew 5:31-32, but that’s not what God wants, Matthew 19:4-6.

God wants unity; He wants that picture of Jesus and the church reflected in their marriage. Divorce is not to be a consideration; it’s not to be an option for married couples. He said that mustn’t happen, but if it does happen, make it legal, and give them the certificate of divorce.

THOSE WHO ARE MARRIED TO AN UNBELIEVER

‘To the rest I say—I and not the Lord—that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case, the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you. Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife.’ 1 Corinthians 7:12-16

In this next section, Paul is going to deal with a marriage where one is a Christian and one isn’t. That’s ‘the rest’, a believer married to an unbeliever. We can imagine some Christians who were married to unbelievers thinking they have to get rid of their unsaved partner because if they are married to a non-believer, they have the devil in their house, they have sin in their life and have to get rid of their unbelieving mate.

Here is a situation where it is a little different, Paul says, ‘to the rest I say—I and not the Lord,’ 1 Corinthians 7:12. Now the Lord never addressed a mixed marriage, He never addressed the issue where one was a member of the church and the other wasn’t, or where one was in the covenant and the other wasn’t because Jesus only spoke with the Jews. He worked among the Jews and with the Jews; everybody was under God’s covenant.

The Gospel had gone outside of Palestine and gone into a Gentile world, and some people heard the Gospel, and they have responded, and their mate hasn’t. What are we to do in a situation like that?

Well, ‘to the rest’, if a brother has a wife who isn’t a believer and she is willing to live with him, he mustn’t ‘divorce’ ‘aphiemi’ ‘put her away’, 1 Corinthians 7:12. And, if a woman has a husband who isn’t a believer and he’s willing to live with her, she mustn’t ‘divorce’ ‘aphiemi’ him, ‘put him away’, 1 Corinthians 7:13.

Paul says if Christians are married to an unbeliever, then they should still live with them. God recognises that marriage is not an invalid marriage because their mate didn’t become a Christian.

That doesn’t mean they are saved; that isn’t what the word ‘sanctified’ means in 1 Corinthians 7:14. He means that the relationship is acceptable to God, the marriage is a sanctified marriage, it’s endorsed, it’s accepted by God. Otherwise, he said, ‘your children would be unclean’, 1 Corinthians 7:14. The Greek word for unclean is ‘akathartos’, which means impure. What does Paul mean by that? He simply means they are illegitimate.

They are thinking that if they’re married to an unbeliever, God mustn’t recognise their marriage. Paul says, if that’s true, then their kids are illegitimate, but ‘as it is, they are holy’, 1 Corinthians 7:14.

They had to recognise that if they were married to an unbeliever and they became a Christian, God still accepts their marriage. The Christian must accept them; they should go on in that marriage and not try to get out of it.

What happens if the unbeliever doesn’t like that marriage? What if the unbeliever doesn’t like the fact that their other half has become converted to Jesus Christ?

They don’t like their husband or wife’s godliness, their holiness, or the fact that they won’t engage in the things that they used to engage in anymore. What happens then?

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 7:15 that if the unbelieving partner decides to terminate the marriage, they can terminate it. We have already seen that Christians, people who are in a covenant relationship with God, should never desire to divorce; divorce isn’t to be an option.

Neither a practical divorce in abandonment nor a legal divorce in the courts is to be considered as an option for Christians; they are to maintain the ideal. In a mixed marriage, the Christian is still to maintain the ideal.

But the unbeliever isn’t under God’s laws, they aren’t a Christian, and therefore they are not bound by God’s marital laws. If they want to terminate the relationship, Paul says, let them do so; there isn’t anything anyone can do to stop that. In that case, the Christians aren’t bound, 1 Corinthians 7:15.

If you aren't bound, that means you are free. Right? If you are free, you can remarry; if you can't remarry, you're not free, you're still bound. Paul says the Christians aren't bound; if they're not bound, we assume they are free; they wouldn't be free if they couldn't remarry.

Look at what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:16, 'How do you know, wife, if you will save your husband or not? How do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?' N.I.V.

I personally believe that many have interpreted those questions exactly the reverse of the way that Paul meant them. Many have always said, 'if the unbeliever leaves, they go out, they're not bound to meet their needs sexually or bed and board, but they're still, in the eyes of God, married to them. After all, if they just hang in there, they might convert them.'

Paul is saying, they don't have to hang on to it because they don't know that they will convert them, they don't know that they will come to Jesus Christ or yield their life to Him as Lord, 1 Peter 3:1, so they don't have to persistently hold on to a relationship that the unbeliever wants to terminate.

If the unbeliever says, they've had it, and they're getting out of this relationship, and they terminate it, then God says that it is terminated. They aren't bound; they're free. If they are free, then I believe they are free to remarry.

If that isn't true, then I wonder why Paul gave this piece of counsel, why he didn't just repeat 1 Corinthians 7:11?

Why did he not say, in that case, then their options are to remain unmarried or be reconciled to their mate?

He didn't say that, he said they aren't bound, they don't know that Christian will save them, they don't know that the Christian will ever bring the unbeliever into the faith, 1 Corinthians 7:16, so if they want to go, if they want to dissolve it, let them go, the Christian isn't bound.

Over in Romans, Paul uses the illustration that says a woman is bound to her husband in marriage for life, Romans 7:2. Notice, he doesn't deal with the case of divorce; he's using the illustration of the ideal, but he talks about marriage as bondage. They were bound in their marriage, but here in Corinthians, Paul says if the unbeliever departs, the Christian isn't bound.

THOSE WHO WERE JEWS AND GENTILES

'However, that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches. Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything. Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called.' 1 Corinthians 7:17-20

Here, Paul addresses an issue that is closely related to what we have just mentioned: Does salvation change their marital condition? Paul has already addressed that basically and said 'no', but now he addresses it by way of illustration.

Paul's only point in this is that whatever your marital condition was when you were converted to Christianity, remain in it, 1 Corinthians 7:17. He has just been discussing this issue of being married to an unbeliever, should I get out of it? The emphasis in these illustrations is 'no', don't get out of it.

Was someone circumcised or uncircumcised when they became a Christian? 1 Corinthians 7:18. Many Jewish men were already circumcised when they became Christians, but they don't need to become uncircumcised. Many Gentiles weren't circumcised when they became Christians, but they don't have to become circumcised.

Keener, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The idea of becoming uncircumcised after one has been circumcised seems strange, but some Jews 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.’

In other words, those who were Jews don’t need to change the fact that they were Jews, and those who were Gentiles don’t need to change the fact that they were Gentiles, [Romans 2:27](#) / [Romans 2:29](#) / [Galatians 3:28](#) / [Galatians 5:6](#) / [Galatians 6:15](#) / [Colossians 3:11](#).

What is important as a Christian is not changing one’s marital situation, but obeying the will of God, [1 Corinthians 7:19](#) / [John 14:15](#) / [John 15:14](#) / [1 John 2:3](#) / [1 John 3:24](#) / [1 John 5:2](#). They must remain in the condition, the situation in which they were when they were called to Christianity, [1 Corinthians 7:20](#).

SLAVES

‘Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever. For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters. In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God.’ [1 Corinthians 7:21-24](#)

Was someone a slave when they became a Christian? [1 Corinthians 7:21](#). They can remain a slave and become a Christian slave; that’s a relationship, there’s a man attached to another man, they are a slave.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning [1 Corinthians 7:22-23](#).

‘Paul’s thought returned to the Cross again, [1 Corinthians 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 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. This applies to physical and spiritual bondage.’

If one person is a Christian and the other isn’t, they are an unbeliever, should the Christian try and get out of the marriage? No, each man is responsible to God; they should remain in the situation they were in when God called him, [1 Corinthians 7:24](#) / [1 Corinthians 7:17](#) / [1 Corinthians 7:20](#).

Because they are married to an unbeliever doesn’t mean the Christian has to terminate the relationship to be acceptable to God. This is written in the context of [1 Corinthians 7:12-16](#).

He is simply saying that Christians need to remain in that situation, and they should make a go of that marriage. Divorce isn’t to be an option for a Christian; they can serve God, even with a mate who isn’t a believer.

THOSE WHO ARE VIRGINS

‘Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy. I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that. I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried

woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord. so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord.’ 1 Corinthians 7:25-35

Paul now goes on to deal with another issue: should the virgin, that is, those who have never been married, marry? 1 Corinthians 7:25. Remember I’ve pointed out before and tried to demonstrate that an unmarried woman is different from a virgin, ‘parthenos’.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning the virgins.

‘The ‘virgins’, ‘parthenos’, were a group within the ‘unmarried’, ‘agamos’ of 1 Corinthians 7:8.’

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the word virgin.

‘It is evident that the word in this place means young unmarried persons of either sex, as appears from 1 Corinthians 7:26 / 1 Corinthians 7:27 / 1 Corinthians 7:32-34, and from Revelation 14:4.’

Paul says it would be all right to get married, but singleness would be better because of the present crisis, 1 Corinthians 7:26. We don’t know what ‘the crisis’ was that was present at that time, but there was some kind of critical situation that was causing Paul to think it would be better for virgins not to get married right now, because that is going to come in and put pressure on them.

There will be family pressure. If someone would come in and torture their family or their wife, they would be willing to renounce, they would be willing to give up on Jesus to get them out of that torture, to get them out of that difficult situation.

Paul says, because of the present crisis, I think that it’s good for them to remain as they are. He says this for their own good and not to restrict them, 1 Corinthians 7:27-35. He’s not trying to tell them that you have to be celibate; he’s not trying to tell them that they cannot get married; he’s telling them it makes sense.

Right now, if they are unmarried, they can give devotion to the Lord. They can think about how to please Him, and when the pressure is on, whatever this crisis is, they would be able to give their attention to the Lord and keep themselves from apostatising.

But if they get married, they are going to devote their attention to the world. They’ve got to meet the needs of their mate. What will it take to please them? What would it take to make them happy? They would have divided allegiance, 1 Corinthians 7:29-33.

Paul didn’t say it was wrong to have that kind of divided allegiance because God created marriage. But they can’t give 100% focus to pleasing the Lord, and that mate becomes a problem when persecution comes on. It would be better if they kept themselves in a single state so their family could not be used against them.

Paul also tells them that because of the intimate relationship between two people in marriage, there’ll be problems there, 1 Corinthians 7:34-35. He tells them that those who marry will face many troubles in this life; he says, he would spare them that.

There’s enough persecution and enough problems being a Christian in this ungodly society that is seeking to persecute the church, without compounding that with the problems that come when they get into marriage.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul counselled, not commanded, single women to remain unmarried for three reasons: the present difficult time for Christians, 1 Corinthians 7:26-28, the imminent return of Christ, 1 Corinthians 7:29-31, and the opportunity to serve Christ undistracted, 1 Corinthians 7:32-35. Nevertheless, single women have the freedom to choose whether they want to get married, as do single men. Yet the realities of life in Christ that Paul outlined in this pericope need to inform that decision.’

THOSE WHO ARE ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED

‘If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his fiancée if his passions are strong, and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let them marry. But if someone stands firm in his resolve, being under no necessity but having his own desire under control and has determined in his own mind to keep her as his fiancée, he will do well. So then, he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.’ 1 Corinthians 7:36-38

The next question is simply this: Should an engaged man break off the engagement? Or if you have the King James translation, the question would be, should fathers impose lasting virginity on their daughters? 1 Corinthians 7:36-38. In this context, it’s unclear what Paul is talking about. Is he talking about a man who wants to give his daughter in marriage or is he talking about a man who wants to take a daughter in marriage? We aren’t sure how to translate it.

Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Roman and Greek fathers had the control of the marriage of their daughters.’

I believe Paul is saying if a young man and a young girl are engaged and they have been engaged for a while and the girl is getting along in years, I mean, she is sixteen or seventeen or maybe eighteen years old by now. Remember that they did marry pretty early back then, and that would be getting on in years.

Paul says if they are under compulsion and the young man is having a hard time controlling his will, what does he mean? 1 Corinthians 7:36. It’s better not to marry because of the present crisis, but the compulsion is his sex drive. So, if he is under compulsion, then go ahead and get married; they aren’t sinning, 1 Corinthians 7:36. They are just not doing what is best because of the present crisis, but it’s all right to get married.

If they decide not to get married, if he has control over himself, and he says it’s no big deal, he can handle that and stay single; that’s fine, 1 Corinthians 7:37. Then he who marries the virgin does right, and he who doesn’t marry her does even better, 1 Corinthians 7:38. Why does he do better? Because of the present crisis.

WIDOWS REMARRYING

‘A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my judgment, she is more blessed if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.’ 1 Corinthians 7:39-40

Should widows remarry? I think they are wondering if two people have been married and one of them dies, are they still married to that person? Some were thinking the widow can’t marry anyone else because they’re still married to that person; they can’t go out and marry anybody else.

Paul says that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives and no longer, that’s his point, 1 Corinthians 7:29. Anyone who argues that widows took that individual and married him, and when he died, they’re still married to him, and they can’t marry someone else, they thought this was wrong. Jesus says otherwise in Luke 20:27-40. If a husband dies, the widow is free to marry anyone she wishes.

Paul didn’t believe that marriage went on through death; he didn’t believe that death maintained the marriage relationship. He believed that death terminated the marriage relationship and, therefore, a woman was free to remarry; evidently, people were saying they weren’t.

The interesting and difficult phrase is this: ‘She is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord,’ 1 Corinthians 7:39. That is an interpretive translation.

In other words, that isn't a literal word-for-word translation. That's an attempt to translate what the translators believe the idea means, and you have to do that at times.

If the Bible were given a literal word-for-word translation all the way through, it wouldn't make sense. Anyone who has studied a second language knows you can't give a literal translation all the time. Here, the translators are trying to capture what they feel the idea is here.

ONLY IN THE LORD

In the Greek text, it says, 'that a woman is free to marry anyone she wishes to marry only in the Lord', 1 Corinthians 7:39. Now, what does 'only in the Lord' mean? Does it mean that the person she marries must be a Christian?

That is certainly one alternative. I think the way to figure this out is to look at the phrase 'only in the Lord' every time it occurs in the Bible; it only occurs three times.

The phrase is found in Ephesians 7:1. Does that mean that if children have Christian parents, they have to obey them, and if they don't have Christian parents, they don't have to obey them? No.

I think it means that children are to obey their parents in the sphere of the Lord's authority. They have to obey their parents the way the Lord says to obey their parents. 'In the Lord' means in the way that the Lord guides them, in the way the Lord teaches them, in a way that shows they are in submission to the Lord.

The phrase is found in Colossians 3:18. Does that mean that if her husband is a Christian, the wife has to submit to him, but if her husband is not a Christian, the wife doesn't have to submit to him? No.

Paul's counsel is to the wives, wives are to submit to their husbands. How? In the Lord, in the way, the Lord would have them do it. Submit to him in the way the Lord leads him to submit to Him, not in the world's concept, but in Jesus' concept. Wives are to submit to their husbands in a way that is pleasing and acceptable to the Lord. 'In the Lord' signifies a realm of authority.

Widows may marry anyone they wish, only 'in the Lord'. What does that mean? If it means that she is free to marry, but he has to be a Christian, then I wonder why Paul doesn't lay down that same stipulation for the divorced person.

Why doesn't he lay down the same stipulation for a virgin? Why is it that only for a widow would he say that they have to marry a Christian? I can't find any reason to hold on to that point of view.

I'm not saying that isn't the best thing to do; I'm simply saying that I don't believe the text mandates that. In that society where a woman had no rights, one of the worst things that could happen would be for her to become an old woman who had no husband.

Now, a virgin will be taken care of by her father, but a divorced woman who is younger stands a chance of remarrying. But a widow, a woman who is up in years, who has no respect in the community, who has no rights, who can't go out and get a job, she is at the mercy of whatever.

The first guy that comes along and proposes to her may take advantage of her; she isn't to just pursue that immediately. If she gets remarried, she needs to do it in a way that will honour the Lord.

Remember the purpose of marriage? Matthew 19:6. Remember what it is that God wants them to get out of a marriage and do it in a way that pleases the Lord.

I think this is a provision for the elderly woman to keep her in a state of panic, from just marrying the first thing that comes down the road. The pressure would be on her; it wouldn't be on other people who were in a position of getting married.

Paul says, in his judgment, that he thinks a widow would be happier if she stays as she is, 1 Corinthians 7:40. That's interesting because later in 1 Timothy 5:14, Paul will say, 'I counsel younger widows to get married'.

They would be in the same stage as the virgin or the young divorcee. There would be opportunities for them, the older ones don't have to, in fact, here he counsels them to just go ahead and stay single and serve the Lord and give the Lord their undivided attention, and then he says, I think 'I have the Spirit of God'. Paul believes he's giving them the judgment that God wants them to know on this matter.

SUMMARY

In Matthew 5:21-32 and Matthew 19:1-9, Jesus deals with the problem of 'abandonment'. He says, 'If a man puts away 'apoluo' his wife, 'if he abandons her,' he must give her a certificate of divorcement 'apostasion'.'

The man must make it legal. If he puts her away, but he does not make it legal, and she marries somebody else, she is committing adultery. If he marries another woman without having put her away legally, he commits adultery. There must be a legal, official termination of the marriage for there to be freedom to remarry.

Paul comes along and says in 1 Corinthians 7:1-7 that it would be better to stay unmarried for several reasons. In the present crisis, they can give devotion to the Lord, which will keep them from getting trapped in a relationship with an unbeliever who would make it difficult for them to function properly.

But he says if the pressure is there, the sexual, emotional and psychological needs are there to be fulfilled, and they must have them fulfilled, and he says to get married.

In 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, he tells the divorced and the widows that they can get married; he tells the virgin in 1 Corinthians 7:25-35 that they can get married. He tells the man who is engaged to the virgin that he can get married, that may not be the best thing to do because of the present crisis, but they can do it and do it in a way that will honour God, have a marriage that will uphold His ideals.

Then he says that where both are believers, they mustn't contemplate divorce; they must do all they can to maintain that marriage. If they are married to an unbeliever, if they become converted after they are married, they are to maintain that marriage because it's an acceptable marriage to God.

If the unbeliever terminates it, it's terminated; it wasn't what they wanted. They didn't pursue it, they didn't ask for it, and they terminated it. Therefore, they aren't bound in such circumstances.

The Christian has an ideal to uphold. The Christian looks to save the marriage, strengthen the marriage, and make the marriage last. But sometimes it happens, and Jesus gives the guidelines for what to do when it does happen.

CONCLUSION

The lesson we learn from this chapter is that fornication is sinful, those who lack self-control must marry, perform their sexual duties toward their mates and let it be the guide as to whether one is 're-married.' The second lesson we learn from 1 Corinthians 7 is the fact that God's marriage bond is intended to remain unbroken, Genesis 2:24.

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION

The letter that the Corinthian brethren composed not only had questions about marriage, 1 Corinthians 7:1, but also about ‘things sacrificed to idols.’ Much of the confusion over what to eat and what not to eat stemmed from the mingling of Old Testament and New Testament teaching, Mark 7:14-23.

A principle that continues in the New Testament is the regulations regarding the eating of blood. Moses had commanded that blood not be eaten, Leviticus 17:10-11, and so the Law of Christ demands the same, Acts 15:20 / Acts 15:29. If one were to read Revelation on eating meats sacrificed to idols the conclusion would be that it is sinful to do Revelation 2:14 / Revelation 2:20.

Again, at the Jerusalem conference, the apostles and elders of Jerusalem wrote, ‘It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things,’ Acts 15:28-29.

Pagan priests sacrificed animals to their respective deities just as the Jews sacrificed to God. The meat from the sacrifices was not wasted but oftentimes sold in the markets.

The question this chapter deals with is this: Is it sinful for a Christian to eat meat sacrificed to idols? Secondly, would it be sinful to enter an idol’s temple and eat the meat within?

While looking at the teaching of Acts 15 and Revelation 2, one would conclude that anyone eating meat sacrificed to idols would be in sin. Yet Paul states in 1 Corinthians 8 and 1 Corinthians 10 that eating meat sacrificed to idols is not a sin so long as one does not violate their conscience, Romans 14:15.

The study will indicate that it is not man’s conscience that must be met but rather God’s will. God’s will is that idols are nothing, and therefore, eating meat sacrificed to a nothing god means nothing, unless you believe that it does. God’s law reigns supreme; however, man’s conscience also is to be considered.

The rule appears to be that one’s conscience on a given subject equates to law so long as that conscience act does not cause him to violate the standard of God’s will. Matters of incidents, personal judgment, and expediency are ok so long as they do not violate God’s laws.

EATING OF MEATS SACRIFICED TO IDOLS

“Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that “We all possess knowledge.” But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. But whoever loves God is known by God. So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “There is no God but one.” 1 Corinthians 8:1-4

1. About things sacrificed, concerning food offered to idols.

The Corinthians had raised this question in 1 Corinthians 7:1. It was one of the ‘matters about which you wrote’, Paul seems to be quoting statements made in their letter.

The knowledge in Greek is ‘gnosis’, 1 Corinthians 8:2, was in the realm of knowing that there is really only one true God and that an idol was really non-existent, 1 Corinthians 8:4.

Every true Christian believes in one true God; however, some have a greater understanding of the one true God than others. Such abilities could lead the intelligent, informed brother to be arrogant and lack love.

The arrogant with knowledge looked down upon the lesser informed brother rather than lovingly ‘building’ the brother, 1 Corinthians 8:1. The word ‘build’, in Greek, is ‘oikodomeo’ and it means to ‘build a house, metaphorically, to build up.’ One who does not love, ‘agape’, is one who tears down rather than builds up and strengthens others. An important thing to note here is that Paul uses the phrase, ‘concerning things sacrificed to idols’, two times, 1 Corinthians 8:1a and 8:4a. Sandwiched between these two statements are instructions regarding a man not knowing what he thinks he knows.

The brother who believes he has wisdom and knowledge regarding eating things sacrificed to idols really ‘knows not yet as he ought to know,’ 1 Corinthians 8:2. The point is that some people think they know things, yet they really don’t. When we compare the statements before us with 1 Corinthians 8:7, it is apparent that though all men thought they had knowledge, they really didn’t.

Today, most brethren would consider themselves the ‘strong brother’ of 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14; however, many of these brothers are telling us that it is sinful to eat at restaurants and buy products from companies that support sinful things.

Their convictions have gotten the better of them, and though they believe themselves to be spiritually strong, they are spiritually weak because they let their conscience deem what is right rather than God’s standard.

If God knows me and I know God, I am obviously in spiritual fellowship with the Father, 1 Corinthians 8:3 / 1 Corinthians 2:10 / Matthew 11:27. Spiritual matters are important to me; to be known of God is to be in fellowship with God, 1 John 1:3-7. To be known of God is to follow the commandments of God, 1 John 5:3.

To be known of God is to have God in us, dwelling in us in that we are one with God in purpose through His commandments, John 17:21-23 / 1 John 4:4. To be known of God is to be able to differentiate, by use of the word of God, the spirit of error and the spirit of truth, 1 John 4:6.

Barrett, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If a man loves God, this is a sign that God has taken the initiative.’

Apparently, Paul speaks of an attitude in this verse. The one with true knowledge and wisdom is the one who will understand truths and apply these truths with love toward self and others. Questions will be solved in this man’s mind by saying, ‘What do the Scriptures say?’

Here is the completion of the ‘eating meets sacrificed to idols’ sandwich. Before Paul discusses the right or wrong of the question, he prefaces his argument with three facts.

- a. Not all brethren know what they ought to know, even though they think they know.
- b. Love of each other and of God should govern all my decisions.
- c. I should be spiritually minded about all questions before me.

Now Paul is ready to answer the question of whether or not eating meat sacrificed to idols in the temple of idols is wrong. Among the Christians, there is a common knowledge that an idol is not really anything and that God reigns supreme as the one true God, 1 Corinthians 8:4 / Deuteronomy 6:4.

The prophet Isaiah pointedly stated that an idol is an object made by the hands of man, carried by the hands of man, and worshipped by the hands of man. They know nothing, see nothing, understand nothing, and say nothing because they are nothing but an image carved out of mindless stone, clay or metal, Isaiah 44-46. Regarding God, Isaiah

records, ‘Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is none else, I am God, and there is none like me,’ Isaiah 46:9.

Paul’s point is that every Christian believes the fact that there is really only one true God. This is the foundation of his argument! When referring to such matters, the pagan Corinthians would speak of ‘hierothuton’, which means ‘sacrifices for sacred purposes’, 1 Corinthians 8:1-4. The Christians would have used another term altogether to describe this ‘eidoloth uton’, that is, ‘sacrifices to idols’.

1. The situation in the city of Corinth.

A pagan city, and therefore impossible to live without becoming aware of the extent to which paganism affected and influenced every aspect of life, not only religious life, but social and economic life as well.

a. When a man took up a trade or a profession or went to a social function, or celebrated a family occasion, paganism entered, in one way or another.

b. Social meals were a demonstration of paganism.

The Greeks placed far more emphasis on social life than we do today. Far more often than most of us have appreciated, friends and neighbours met together for a communal meal, and it was a common everyday occurrence for someone to receive an invitation to such a meal. Invitation cards to a meal have been found in the Temple.

But before or after such a meal, there was certain to be a pagan ritual in which part of the meal would be offered symbolically to one or other of the pagan gods, when a portion of the food and drink would be placed on the family altar, and the guests would be expected to take part in this ceremony.

The reason for it lay in the belief, held by the ancient Greeks, that the world is full of evil spirits, which are always lurking and waiting to enter into a man in order to take possession of him.

They believed that one of the commonest ways in which evil spirits gained entry into them was through the food they ate. The spirits, they said, settled on the food, so that when one ate it, they entered the body.

But there was a safeguard which they could adopt, and that was for them to dedicate the food to one or other of the gods, and that would keep out the bad spirits. This is why, before an animal was slaughtered in ancient Greece, it was first dedicated to the gods, and that was supposed to keep it untainted.

Sacrifices were made to the idols in the pagan temple. As in other Greek cities, priests of the pagan religions received a large share of the sacrifice for themselves and, because they were unable to use all of it, they passed it on to dealers who sold it in the shambles, in the market.

Even the more devout or superstitious of the Pagans would not under any circumstances buy the meat, so with so little demand for it, it was sold cheaply. So a Christian might either buy it for himself because it did not worry him, or he might eat it in the home of a friend, knowing where it had come from, or he might even be offered it in a meal without being aware of where it came from.

How does Paul deal with the problem? For some, all this constituted no problem at all. These mature Christians, like the prophets of the Old Testament, knew that an idol was just so much carved wood, chiselled stone, cast metal. The fact that the heathen called the work of their own hands, their gods, didn’t make them gods.

They were still pieces of wood or stone or lumps of metal. They had no power at all. Not only did the idols lack the power of God, but they also had less power than the men who created them, because they could ‘neither see nor speak or do anything’, as the prophets pointed out, Psalms 115:4-8.

Therefore, although the pagan worshippers offered a piece of meat as a supposed sacrifice to one of these carved trees, or images, it remained just ordinary meat, and if these Christians were offered a nice roast, they could eat it without any problem. In other words, without any qualms of conscience.

“For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live”. 1 Corinthians 8:5-6

Note that Paul included ‘all’ Christians in 1 Corinthians 8:1 / 1 Corinthians 8:4 / 1 Corinthians 8:6. All Christians understand this and by faith believe it. Though the pagans had a deity for many earthly things, such as the moon, stars, sun, wind, sea, etc., there is in all reality only one true God, 1 Corinthians 8:5-6.

This one true God is the creator of all things, Psalms 33:6-9 / Psalms 148:4-5 / Isaiah 45:18. God created all things with or by Jesus Christ. Jesus was the agency in which creation occurred, John 1:1-3 / Colossians 1:16 / Hebrews 1:2. Finally, Paul states that ‘we’, that is, Christians, are ‘unto him and through him,’ 1 Corinthians 8:6. Christians are ‘unto’ Christ in that we are servants of the Lord. Christians are ‘through’ Christ in that we are redeemed by Christ. Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Father is the source and goal of all things, whereas the Son is the agent through whom all things have come from God and will return to God. Since Paul’s point was the unity of the Godhead, there was no need to complicate matters by referring to the Holy Spirit here.’

“But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food, they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.” 1 Corinthians 8:7-8

Paul has said that ‘we all have knowledge’, 1 Corinthians 8:1, yet now says, ‘not everyone possesses this knowledge,’ 1 Corinthians 8:7. The first appearance seems to be a contradiction; however, one must understand the context of this series of verses.

Remember, the Corinthians are asking, ‘Is it lawful for me to eat meat sacrificed to idols?’ Such a question reveals the fact that not all really had a true knowledge of the one true God.

Some Christians were ‘used until now to the idol’, in Greek that is, ‘sunetheia eos apti’ which means ‘habitual intercourse, acquaintance, society, intimacy. Habit, custom.’ Many Christians had lived in a society where multitudes of deities were worshipped and accepted as real, Acts 17:16.

By habit and society, they too had come to know other deities. Their conversion to Christianity was a complete 180-degree turn from where they were, i.e., not sure or even believing in idols.

These brethren’s newfound zeal obviously caused their conscience to be bothered if told they were permitted to continue to eat the meat sacrificed to these idols in their temples.

They were convicted of the wrong and wanted no part of this now. They would have their ‘weak conscience defiled’ if they ate meat sacrificed to idols, 1 Corinthians 8:7.

The ‘conscience’, ‘suneidesis’, is ‘a consciousness that cannot come to a decision or a conscience of guilt’. The conscience is ‘with knowledge’, ‘awareness’. The conscience of a man determines the right or wrongness of an activity, 2 Corinthians 4:2.

The word ‘weak’, in Greek, is ‘asthenes’, and it means ‘without strength, weak, feeble, weakly, too weak to bear labour’. The word ‘defiled’, in Greek, is ‘moluno’, and it means ‘to stain’.

To understand what it means to be defiled, we must turn to the Old Testament. God’s people were defiled when conducting themselves in sin, Ezekiel 36:17 / Ezekiel 37:23 / Hosea 5:3.

Here were some whose awareness of the reality of the one true God was feeble and thereby corrupted by entering an idol temple to eat meat sacrificed to that idol. Those Christians who were socially and habitually attached to pagan deities defiled and sinned against their knowledge of what was right and wrong to do.

Again, the question is, can we eat meat sacrificed to idols in the temple of idols? Apparently, this question was a source of contention among the brethren. Some believed it to be a sin, others did not.

Paul thereby gives divine instruction regarding the matter. All who are spiritually minded will have the same approach to any question. What is God's will?

The words 'bring us near', 1 Corinthians 8:8, in Greek is 'paristemi', and it means 'to set before the mind, present, offer, bring home to the mind, to make good, prove, shew'. Being presented to God in a commendable state is not contingent upon whether I eat certain foods or not.

Paul said that 'the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,' Romans 14:17. Eating was a liberty, as was circumcision, 1 Corinthians 7:19.

The answer to the question is thereby simple. Yes, it is ok to eat meat sacrificed to idols in the temple of idols because the idol doesn't really exist. The food is the same food before it was sacrificed as after it was sacrificed. The food did not change, and therefore it doesn't matter if you eat it or don't eat it.

Robertson and Plummer, in their commentary, say the following.

'It is the clean heart, and not clean food, that will matter; and the weak brother confounds the two.'

More than this, some of the Christians even joined in the meals held in the courtyards of the heathen temples, perhaps a sort of defiant, brave gesture, showing how little they thought of the idols, 1 Corinthians 8:10.

Perhaps even argue that in this way they would encourage other brethren, 'embolden them' is the expression used, give them the courage to follow their example.

There were, however, other members of the church in Corinth who did not feel like this about the matter, and it is for the sake of these brethren that Paul is making his argument, 1 Corinthians 8:7. He says, 'not everyone feels this way'. In other words, not everyone has reached the stage of maturity when they are able to treat paganism with disdain! He says, 'not everyone has this knowledge', 1 Corinthians 8:7.

There were members of the church converted from heathenism, who had been brought up from childhood to believe in idols, and they were not able to get rid of the lingering feeling that an idol was 'something'.

Notice Paul calls them 'brethren', 1 Corinthians 8:11 / 1 Corinthians 13, because in his heart, that is what they are, but in 1 Corinthians 8:9, Paul describes them as 'the weak'.

In 1 Corinthians 8:10, he speaks of 'the man who is 'weak''. Again, in 1 Corinthians 8:11, he that is weak. 1 Corinthians 8:7 / 1 Corinthians 8:12 says that these brethren have 'weak consciences'.

So, these were undoubtedly brethren who had not matured to this state of understanding or knowledge. Notice how often he speaks of knowing and having knowledge.

'We know that we have all knowledge.' 1 Corinthians 8:1. 'Knowledge puffs up,' 1 Corinthians 8:1. 'If any man thinks that he KNOWS anything he does not yet KNOW as we KNOW.' 1 Corinthians 8:2. 'We KNOW that no idol is anything.' 1 Corinthians 8:4.

And so, if these brethren were to eat such meat, it would really trouble them, and there was nothing they could do about it; they couldn't help it because their untaught consciences told them it was wrong.

This reminds us that conscience alone is not a safe guide. Conscience must be instructed and taught, 1 Corinthians 8:7 / 1 Corinthians 8:12. The very word 'conscience', 'con science', means 'with knowledge'.

It is worth remembering that Paul once claimed, ‘I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day’, Acts 23:1, and there is no doubt that, even when he was persecuting the church, he had a clear conscience! He thought he was doing the will of God. But he was mistaken. He later added, ‘I acted ignorantly and in unbelief’, 1 Timothy 1:13. There was another potential problem. If these ‘weaker brethren’ saw other brethren eating such meat or if they even heard that others were doing it, that could become a serious stumbling block in their way.

There is also another argument, which Paul develops more fully in 1 Corinthians 10, which we might touch on very briefly in this study. Besides these former pagans who were offended when the more enlightened brethren ate meat that they knew had been offered to idols, there were others in the church at Corinth who were affected by the conduct of the ‘mature’ Christians.

These were ex-followers of Judaism, Jews who had been brought up according to the Mosaic Law, and we know how the devout Jew thought and felt about idolatry! These Jewish Christians, who had an intense hatred for idolatry, simply could not regard an idol or anything that reminded them of idolatry as nothing.

The great recurring sin for which God had repeatedly punished His ancient people, as the Old Testament plainly reveals, was the sin of either practising or tolerating the worship and service of idols. This was the sin for which they were sent into captivity in Assyria and Babylon, and the reason why God allowed the destruction of their beloved Jerusalem.

Jewish Christians would point to the fact that God had uttered the sternest of denunciations of idolatry throughout their people’s history, and then they would ask. Would God concern Himself over something that was ‘nothing’?

The decision of the meeting of Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem was that Gentile Christians should be asked to abstain from conduct associated with idols and idol-worship because it offended Jewish Christians, Acts 15:20-29. Notice that, in the chapter we are looking at, Paul does not deal with the question concerning whether an idol is truly nothing or something but he does raise it again in 1 Corinthians 10, where he presents the argument that, although the idol itself may be just wood or stone or metal that has no spiritual power, evil spirits and demons certainly exist, and it is the powers of evil which lead men into the worship of idols.

However, for the moment, the argument that Paul makes is this: even if a thing is harmless to you if it harms your brother, something more important than knowledge should determine how you behave. Love should take over so that you are led to refrain from doing anything that will affect the spiritual life of your brother and cause him to stumble.

Paul goes even further in this argument. He goes so far as to say that it is possible, by insisting on your liberty as a Christian, that you become guilty of sinning against your brother.

You are ‘sinning against the brethren’, and that is serious enough! But there is something even more appalling. ‘In sinning against the brethren, you are sinning against Christ,’ 1 Corinthians 8:11-12.

Clearly, as Christians, although in Christ, we have ‘freedom’ and ‘rights’, we have no right to do anything that will cause harm to another person, Matthew 22:37-39.

And even though we are ‘mature’ and ‘strong in the Faith’ and know that certain things are harmless, innocent and safe our conduct, the way we behave must not be controlled merely by ‘knowledge’ but by ‘love’, the ‘agape’ which is the greatest kind of love, because it ‘seeks the highest good’ of others.

This is an important point: knowledge is not everything. To know what is right is not enough. There will be times when love for the brethren will cause us to say, ‘I know that what I want to do is permissible, because it does not violate any Christian Truth, but for my brother’s sake, I will forego it because it is not worth the risk of losing him.’

A PROPER VIEW TOWARD LIBERTIES

“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol’s temple, won’t that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.” 1 Corinthians 8:9-13

Clearly, the context states that eating meat sacrificed to idols is really not a sinful event for the one who understands that there is truly only one deity, God. How then can we reconcile this with what Paul had been a part of in Acts 15 and John’s commands in Revelation 2?

The thought is truly clear. Eating meat sacrificed to idols was indeed sinful for the one who considered, by social habit, the reality of the idol, 1 Corinthians 10:14-33. Therefore, if and when he partakes of food that had been sacrificed to idols, it defiles his conscience, and to him, it is sinful, Romans 14:23.

A judgment is then to be made regarding one’s consciousness, 1 Corinthians 8:9. A conscious person trained and unencumbered by doubts regarding other deities was at liberty to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Not so with the weak conscience.

Though the matter really was an issue of liberty, Paul warns the informed brother that he, through a lack of love, can be a ‘stumbling block’ to others by exercising his ‘liberties’ at the expense of another’s soul, 1 Corinthians 8:9 / Romans 14:13-23.

Paul had previously said, ‘all things are lawful for me; but not all things are expedient,’ 1 Corinthians 6:12. He again makes the same statement in 1 Corinthians 10:23. The point is that in some cases, wisdom, judgment, and love for brethren must dictate whether or not I exercise a certain liberty.

If I am bent on exercising my liberty, I may cause others, that is, the weak, to stumble and thereby jeopardise their souls. Such an attitude indeed lacks love and would be sinful on my part, Romans 14:15.

Paul gives a scenario where the strong in faith cause the weak in faith to sin, 1 Corinthians 8:11-12. The strong realise that there are not many gods but one God, Jehovah, and therefore eating meat sacrificed to idols even in the pagan temples was not a sinful act.

1 Corinthians 10 reveals the fact that it would not be expedient to enter the pagan temple; however, Paul is simply getting the point across about each considering each other in 1 Corinthians 8.

The weak brother may see the strong brother in the temple, eating meat sacrificed to idols and do the same thing. The difference is in the conscience of each man. The strong eat meat without offence to their conscience, whereas the weak eat with offence and thereby sin.

In such a case, the strong have contributed to the sin of the weak and thereby sin themselves. The strong have ‘emboldened’ the weak to eat that which violates their conscience of right and wrong, 1 Corinthians 8:10. The building encouragement is directed in the wrong path, the original thought of 1 Corinthians 8:1.

Yes, I have knowledge and understanding regarding the matter of ‘adiaphora’, that is, disputable matters; however, with this knowledge, I cause another brother to stumble into sin because of his lack of knowledge, 1 Corinthians 8:11. This brother perishes, that is, he is lost in sin because of my understanding of matters of indifference.

What this tells us is that even in matters of indifference, we should use lawful judgment as to whether or not to practice it lest we cause a brother to stumble into sin. To disregard others is to sin. 1 Corinthians 8:12.

Again, what mattered was the keeping of God’s commands and being concerned about others’ souls, 1 Corinthians 7:19 / Romans 14:17. Such conduct displays true love for brethren, 1 John 2:9 / 1 John 4:11.

Paul, after saying everything on the matter, says that he will never eat meat if it causes his brother or sister to fall into sin, 1 Corinthians 8:13. In other words, his love for them would come before his knowledge of things which were permissible.

Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Love is the solution, not knowledge, in all social problems.’

SUMMARY

The Jerusalem conference of Acts 15 and John’s statements in Revelation 2:14 / Revelation 2:20 exposed the sinfulness of eating meat sacrificed to idols. When one reads 1 Corinthians 8, and 1 Corinthians 10, it would appear that Paul has contradicted the clear teaching of Jesus on this issue.

Romans 14:23 seems to be the connecting link to understanding the relationship between Acts 15, Revelation 2 and 1 Corinthians 8 and 1 Corinthians 10. It reads, Clearly, the matter of eating meats sacrificed to idols was an issue of ‘adiaphora’, that is, disputable matters, 1 Corinthians 8:7.

Whether one eats meat, sets aside a special day of the week for study or is circumcised really does not affect the soul, Romans 14:1-5 / 1 Corinthians 7:19. These areas are termed ‘liberties’ or matters of ‘adiaphora’, 1 Corinthians 8:9. Yet if one were to violate his conscience by eating meat sacrificed to idols, to him it would be sin.

Many Gentiles were raised in pagan societies that habitually worshipped various deities, and thereby it was a way of life until they obeyed the gospel. Removing the falsehood of lesser deities from their hearts was a slow process.

The stronger brother may also find himself in sin by pressing his liberties to the point of causing the weak brother to stumble in sin. Such activity displays a lack of love for a brother.

The point is that in some cases, wisdom, judgment, and love for brethren must dictate whether or not I exercise a certain liberty, 1 Corinthians 6:12 / 1 Corinthians 10:23.

One must not confuse a liberty with a matter of ‘the faith’, Jude 3. Liberties do not affect the soul unless one is ‘brought under the power’ of the activity, 1 Corinthians 6:12. Whether or not one ‘keeps the commandments of God’ does affect the soul, 1 Corinthians 7:19.

A stumbling block refers to one inducing another to sin. To give a spiritually immature brother his way by setting aside matters of doctrinal differences is to accentuate and promote unity in diversity.

When such a brother presses us with such human reasoning, may God give us the strength of the apostle Paul and ‘give place in the way of subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you,’ Galatians 2:5.

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION

“Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. This is my defence to those who sit in judgment on me.” 1 Corinthians 9:1-3

PAUL’S OWN LIFE, AN EXAMPLE OF ONE GIVING UP RIGHTS FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

1 Corinthians 9 appears to be an explanation of Paul’s selfless statement in 1 Corinthians 8:13. Paul was ‘free’ in the sense that he had the same liberties as any other Christian.

As an ‘apostle,’ Paul could have truly pressed his liberties and made others bend to his scruples, yet he chose to give up any of his liberties so that souls would be saved, 1 Corinthians 9:1.

Apparently, some in Corinth were rejecting Paul’s apostleship, 1 Corinthians 9:2. None of the following statements would make sense regarding liberties if Paul were not an apostle.

Therefore, he defends his apostolic office by saying that he had ‘seen Jesus our Lord’, a qualification for apostles, 1 Corinthians 9:1 / Acts 1:22 / Acts 22:14-15 / Acts 26:15-18.

The Corinthian church was a result of Paul’s labours, and they really had no grounds to discount his words. The Corinthians had spiritual gifts that were administered to them by Paul.

Only an apostle of Jesus Christ had the power to transfer the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Acts 8:14-17. The fact that Paul laid his hands on the Corinthians and gave them spiritual gifts is a sign of his apostleship, 1 Corinthians 9:2.

Those faithful brethren in Corinth knew assuredly that Paul was an apostle. These faithful brethren were the ‘seal’, in Greek it’s the word ‘sphragis’ of Paul’s apostleship, 1 Corinthians 9:2. The word ‘seal’ is ‘the impression of a signet-ring, a seal’. The seal of the king’s ring carried the weight of authority. It represented the validity of a matter.

The fact that the Corinthian church was established and brethren were ‘in the Lord’, 1 Corinthians 9:2, through baptism made for a valid argument regarding the apostleship of Paul, Galatians 3:26-27.

In the opening verses, Paul shows that he realises that there are members of the church in Corinth who either question or even deny his apostleship, 1 Corinthians 9:3-6.

THEIR OBJECTIONS

1. He was unmarried, an argument which certainly carried weight with Jewish converts, who had been brought up to believe that marriage is a divine obligation.

In Judaism, a man who was unmarried at thirty years of age, ‘diminished the Face of God in the world’. Furthermore, no unmarried man would be considered worthy to be regarded as a ‘Rabbi’ or ‘teacher’.

2. He did not accept payment for his ministry.

Every Teacher in Judaism was expected to accept payment for his teaching, and if Paul declined to follow the traditional practice, it must be because his teaching was worthless.

3. He was not one of the ‘original’ apostles.

Chosen and sent out by the Lord personally. Indeed, he was late on the scene! Consequently, in their estimation, he did not possess the same degree of authority.

4. And, his attitude towards Gentiles who wish to become Christians was far too lenient!

They objected to his teaching on 'Freedom in Christ'. In 1 Corinthians 9:1-2, Paul declares his qualifications.

1. He had 'seen the Lord' after His resurrection, 1 Corinthians 9:1 / Acts 1:21-22.

This was necessary if he was to become a 'witness'. When a replacement for Judas was chosen, this was a major issue. Note that 'witnesses' cannot possibly have 'successors'.

Consequently, the Roman Catholic doctrine and claim of 'apostolic succession' is false. Also, this fact nullifies the claim of the 'Watchtower' followers to be 'Jehovah's Witnesses'. The claim is as fabricated as the name 'Jehovah'.

2. He had been chosen by the Lord Himself, Acts 1:2 / Galatians 1:1.

Read Galatians 1-2. He had demonstrated 'the signs of an apostle', 2 Corinthians 12:12. The Jews demanded 'a sign' from anyone who claimed to speak for God, Matthew 12:38. A message from God must be validated by a demonstration of divine power!

Paul has now given a proper defence, as in a legal trial, regarding his apostleship. The word 'this', 1 Corinthians 9:3, seems best to describe the previous two verses where Paul defends his apostleship. In 1 Corinthians 9:3-14. He argues for his right to the privileges and respect received by the other apostles.

PAUL'S RIGHTS

"Don't we have the right to food and drink? Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? Or is it only I and Barnabas who lack the right to not work for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever ploughs and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ." 1 Corinthians 9:4-12

Paul had rights as an evangelist, apostle and Christian; however, he waived those rights for the benefit of others. Again, let us remember that liberties are under consideration.

Though many would not see it to be lawful to support a gospel preacher, or the apostles, Paul reminds them that just because he preaches does not negate his right, or liberty, to eat and drink, 1 Corinthians 9:4. Paul also had the right to 'take a believing wife,' 1 Corinthians 9:5. Though many had wives, Paul did not take advantage of this liberty. Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Paul may have mentioned Peter in particular because he had a strong following in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 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 about their habits of ministering second-hand.'

Paul said that he had a right, liberty, to 'not work' as one who labours in the kingdom of God, 1 Corinthians 9:6 / 1 Corinthians 4:12 / 1 Thessalonians 2:9 / 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9 / Acts 20:34. The preachers of the Gospel had a right to not work at secular employment but to be supported by the brethren, 1 Corinthians 9:14.

Paul now gives three Illustrations to get across the point that it would have been a liberty of Paul's to take wages from the brethren; however, he did not do this.

1. Soldiers do not serve for free, 1 Corinthians 9:7.

2. Farmers plant with the expectation of a return from their crop, 1 Corinthians 9:7.

3. The labourer among animals receives wages for his work, 1 Corinthians 9:7.

It has always been lawful for a worker to be paid his wages for labour, 1 Corinthians 9:8. In 1 Corinthians 9:9, Paul quotes from **Deuteronomy 25:4**. This was an issue of cruelty because while the ox was muzzled during laborious work, it could not eat.

The Gentiles were of this practice; however, the Lord commanded that the Hebrews allow their ox to eat while treading out the corn. If it is cruel to make an ox work and not let him eat, then it is a cruel act to make an evangelist labour with no compensation.

The evangelist is pictured as a sower sowing seed in the ground, 1 Corinthians 9:10. The evangelist was preaching and teaching to the Corinthian brethren and was due to their just compensation of the brethren's 'carnal things'. Wiersbe, in his commentary, says the following.

'Keep in mind that, for the most part, the Greeks despised manual labour. They had slaves to do manual labour so that the citizens could enjoy sports, philosophy, and leisure. The Jews, of course, magnified honest labour.'

The word 'is it too much', 1 Corinthians 9:11, emphasises the Corinthians' attitude toward paying evangelists, **Galatians 6:6**. Paul may have been killing two birds with one stone here.'

The thrust of the apostle's point is liberties, areas where it does not get one closer to God if we do or do not do them. Whether to receive wages for the work of a preacher may be done or not done. Those preachers who received wages were doing so because it was indeed work.

Another proof that he had the right to receive compensation was that other preachers at Corinth had already been receiving compensation for their labours, 1 Corinthians 9:12. At this point, one may expect Paul to demand compensation; however, this was not his intention to bring all this up.

Why didn't the apostle use their right to receive compensation for their labour? So that the Gospel plan of salvation is not hindered, 1 Corinthians 9:12. It may be that some weak brethren would find an occasion to stumble in this area. Some may have believed that if Paul, Silas and Timothy had taken wages from them, then their motive for preaching was money rather than a love for people's souls. Rather than pressing his rights, Paul gave them up for their sakes.

"Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel." 1 Corinthians 9:13-14

Under the Mosaic Law, the priest who laboured in teaching, sacrificing, changing the showbread and keeping the candlesticks lit was authorised to take wages in the form of parts of the animal sacrifices, **Numbers 18:8-20**.

While other tribes farmed, the priests were about the business of the altar and temple, 1 Corinthians 9:13. Clearly, Paul authorises a local preacher, who is doing the work of an evangelist, 2 Timothy 4:1-5, to receive wages from the brethren, 1 Corinthians 9:14.

This work is not only in proclaiming Gospel truths to the lost but to the brethren as well, 1 Corinthians 9:11, that all may be edified in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, **Ephesians 4:11-12**.

The word 'commanded' or 'ordain', KJV, in Greek is 'diatasso', and it means 'to make arrangements, to arrange for oneself, get things arranged, to be appointed'.

God made arrangements for those who would be preachers of the Gospel and appointed for them a means of wages through the brethren. Each local church must make judgments based on contributions as to what the local preacher may be compensated.

We see this when Jesus sent out the twelve apostles to preach the Gospel, **Matthew 10:9-10**. These men brought the blessings of the Gospel to people, and the people were to share their blessings with the messenger, **1 Corinthians 9:11**.

“But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast. For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel.” **1 Corinthians 9:15-18**

In **1 Corinthians 9:15-23**, Paul’s drive came from his being obligated to the Lord to preach. Paul’s glory was in the fact that the Corinthians had obeyed the Gospel through his teaching, **1 Corinthians 2:1-5** / **1 Corinthians 9:2**. Though the Lord had ‘commanded’, **1 Corinthians 9:14**, that such preachers are compensated and ‘other’, **1 Corinthians 9:12**, preachers in Corinth had received such compensation, Paul would not take it. Paul would rather die than have a brother in Christ stumble in this area of receiving wages, **1 Corinthians 9:15**. Clearly, the receiving of wages from a local church or not receiving wages was a matter of judgment rather than a doctrinal must.

Some preachers, like Paul, were tentmakers, **Acts 18:3**, and still others receive wages from churches that they are not even a member of, **Philippians 4:15**. Apparently, Paul perceived that there were brethren at Corinth who would be offended by his taking wages from them, so he did not do it for their souls’ sake.

Paul is not trying to prove a case for receiving wages, but he has in mind the soul and love of a brother in mind, **1 Corinthians 8:13**. Though it was his right to receive wages and though it was his right to eat any meats, he was willing to forgo those rights for the sake of others’ souls. This is brotherly love personified.

So, if eating meat sacrificed to idols was offensive to some, Paul would not do it, **1 Corinthians 8:13**. If being compensated for his work as an evangelist caused some to stumble in offence, he would not take it.

To demand wages from the brethren would have been to glory in the position of an evangelist. Paul’s purpose for preaching was not for monetary gain but to gain the souls of men. Woe would be pronounced upon Paul or any others if the Gospel is not preached.

Notice Paul was ‘compelled to preach, **1 Corinthians 9:16**. The Lord had handpicked Paul for this work, **Acts 9:15-16**. Paul intended to be obedient to the Lord’s command, **Acts 26:16-19**. The apostle Paul was compelled by Jesus to be an apostle and preacher, **1 Corinthians 9:17**.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If he preached the gospel willingly, he would receive a reward (pay) from the Lord. If he did so unwillingly, he would not receive a reward but would be simply doing his duty as a steward, manager of a household, **1 Corinthians 4:1-2** / **Luke 17:7-10**.’

Paul would have had great feelings within for helping others obey the Gospel had he done this voluntarily, along with receiving wages as was his right, his reward, **1 Corinthians 9:18** / **2 Corinthians 11:7-12**.

Paul’s work, however, was of necessity because it was of necessity by the Lord; he recognizes that the Gospel message has been entrusted to him by the Lord to care for and distribute.

Paul’s outlook on a reward appears to be different from others’ views. The preacher certainly has the right to receive wages, and that point has been established above.

These men enter into the work of evangelists voluntarily and receive their just rewards, inward satisfaction for saving souls and compensation for doing so.

Paul's reward was that he gained the souls of men; rather than receiving wages, he would rather preach without the chance of a brother saying, 'Paul, you're only doing this for money.' Paul, therefore, chose not to demand his 'right in the gospel' of receiving wages for preaching.

This whole section is stressing, 1 Corinthians 8:13, regarding giving up rights for the sake of others' souls. Paul said, 'Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbour's good,' 1 Corinthians 10:24.

The word 'right', 1 Corinthians 9:18, in Greek is the word 'exousia', and it means 'freedom of choice, right to act, decide, or dispose of one's property as one wishes'.

The Greek word 'exousia' is used in other passages in this fashion: 2 Thessalonians 3:9 / John 10:18 / 1 Corinthians 7:37 / 1 Corinthians 8:9 / 1 Corinthians 9:4-12 / Hebrews 13:10 / Revelation 13:5 / Romans 9:21.

The Christian has the 'right,' the freedom of choice, the right to act, decide, when participating in things lawful but not necessary. There are many areas in which we use our judgment to accomplish God's will.

It is our judgment to use more than one cup when serving the Lord's Supper, conducting Bible classes, using songbooks, and so forth. While these expediencies are not demanded, the Christian has the right to use these things because they do not violate any other laws of God.

If a brother is conscientiously bothered by the use of these things, we may want to stop and do something different. If however, a brother demands that we stop due to his perception of the liberties being sinful, we must stand our ground, Galatians 2:3-5.

In 1 Corinthians 9:15-18, Paul defends his principle of becoming 'all things to all men' which his critics regard as 'carrying popular favour'. He insists that he takes this stand in order to 'save some', and he asserts his 'right' to be materially supported, even though he does not actually exercise it.

EXAMPLES WITH WHICH THEY WOULD CERTAINLY BE FAMILIAR WITH

1. He implies that the apostles took their wives with them on their travels, 1 Corinthians 9:5.

Perhaps because it would create a favourable impression on the women in the Greco-Roman world.

2. Others received support that was granted without opposition, 1 Corinthians 9:7, such as soldiers, shepherds, vine-dressers, and Priests, 1 Corinthians 9:13.

3. Finally, he argues that simple gratitude should inspire in them a willingness to 'share' material blessings, 1 Corinthians 9:15.

Some churches understood this and acknowledged this obligation, e.g., the church at Philippi, which 'once and again sent to my needs', Philippians 4:15-16. The fact that it was he who brought the Gospel to Corinth and spent time with them should have led them to provide him with support in his ministry.

An 'apostle' is 'one sent', from the Greek 'apostolos'. Paul and Barnabas are both called 'apostles', 1 Corinthians 9:6 / Acts 14:14. The difference is that Barnabas was an apostle of the church in Antioch, by whom he and Paul were sent out. This is why, on their return from the First Missionary Journey, they reported to the church in Antioch. Incidentally, when Paul set out to Damascus, armed with letters from the High Priest in Jerusalem, he could be called 'an apostle' of the High Priest, Acts 9:1-2. The authority of an apostle depends on the authority of the one who sends him out. Only those chosen and sent out by Christ personally are backed by the authority of Christ, Luke 10:16.

THE DURATION OF APOSTLESHIP

In **Ephesians 4:11-13**, Paul lists the offices and the various gifts with which Christ blessed the church. The list consists of ordinary and extraordinary, temporary and permanent gifts.

The extraordinary but temporary gifts were the offices of apostle and prophet. The permanent and abiding gifts are the offices of evangelists and Pastors, the word is a form of ‘poimenos’, and refers to elders or shepherds and teachers.

These ‘gifts’ were all given for the edification, i.e., the ‘building up’ of the church. The word ‘edification’ comes from the Greek word, which means ‘to build a house’.

Note! The translation of these verses, in some versions, conveys an erroneous idea, **Ephesians 4:13**. These translations state, ‘till we all come TO the unity of the faith...’ The correct rendering is, ‘till we all come, IN the unity of the faith to a perfect man.’ i.e., this means to ‘maturity’; manhood; no longer being babes in Christ.

We already possess the ‘unity of the faith’, **Ephesians 4:13**. ‘By one Spirit we have all been ‘baptised into one Body,’ **1 Corinthians 12:13**. The faith has ‘once for all time been delivered to the saint’, **Jude 3**.

Any conduct or teaching that violates the unity of the Body is a sin that brings grave consequences, **1 Corinthians 3:16-17**. The passage teaches that, through the exercise of the various abilities and talents that the Lord has bestowed on the members of the church, the church, the Body, is able to build itself up.

PAUL’S USE OF HIS FREEDOM

“Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews, I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law, I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” **1 Corinthians 9:19-23**

Paul said in **1 Corinthians 9:1** that he was free, and again in **1 Corinthians 9:19**, he states that he is free. Paul’s liberty, as others’ liberty, was to eat meat sacrificed to idols, take a believing wife, and receive wages for his preaching. Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul was a free man, not a slave of any other human being. Nevertheless, as the Lord’s servant, he had made himself subject to every other human being so he might win some to Christ. Serving people rather than commanding them is the way to win them, **Mark 10:45**.’

Paul voluntarily gave up these things in many cases so as not to offend others. Paul voluntarily brought himself under bondage to others in that he humbly submitted to others’ spiritual weakness in areas of indifference that he may help them in the long run, **1 Corinthians 9:19**.

This verse teaches a valuable principle that must be understood correctly in view of all Scriptures. The Jews held stringently to dietary laws expressed in the Pentateuch, **Leviticus 11 / Deuteronomy 14**. Circumcision was a vital part of Jewish culture and law as well, **Genesis 17:11**.

At a time when men and women were in a state of change from the Law of Moses to the Law of Christ, many held tightly to that Law that had been a part of their heritage and society for as far back as they could remember. The road to the Law of Christ was not easy for many, though the Old Testament Scriptures foretold of its coming, **Jeremiah 31:30-40**.

Paul's objective was to help these Jews see their need for Christ, due to their sin, and thereby 'win' the many, 1 Corinthians 9:19-20. If Paul came into a city and ate swine's flesh, showing disdain for circumcision and the Sabbath, the minds of the Jews would have been turned away from him.

Since neither of these issues were a matter of salvation Paul did whatever others were doing for propriety's sake, Acts 18:8 / Acts 21:26. Yet when one would teach that these dietary laws, circumcision, or any other part of the Mosaic Law was essential to salvation, Paul rigidly opposed it as a false doctrine, Acts 15 / Galatians 2:2-4 / Galatians 5:3-6. Paul wanted to be less offensive so that he could gain many. A great example of this spirit is that Paul had Timothy circumcised so as not to offend any Jews that they may come in contact with while preaching, Acts 16:3.

Note, however, that when the doctrine of Christ was at stake, Paul cared not that he offended. In fact, he pressed the matter diligently even if it meant losing his life, Acts 21:13.

The Lord Jesus practised this same approach, when one presses these liberties and binds them as Law, Jesus in no way accommodated such false teaching but aggressively opposed the teaching, Luke 11:37-54.

Paul's consistency of behaviour is illustrated in these verses. Since keeping some aspects of Mosaic Law, such as dietary laws, circumcision, and the Sabbath, would not have hindered Paul's objective of heaven, neither would not doing these things among the Gentiles obstruct his heavenly goal.

Paul abstained from Jewish law around the Gentiles as he practised it around the Jews so that he may gain the many, 1 Corinthians 9:21. We may practice some things around some and not do so around those we know it offends. Barrett, in his commentary, says the following concerning 1 Corinthians 9:21.

'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.'

Paul was not a lawless individual; he was 'under law to Christ' 1 Corinthians 9:21. The teachings of Jesus were binding and essential, 2 John 9. What this verse teaches us is that there is a law to follow, the Law of Christ. So many do not understand that there is a clear distinction between liberties, expedients, and law.

Some confuse lawful living with destroying the grace of God and making the cross of Jesus Christ of no effect. The author of Hebrews proves that we are currently under the Law of Christ, Hebrews 7:12.

Certainly, Paul did not become a lawless man of fornication and murder to save the fornicators and murderers. Those areas of liberty are under consideration, and the weak brother is understood to be the one who does not have knowledge of certain liberties and thereby abstains from such for conscience's sake, 1 Corinthians 8:7 / Romans 14:1-9.

Paul used wise judgment as to when to exercise or abstain from exercising a liberty for the sake of the individual people he was with. His objective remained constant: to gain souls.

To be a joint partaker with other saints is to be understood in the realm of salvation and heaven. Paul would have hindered his own chances of making it to heaven if he were inconsiderate of others in the realm of Christian liberties, 1 Corinthians 8:11-12 / Romans 14:15.

Paul was not just being a good boy by giving up such liberties rather than pressing them. He did so for the sake of the souls involved, including his own, 1 Corinthians 9:22-23.

THE HEAVENLY GOAL AND PRIZE THROUGH SELF-DENIAL

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize”. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

THE GAMES

A very familiar scenario is given by Paul. The athletic contest in and around Corinth was well known. We are all familiar with the ‘Olympic Games’, which were revived in 1896 by the French Baron Coubertin, who formed the Olympic Association a couple of years earlier, but the similarity between the Ancient and the Modern Games exists in name only!

In fact, the Olympics, as they are popularly called, were not the only ‘Games’ celebrated by the Greeks. Other Games were also held in Paul’s time, and he is no doubt thinking not of the Olympic Games, but of the Isthmian Games with which the Corinthians were both familiar and proud, because they were held very close to Corinth, every two years.

That pride is reflected in the strict conditions of qualification that Paul has in mind as he writes.

1. Only athletes of pure Greek blood were allowed to compete.
2. The athletes had to show proof of their ancestry.
3. No one who had a criminal record, or who had forfeited his citizenship by breaking the Law, was allowed to compete, no matter how otherwise qualified he might be.

No talk of ‘human’ rights! If you committed a crime, you forfeited your rights!

4. Only men were allowed to take part.

Although history records the names of several rich women who owned winning chariots, they were not likely to have been present at the Games anyway! It was said that it would be ‘unethical’ and ‘inappropriate’ for women to be present. The reason? The athletes competed naked.

And, even in modern Olympics, the first Games in which women were allowed to compete were in 1900, in Paris. I think they were allowed to compete in Tennis and Golf!

As a matter of fact, the first woman to become an Olympic Champion was an Englishwoman named Charlotte Cooper, who won the Tennis Singles Title that year. Some Women’s Athletic events were added in 1948.

5. Those who qualified to participate were required to undergo months of rigorous, supervised training.

We know that today’s athletes spend months in intensive training in order to be fit enough to compete. You may recall that before the London Games, we read newspaper reports describing the intensity of the physical preparation to which the athletes subjected themselves. Out on the road before daybreak! Running hundreds of miles a week! Spending hundreds of hours in the Gym! All in order to reach peak fitness.

Paul refers to this intensive training and points out that it is endured, not to win a gold medal which would be a permanent reminder of a victory, or to receive a knighthood, or some other honour, but to be awarded a crown of leaves, in Olympia a crown of olive leaves, and in the Corinthian Games, a crown of pine leaves, which almost certainly withered before the year was out.

Of course, other honours lasted longer, most of which were bestowed on the winner by his home city. When he returned home, the successful Olympian would be treated as a general returning from a victorious battle.

The city walls would actually be thrown down so that he could enter like a conqueror, and they would even erect a statue of him in the city so that his fellow citizens could honour him.

Some Greek poets were renowned for writing poems in which they celebrated, named and praised the successful athletes, because of the honour they brought to their cities.

Why were the games regarded as important? And they were certainly regarded as important! Even if Greek states were at war with each other, when the time for the Games came around, the war was suspended for the duration of the great event, because the Games were regarded as important in promoting Greek Unity!

The Corinthians knew all this, and, because they were intensely proud of their Games, Paul's illustration in this chapter would resonate with them and carry great weight. The lessons drawn from it made an impression on them. They felt involved! He was talking about them!

Paul says, in these 'games', athletes endured all this to win a wreath of Pine leaves that withered away, awarded to the one winner, but the prize for which we seek endures throughout Eternity, a 'Crown of Life', and, importantly, there are no losers! Everyone who finishes the course received the prize!

His aim in using this example is to encourage his Corinthian brethren to remain faithful, and so he says, 'run in such a way that you may obtain it', **1 Corinthians 9:24**.

Though many may enter an event, there is only one who shall win, **1 Corinthians 9:24**. Each contestant has the same goal of victory; however, only one will win the crown.

As the athlete prepares for the one championship race, even so the Christian is to strive to attain the heavenly reward, **1 Corinthians 9:25**. He then tells them how they must qualify in **1 Corinthians 9:25**.

1. Be temperate.

The word that is translated as 'temperate' in several versions really means 'self-controlled'. Some people suppose it permits 'moderation in all things', i.e. 'everything is allowed 'in moderation.' But it actually means that there must be 'self-control in all things'.

The Greek athlete endured at least ten months of rigorous training, regarding it as a matter of honour to scrupulously abide by the rules and the strict code of conduct associated with the Games.

2. Be dedicated and decisive, **1 Corinthians 9:26**.

We should notice that Paul makes this personal, **1 Corinthians 9:16-17**. All this applies to himself as much as to his brethren. When he urges them to 'strive', he tells them that this is what he also must do. He is not exempt from hardship, and he is not saved because he is an Apostle.

Instead, he tells them, 'I don't run like a man who doesn't know where he is going!' On the contrary, he knows what his goal is, and has also considered the cost and has decided that it is something to which he is prepared to make a commitment.

Notice the two statements which follow. 'I fight not as one who beats the air!' In other words, he is not putting on a show! He is not 'shadow-boxing'. He is not, as we say, going through the motions, and it is here that far too many translations miss the point!

For example, the New King James Version says, 'I discipline my body and bring it into subjection', and this completely misses the force of his statement. He says, 'I pommel my body'.

This is a technical expression that literally means ‘to strike it full in the face’. The word describes the most devastating blow that a boxer could deliver to an opponent.

He adds, ‘I keep it under.’ He subjects his body to constant stress and tension. In fact, he uses a word from which we get our word ‘agonize’. The preparation an athlete underwent in order to be fit for the Games amounted to physical agony.

Why does he endure such exhausting training? Disqualification, **1 Corinthians 9:27**. Paul kept his attitude toward liberties and expedient matters in check lest he lose his own soul, **Romans 14:15 / 1 Corinthians 8:12**.

Jesus Himself puts it like this, ‘no man who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God’, **Luke 9:62**. The man who handles the plough does not gaze around him or allow himself to be distracted when he ploughs. He fixes his eyes on a point in the distance and steers towards it, and in this way, he produces a straight line.

We should never forget, it is the one who ‘endures to the end’ who shall be saved. It is he who remains ‘faithful’ that the crown is awarded. And everyone who finishes the course is awarded the prize, **Acts 14:22 / Matthew 7:13-14 / Revelation 2:10**.

Believers' Crowns		
Title	Reason	Reference
A Crown of Life	For testing a disciplined life	1 Corinthians 9:27
A Crown of Righteousness	For overcoming and discipline	1 Thessalonians 2:19
A Crown of Glory	For being the Lord's spouse	2 Timothy 4:8
A Crown of Life	For enduring trials	James 1:12 / Revelation 2:10
A Crown of Glory	For shepherding God's flock faithfully	1 Peter 5:4

The Christian must ensure they don't get disqualified, they must listen to many warnings about falling away, etc., **Romans 1:28 / Romans 7:6 / 1 Corinthians 10:12 / Galatians 5:4 / Hebrews 3:12 / Hebrews 3:14 / Hebrews 4:11 / Hebrews 6:8 / Hebrews 6:3-6 / 2 Peter 2:20-22**.

All of these verses refute the argument that claims a child of God cannot sin, **1 John 3:9**. John advised the Christian on what to do when he does sin and also, he describes the person who says he never sins, **1 John 1:6-10 / 1 John 2:1**. Apostasy is a subject that concerns only Christians. The very fact that the word exists declares that the apostasy exists and that it is possible for a Christian to ‘apostatise’. It focuses attention on the condition. Whether or not a child of God can fall away and be lost, and thus cease to be a son of God, is an issue not to be treated lightly.

SUMMARY

Christian liberties are introduced in **1 Corinthians 6**, when Paul said, ‘All things are lawful for me; but not all things are expedient,’ **1 Corinthians 6:12**. **1 Corinthians 7** briefly touches upon the subject of liberties when Paul said, ‘Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God,’ **1 Corinthians 7:19**.

Liberties are dealt with in full in **1 Corinthians 8**, as Paul discusses the issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols. The fact that liberties exist is firmly fixed in chapters six and seven.

1 Corinthians 8 introduces another idea regarding liberties that is fully developed in **1 Corinthians 9**. That idea is the fact that the Christian may sin while using liberty, **1 Corinthians 8:9**.

The word ‘liberty’ means to have freedom or power of choice. Matters that do not affect my salvation are termed matters of liberty, adiaphora or matters of indifference.

There are times in a Christian's life when said liberties may have to be forfeited for the sake of others. Paul displays the heart of one who truly loves souls, **1 Corinthians 9:18**. Paul had many 'rights' and 'liberties' as a Christian; however, he would never press those rights on others to the point of causing them to sin, **Romans 14:15**.

1 Corinthians 9 is a chapter of admonition to all saints. Paul uses himself as an example of one willing to give up all rights or liberties for the sake of others. Paul had the right to lead a believing wife, forbear working, and receive compensation for his work as an evangelist; however, he forfeited those rights so that others would be saved.

The thought of sin on the part of the individual practising liberty is now fully developed in **1 Corinthians 9**. Heaven was the goal at hand for self and others.

If, while practising a liberty, I cause a brother to forfeit his salvation through sin, then I have also been rejected by God for my part in that brother's sin, **1 Corinthians 9:27**.

The message is that while we make our trek toward heaven, only those who discipline themselves to consider others, in relationship to the gospel truths, shall be in heaven. Often, people want to know how far Christians should permit the weak brother to dictate our actions.

Paul answers this question in **Acts 15:1-21**, when it was said that the Jews who had obeyed the Gospel yet clung to many Mosaic Laws demanded that people be circumcised.

The apostle Paul said in **Galatians 2:3-5** that we would give way to their subjection not even for a moment. The answer to the question is simple. When brethren claim that our liberties are sinful, then we must stand our ground lest they be found to bind where God has not bound or loose where God has not loosed.

CHAPTER 10

INTRODUCTION

With the possibilities of falling from grace mentioned in **1 Corinthians 9:27**, Paul admonishes the Corinthians to be knowledgeable of the events transpiring in the Old Testament, **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**. The word 'for' connects the thoughts of **1 Corinthians 6-9** with **1 Corinthians 10**. Liberties and expedient matters are left to the judgments of man. Those who practice liberties at a weaker brother's expense cause not only the weak brother to sin but the strong brother as well. Again, **Romans 14:15** and **1 Corinthians 8:12** are under consideration. Paul is now going to paint a picture of the Christian's responsibility to remain free from sin even when practising a lawful liberty.

The word 'all' is used five times from **1 Corinthians 10:1-4**. The significance of this word is that it includes 'all' God's people, not just a select few who had problems with liberties or some who had no problem with liberties. That which they were not to be ignorant of was the Old Testament Scriptures.

Just because one is in good standing with God does not mean that he or she can lose that position through sin. Paul said that even he could, **1 Corinthians 9:27**. Whether strong or weak, one could sin and find themselves 'disqualified', **1 Corinthians 9:27**.

WARNINGS FROM ISRAEL'S HISTORY

“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.” 1 Corinthians 10:1-5

While Israel travelled from Egypt, they were led at night by fire and in the day by a cloud by the Lord, 1 Corinthians 10:1 / Deuteronomy 1:33. Exodus 14 records the event of Israel passing through the Red Sea by the power of God, and the Egyptians were defeated as the walls of water collapsed upon them.

What the act of following Moses through the Red Sea and following the Lord through the cloud by day and fire by night did was to symbolically take the Israelites out of the control of Pharaoh of Egypt and into the authority of Moses and God, 1 Corinthians 10:2.

The Christian’s baptism takes them out of darkness, that is, servitude to sin, and places them under the ownership of Jesus Christ, Acts 20:28. Paul’s point, as developed in this chapter, is that baptism alone does not save you. Man must maintain good works.

1. All ate of the spiritual food, the Manna, 1 Corinthians 10:3 / Exodus 16 / Deuteronomy 8:2-4.
2. All drank of the same spiritual drink at the waters of Meribah, 1 Corinthians 10:4 / Exodus 17:1-7.
3. The song of Moses is recorded in Deuteronomy 32.

In Deuteronomy 32:4, Moses refers to God as ‘The Rock,’ Deuteronomy 32:15 / Deuteronomy 32:18 / Deuteronomy 32:30-31. Paul tells us here that Jesus Christ was that Rock, 1 Corinthians 10:4. Jesus was the Rock that nourished Israel through their wilderness wanderings, Numbers 20:2-13. Here, then, we see the pre-existence and deity of Jesus.

4. That which brought ALL God’s people together was their common reception of God’s mercy.

‘All’ of 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 is now put into contrast with ‘most’ of 1 Corinthians 10:5. All were God’s people, but most of them did not please Him. All were recipients of God’s mercy, yet not all were grateful and faithful, 1 Corinthians 10:5.

God caused Israel to wander in the wilderness of Zin for 40 years because of their disobedience, 1 Corinthians 10:5. The Lord swore in His wrath that not one of the unfaithful Israelites would enter into Canaan, Deuteronomy 1:34-39. God did not allow Moses to enter Canaan because of his and Aaron’s sin at Kadesh-Barnea, Numbers 20:2-13. The point being, they had disobeyed His commands. The only ones that did not fall into this ‘most’ category were Joshua and Caleb, along with all who were under the age of twenty years old, Numbers 14:24-38 / Numbers 20:12.

Let us keep the context before us. Liberties and expedients are lawful so long as they are not exercised at the expense of another brother’s faith. The strong brother who does not consider his weaker brother’s conscience in matters of liberty and expedients is in sin himself. Sin is serious!

“Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day, twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.” 1 Corinthians 10:6-10

If the Corinthians were unable to exercise self-denial in the case of their liberties, they too faced the same fate as the Hebrews. Paul admonishes them not to lust after things that may cause self or a brother in Christ to fall, 1 Corinthians 19:6. Baptism, Christ’s watchful protection, and partaking of the Lord’s Supper will not shield the saint from sin. Israel decided to make a god after seeing that Moses delayed coming down off Mount Sinai, 1 Corinthians 10:7 / Exodus 32:6. They persuaded Aaron to fashion a golden calf, and the result was three thousand Israelites lost their lives by the sword of the Levites, 1 Corinthians 10:8 / Exodus 32:28. They had violated God’s laws of idolatry, Exodus 20:1-6.

At the council of Balaam, both Midian and Moab sent whores to seduce the Israelites, [Numbers 25:1-9](#), and the result was that twenty-three thousand people lost their lives, [1 Corinthians 10:8](#). The conviction of Phinehas, Eleazar's son, stopped the plague of God.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul said 23,000 Israelites died in one day. Moses in [Numbers 25:9](#) said 24,000 died as a result of the plague God sent to judge the people. There is, therefore, no conflict between the numbers since they describe somewhat different groups of people.’

After learning that the Edomites would not let Israel cross Edom, they had to take the long southern course around Edom. The way was difficult, and they began to complain about the manna, [Numbers 21:5-6](#). God sent snakes to bite them and kill them, [1 Corinthians 10:9](#), and the result was ‘many people of Israel died,’ [Numbers 21:6](#).

There were two occasions when the whole congregation murmured against God, [1 Corinthians 10:10](#). In [Numbers 14](#), they all murmured against God when the twelve spies had returned and gave the report. Secondly, they all murmured after leaving Kadesh-Barnea and being led astray by the rebellion of Korah, [Numbers 16:41](#).

The results again were devastating, all people, twenty years and older, who complained when the spies brought back the report of Canaan wandered in the wilderness for forty years and died.

In the case of Korah's rebellion, including all the two hundred and fifty princes, a family of the Danites that were involved, and Korah's family, fifteen hundred people died because of their rebellion.

THE DESTROYING ANGEL

Notice Paul says they were killed by ‘the destroying angel’, [1 Corinthians 10:10](#).

Encyclopaedia of the Bible says the following.

‘A superhuman being, used as an instrument of God's wrath in the execution of His judgment. It is difficult to say whether this is a good angel used by God as an agent of destruction, or Satan or one of his minions. If a good angel, God could use it to bring both blessing and destruction. ‘The term is used only twice, [Exodus 12:23](#) / [Hebrews 11:28](#), and [1 Corinthians 10:10](#). In the Exodus passage, it is used in connection with the tenth plague of Egypt, the destruction of the Egyptian firstborn.’

Encyclopaedia of the Bible continues and says the following.

‘In the 1 Corinthians passage Paul warned against grumbling, as some Israelites did in the wilderness and were destroyed by the Destroyer. It is thought by some that the Destroyer referred to by Paul was the fiery serpents God sent to bring death to the complaining Israelites.’

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The ‘destroyer’ here is understood by many to mean the ‘angel of death,’ so often referred to in the Old Testament, and usually called by the Jews ‘Sammael.’ It was customary for the Hebrews to regard most human events as under the direction of angels. ‘

However, we must note that the phrase ‘angel of death’ is nowhere to be found within the Scriptures. Whoever the destroyer is, they are called ‘the destroying angel’, not the ‘angel of death’; they aren't given a name, but rather a role, the destroyer.

“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it”. 1 Corinthians 10:11-13

The word ‘admonition’, in Greek, is ‘nouthesia’, meaning ‘warning’. The word ‘noutheteo’ means ‘to put in mind, to admonish’. Studying the Old Testament helps us improve our understanding and thinking about God and how He desires us to keep His precepts.

We now are living in the last days, the end of the ages, 1 Corinthians 10:11 / Acts 2:17 / Acts 3:24 / 1 John 2:18. This is a very important circular part of the argument. Circular in that Paul had stated, ‘If any man thinks that he knows anything, he knows not yet as he ought to know’, 1 Corinthians 8:2.

Most believe they are the ‘strong brother’ who has all understanding. Through time and experience, many expose themselves as truly the weaker brother because of their convictions regarding liberties and expedient matters.

Then again, you have the truly stronger brother who understands liberties and expedient matters, yet does not consider his weaker brother’s conscience. Whether weak or strong, Paul admonishes all to take careful heed lest they fall into sin, 1 Corinthians 10:12.

The weak brother may sin by pressing liberty, that is, by binding or losing where God has not bound or loosed, and the strong brother may sin by not considering the weaker brother’s conscience. Though each man is fully persuaded in their mind that they are right, it is truly God’s laws that judge right from wrong.

Consider this word study from 1 Corinthians 10:13.

- a. The word ‘temptation’, in Greek, is ‘peirasmos’, and it means ‘a trial’.
- b. The word ‘overtaken’, in Greek, is ‘lambano’ and it means ‘to take hold of, grasp, seize, to take by violence, carry off as prize or booty’.
- c. The word ‘bear’, in Greek, is ‘anthropinos’ and it means ‘belonging to man, human, human affairs, man’s estate, suited to man’.

God is true to Himself and provides man with the forgiveness of any sins, that is, His promise to the humble and contrite, Isaiah 57:15 / 1 John 1:8-9.

- d. The word ‘suffer’, in Greek, is ‘eao’ and it means ‘to let, suffer, allow, permit’.
- e. The words ‘beyond what you’, in Greek is ‘dunamai’ and it means ‘to be able, capable, strong enough to do... to be able, i.e., to dare or bear to do a thing’.
- f. The words ‘way out’, in Greek, is ‘ekbasis’ and it means ‘a way out, egress, a going out of, escape from’.
- g. The word ‘endure’, in Greek, is ‘hupophero’ and it means ‘to carry away under, especially, to bear out of danger. To bear or carry by being under, to bear a burden, used metaphorically to endure.’

Paul addresses both the strong and weak brothers here. The weak may be tempted to bind where God has not bound or lose where God has not loosed, yet he is challenged not to do so.

The strong may be tempted to participate in lawful liberty even if it may not always be the wisest decision, 1 Corinthians 8:9. A common trial takes place within the mind.

That trial may be in the form of one saying, ‘I can participate in this; however, my brother is offended in the matter. What shall I do?’ God has provided the way of escape through His instructions, don’t do it if it wounds your brother’s conscience, 1 Corinthians 8:12-13.

The way that God does not permit this trial to be more than the strong can handle is through His divine instructions. The one who has knowledge shall make a wise decision based on revelation. The way of escape is therefore His divine instructions. The learned will not falter, yet the unlearned will sin.

IDOL FEASTS AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

“Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.” 1 Corinthians 10:14-17

The word ‘idolatry’, in Greek, is ‘eidololatreia’, 1 Corinthians 10:14, is from the root word ‘eido’. It is defined as ‘a form, shape, figure, image or statue, hence, an idol, image of a god’.

The word ‘eido’ is used in 2 Corinthians 5:7, ‘for we walk by faith, not by sight’. In other words, the act of worshipping an image based upon human perception is idolatry.

The Christian does not worship based upon ‘sight’, ‘eido’, but upon ‘faith’ that is divine revelation. Many today are looking for a feel-good, see something religion. The word of God, however, is a system of instructions for Godly living.

Though the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 8-10 is eating meat that has been sacrificed to false gods by means of worship, there is another ‘idolatry’ that ought to be considered.

Idolatry comes in a variety of forms other than worshipping false gods. One may exclaim with vigour that they would not participate in idolatry, yet have no problem with worshipping God in unauthorised ways.

Consider Isaiah 46:12 in its context of idolatry. Those idolaters of Judah were ‘stubborn-hearted.’ 1 Samuel 15:23 states the nature of idolatry as well; they were ‘arrogant’ or ‘stubborn’. The rebellious are stubborn-hearted and stubborn, as is evidenced by their rejection of the authority of God.

Saul did what he thought was best rather than what God commanded, and so it was with Judah in the days of Isaiah. Many today want to do what they think is best rather than following God’s divine standard.

The admonition is to ‘flee’ from this way of life and thinking and follow only the divine standard of God’s word, 1 Corinthians 10:14. The word ‘wherefore’ takes into consideration all of the sins of Israel mentioned in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, and therefore idolatry is associated with unauthorised practices. Paul appeals to the Corinthian brethren’s ability to reason, 1 Corinthians 10:15. The word ‘judge’, in Greek, is ‘krino’, and it means to ‘consider’.

The chapter has revealed the purpose of the Old Testament. Those people of God who rebelled against the Lord’s authority were punished, and so will those who reject God’s authority today. Now Paul commands Christians to flee from idolatry and its influence.

These commands and admonitions are found in the context of one who would press his liberties to the point of causing another brother to sin against his conscience in the matter.

Paul now calls upon the brethren to reason with him regarding the sinfulness of their actions in relation to fellowship. The problem gets even deeper. One who would press his liberties to the point of sin is out of fellowship with God because he may be fellowshiping in error.

The word ‘cup’, 1 Corinthians 10:16, in Greek is ‘poterion’, and it means ‘cup, drinking vessel, the cup stands, by metonymy, for what it contains’. An examination of the use of the word ‘poterion’ in relation to the Lord’s Supper

clearly identifies the substance of the cup rather than the cup itself. The cup designates the contents, i.e., the fruit of the vine, which is a representation, not literal, of the blood of Jesus Christ.

It's called the cup, a 'thanksgiving' or 'blessing' KJV, because it represents freedom from sins through the blood sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He said regarding the bread and cup, 'this is my body, and this is my blood,' Matthew 26:26-29 / Luke 22:17-20, though He was still alive.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

'Paul described the cup as a cup of blessing, 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. However, Paul turned this around by saying we bless the cup. That is, we give thanks to God for the cup because of what it symbolises, namely, our sharing in the benefits of Christ's shed blood, 1 Corinthians 11:25.'

Paul states a fact, i.e., when Christians partake of the cup, fruit of the vine representing Christ's blood, shed for the remission of sins, it is a 'communion of the blood of Christ.' 1 Corinthians 10:16. The NIV uses the word 'participation'.

The word 'communion' in Greek is 'koinonia', and it means 'fellowship, partnership, participation, communion'. Who is 'partnering or participating' in the blessings of the blood sacrifice of Jesus represented in the cup and the bread, His body? Paul uses the plural pronoun 'we,' 1 Corinthians 10:17.

Christians, that is, those who have obeyed the Gospel call, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 / 1 Peter 2:9. Fellowship, partnership and participation, therefore, occur during the Lord's Supper.

The 'bread' or 'loaf' NIV, of the first clause, is a representation of the body of Christ, 1 Corinthians 10:17 / Matthew 26:26-29. The body of Christ is a phrase used to indicate the church of Christ, Ephesians 1:22-23.

Fee, in his commentary, says the following.

'The cup may focus on the vertical dimension of fellowship between the believer and the Lord, whereas the bread focuses on the horizontal dimension, 1 Corinthians 10:17.'

When the 'many', 1 Corinthians 10:17, come together on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord's Supper, there is a communion, fellowship or sharing taking place.

That common oneness that we share is in our being united in purpose with the Word of God, 1 Corinthians 12:14-27. Jesus' prayer in John 17 / 1 Corinthians 1:10 / Ephesians 4:1-2 / Philippians 1:27. The many are one as they partake of the one bread, 1 Corinthians 10:17.

"Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's Table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" 1 Corinthians 10:18-22

The descendants of Abraham, Israel after the flesh, made sacrifices to God for sin offerings and various other oblations. When these sacrifices were conducted, both the priest and the one offering the sacrifice were allowed to eat a portion of the sacrifice, Leviticus 8 / Deuteronomy 12 / 1 Corinthians 9:13.

What transpired under such events? The one offering and the priest had communion and fellowship with the altar. Again, to participate in idolatry is to have communion with evil is the point.

In 1 Corinthians 8:4-5, Paul's point was that eating meat sacrificed to idols was a non-issue because the idol is really nothing. 1 Corinthians 10 sets forth the sinfulness of communing with others at the table and altars of idolaters, 1 Corinthians 10:18 / Deuteronomy 14:22-27.

Robertson and Plummer, in their commentary, say the following.

‘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.’

1 Corinthians 10:19 is stated to prevent the accusation that Paul is contradicting himself. He re-states the fact that an idol is nothing. This issue really does not revolve around the idol itself.

The real issue is fellowship, idolatry, and authority. One who participates, shares or fellowships in the sinful, unauthorised practices of idolatry is in error. To eat meat sacrificed to idols at the idol’s temple with idolaters participating in idol worship is to commune or share with them in their unauthorised practices.

There was obviously a difference between eating the meat in the temple and eating the meat in the idol’s temple while worship was going on. One could not possibly participate in their worship! 1 Corinthians 10:20.

To participate in the sacrificial meals of pagan deities was to have communion, fellowship, or share with demons, Deuteronomy 32:17 / Psalms 106:37. Some brethren apparently were unintentionally sinning in this case. Eating the meats sacrificed to idols was a liberty; however, when participation in cultish activities occurred, even though one knew within that the deity was false, sin occurred.

Paul gives the reason for this conclusion in 1 Corinthians 10:21. Note that ‘the cup’ is used figuratively here; people do not drink the literal cup. Our one-cup brethren believe the cup to be of great significance, yet the Lord places the significance upon the contents of the cup, 1 Corinthians 10:16.

To drink the cup of the Lord is to be one with the Lord and his people. To drink and partake of the cup and table of demons is to be one with demons, 1 Corinthians 10:21.

God has set the limits of fellowship. We cannot claim oneness with God and His people, yet partake of evil and unauthorised practices! The lines of true discipleship will not be marred. We are either in fellowship with God or not, 1 John 1:5-6. If I claim fellowship with God yet walk in darkness, practice unauthorised acts.

Notice Paul says, ‘provoke the Lord to jealousy’, 1 Corinthians 10:22, compare this passage to 1 John 1:5-7. The Old Testament pictures God as a jealous God because His people were likened unto a spouse to Him, Exodus 20:5 / Exodus 34:14.

Isaiah and Hosea illustrated the unfaithfulness of Judah and Israel by likening them to an unfaithful wife that caused Jehovah anguish and jealousy, Isaiah 1:21 / Isaiah 57:3-8 / Hosea 9:1. Such ‘provoking’ of God to jealousy is prompting His anger, Deuteronomy 32:21.

A Christian who does such activity must consider himself very powerful and able to stand against the wrath of God, and so Paul states, ‘Are we stronger than he (God)?’ 1 Corinthians 10:22. The answer is obvious.

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others. Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.” 1 Corinthians 10:23-26

Paul now makes practical applications to his teaching on the subject of eating meat sacrificed to idols in 1 Corinthians 10:23-33. This is parallel to what he had previously said in 1 Corinthians 6:12, however, he adds one thing, ‘not all things edify,’ KJV. The NIV uses the word ‘constructive’, 1 Corinthians 10:23.

The word ‘edify’, in Greek, is ‘oikodome’, and it means ‘a building or structure’. Paul’s point is that even though a circumstance is lawful, to participate in it may not edify all involved.

Wisdom must be used by Christians of all ages when participating in areas of liberty and expediency. The point is that we would not want to cause a brother in Christ to stumble over our liberties, 1 Corinthians 10:24 / 1 Corinthians 8:13 / Romans 15:2 / Philippians 2:4.

The liberty under consideration, eating meats sacrificed to idols, may be lawful; however, the Christian must ask ‘Will it edify all involved? To have any other mind is to be selfish and to lack brotherly love, 1 Corinthians 10:24 / Romans 14:15.

The Greek word ‘makellon’ is ‘the meat market’, 1 Corinthians 10:25. The Christian would find himself shopping in Corinth for groceries at the meat market with a variety of choices. Paul’s admonition is to ask no question regarding the origin of the meat but to buy and eat.

Clearly, some of the meat that came to the market was left over from a pagan sacrifice, and everyone knew it. No questions were to be asked with the intent of determining if the meat was sacrificed to idols for the sake of conscience.

Here was a case where the Lord did not demand an action to be done according to knowledge and conscience. The knowledge of the source of the meat was not needed because the meat in and of itself is clean.

The animal’s flesh was part of the ‘fullness’, in Greek that’s the word, ‘pleroma’ of the earth, 1 Corinthians 10:26 / Psalms 24:1 / Psalms 50:12. The earth was comprised of many things, meat was a part of that sum total. The sum total of all the earth and its contents ‘is the Lord’s’ and is therefore clean, Mark 7:19 / Acts 10:15.

Clearly, it was not the meat itself that was unclean; that which was unclean and sinful was the unauthorised idolatry. Many drugs are considered ‘the fullness’ of the earth; however, what men do with these drugs is sometimes unauthorised.

“If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if someone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice,’ then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. I am referring to the other person’s conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another’s conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?” 1 Corinthians 10:27-30

If an unbeliever invites you to a meal, which means you are the guest, Paul says, eat what is put before you, asking no questions regarding the source of the meat, 1 Corinthians 10:27, because ‘The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it’, 1 Corinthians 10:26.

The word ‘conscience’, in Greek, is ‘suneidesis’ and is once again used and means an awareness of one’s duty and surroundings through knowledge, 1 Corinthians 10:27 / Acts 10:28 / Acts 11:2-3.

The scenario is pressed further: what if, while you are sitting at a meal with the unbeliever, he tells you that the meat served is from the sacrifice to a pagan deity? 1 Corinthians 10:28-30.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘A present-day analogy may be imagined if someone with strong principles on total abstinence 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.’

In this situation, the Christian is bound by love and influence not to eat. Not because the meat is unclean, but because the server or host needs to understand that making sacrifices to idols is wrong and unauthorised.

If the understanding brother eats the meats sacrificed to idols knowingly, he knows that all meats are clean regardless if they have been sacrificed to idols, while others have this common knowledge, he may give the impression that he endorses idolatry and said unauthorised practices.

The logic and application of these verses may be used in many activities that are not sinful in themselves, yet to participate in them would give the non-Christian a wrong signal regarding the greater spiritual picture. These verses

presuppose the consequences of the strong Christian eating the meat set before him, even though the meat's origin has been made known.

Fee, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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.’

If the strong go ahead and give thanks for the food and eat it knowing that it is of the fullness of the earth, he does no good in this situation, 1 Corinthians 10:30. He is ‘denounced’ because even the unbelieving Gentiles would see his hypocrisy.

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.” 1 Corinthians 10:31-33

The determining factor as to whether or not I partake of a liberty or do anything ‘whatsoever’ is whether or not the action will bring glory to God, 1 Corinthians 10:31 / 1 Corinthians 6:20.

Jesus tells us that glory is brought to God by the Christian bearing fruit and abiding in the commandments of God, John 15:5-10. One who does not abide by the authority of God brings God no glory. To bring God glory is to cause others to speak well of the Lord through our fruits!

The Jews, Greeks, and the church involved all classes of humanity. Paul would not be a stumbling block to any of these, 1 Corinthians 10:32 / 1 Corinthians 9:19. No liberty was worth closing the door of opportunity to the Jews and Greeks, nor worth causing a weak brother in Christ to stumble.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Giving no offence means putting no obstacle in the path of a person, be he Jew, 1 Corinthians 9:20, or Gentile, 1 Corinthians 9:21, so that he might come to faith in Christ. If he is already a believer, it means putting nothing in his way that would hinder his growth in Christ, 1 Corinthians 9:22. It is not a matter of simply ‘hurting someone’s feelings.’

To seek his own good would be to participate in liberties, no matter what others thought, 1 Corinthians 10:33. Rather than selfishly casting away all others’ consciences on matters of these liberties and shut the door of opportunity, Paul would rather give up the liberty and help the needy souls and thus profit them. These chapters reveal the greatest love and concern for others.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Christian freedom is not given to us for our own sake but for the sake of others.’

SUMMARY

The objective of 1 Corinthians 10 is to illustrate by Old Testament examples and God's supreme authority that participating in liberty at the cost of a brother's conscience amounts to sin. Paul meticulously compares the issue of practising a liberty at a brother's soul's expense to sinful conduct.

Though ‘the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof’ applies to the condition of the meat, it is not expedient in all circumstances to partake of the liberty, 1 Corinthians 10:23-25.

A Christian who participates in a sacrificial meal with non-believers who are worshipping their deity is in such a circumstance. Such activity would be having ‘communion’, fellowship or sharing, with an unauthorised practice. Though the meat is clean, the circumstances around the meat are not.

Eating the meat is not the real issue. The issue is in the fellowship error, 1 Corinthians 10:14-22. The thought is clearly established; i.e., I cannot be a good influence on one for righteousness’ sake while participating in their sinful deeds, 1 Corinthians 10:30. Such actions have a threefold effect.

1. I have shown my convictions to be weak, and thereby I lose my integrity among the unbelievers.
2. I have sinned against God and breached my fellowship with Him.
3. I have followed the error rather than exposing it.

When saints come together in one spirit to partake of the Lord’s Supper, we are in ‘communion’ with each other, 1 Corinthians 10:16. Likewise, when I partake of sinful conduct with someone else, I am in ‘communion’ with their sin and thereby am one in purpose with them in this sin, 1 Corinthians 10:17.

Rather than fellowshiping the sin and sinner, 2 Corinthians 6:14, we are commanded to expose their sin and remain separate, Ephesians 5:11 / 2 Corinthians 6:17-7:1.

The strong in Corinth knew the errors of idolatry and that there was truly only one God; however, they apparently participated in their unauthorised acts of worship and are labelled as sinners, 1 Corinthians 8:1-5. Just because one is a baptised believer does not mean that one is immune from sinful choices. Such a choice will result in falling away from the living God.

That which determines true fellowship with God is one’s stand in truth. The Lord will not permit the lines of fellowship to be marred. Israel’s wilderness journey provides the second of Paul’s illustrations. Because Israel is an outstanding example of a people who had every possible advantage, which began so well but failed miserably because of disobedience.

I think we may take it that, just as the illustration of the ‘Games’ rang a bell in the minds of the Greeks, the Jewish members of the church in Corinth would certainly feel the force of what Paul wrote about the journey of their forefathers from Egypt to Canaan when hundreds of thousands died on a trek that took forty years when it should only have taken a few months.

There is surely no greater single disaster in the entire recorded history of humanity. Of the vast multitude that Moses led out of Egypt, only two survived to lead their children into the Promised Land. They were happy to be released from the slavery of Egypt, but were not prepared to accept the responsibilities of freedom.

In fact, my personal opinion is that, as a Nation, Israel has probably been the greatest failure in history, and I doubt if they ever really understood or appreciated the role that God planned for them to fulfil.

The tragedy was that the descendants of Abraham deluded themselves into thinking that there was something special, outstanding, superior about themselves that caused God to choose them to be His People. They reached this mistaken conclusion by completely ignoring what their own Scriptures said about their origins.

The blunt truth is that, although they have, for centuries, been at war with the people whom we today know as the Palestinians, both they and the Palestinians have the same ancestry.

They both descended from Canaan, the son of Ham, Noah’s second son, not from Shem as is usually thought. In other words, Israel is not Semitic, but is Hamitic, as Genesis 10:16 states. Notice the name ‘Amorites’.

Look at Ezekiel 16, in which God issues a devastating condemnation of ‘Jerusalem’ by which is meant the inhabitants. In Ezekiel 16:3, God says ‘Your father was an AMORITE and your mother HITTITE’.

These were two of the tribes of Mesopotamia, also called Chaldea, where Abram lived in ‘Ur of the Chaldeans’. The word ‘Ur’ means ‘City’. In [Joshua 24:2](#), Joshua tells the assembled Israelites things they would scarcely like to hear! ‘This is what YHVH, the God of Israel, says; ‘YOUR fathers, including Terah, the father of ABRAHAM and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times, and THEY SERVED OTHER GODS.’ [Joshua 24:2](#). And, even when they developed into a nation, the Scriptures state that they were not the largest, but the smallest of nations! But when God made a covenant with them at Sinai, making them His own people, they began to regard themselves as superior to all other nations, failing to understand the reason why God had chosen them.

When He called Abram to leave Mesopotamia, it was not because Abram had found God, but because God had found Abram. God did not look at what Abram was in Mesopotamia, but at what he could become and the role he was to play in bringing about salvation.

Paul states, ‘the scriptures, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen, preached the Gospel to Abram saying, ‘In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed’, [Galatians 3:8](#).

Although even today there are people who seem to revere the Jews and regard them as a special, holy people, the fact is that they played no active, positive part in God’s plan, because they failed to recognize that they were intended to serve as a kind of object lesson, a visible display, of the blessings that come to a people when they submit themselves to the control of God.

These Jews never did because time and time again they rebelled, disobeyed, served idols and were eventually rejected by God when He decided to create a new, obedient people, as Peter states in [1 Peter 2:9-19](#), and Paul even says, ‘Because of you, the Name of God is blasphemed among the heathen,’ [Romans 2:24](#). By means of this reminder of Israel’s tragic failure, Paul issued a warning to the Church in Corinth against idolatry, [1 Corinthians 10:14](#). His reference to the Lord’s Supper, which follows, was intended for those Corinthian members who regarded themselves as strong enough to sit at a feast in a pagan temple because they knew that an idol is nothing and that the meat was nothing more than meat!

There is a resemblance here to the warning he gives in [1 Corinthians 11](#), when he rebukes them for holding an Agape Feast, before going on to supposedly celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Notice the contrast between ‘The Table of the Lord’ and ‘The Table of demons’, [1 Corinthians 10:21](#).

It is true that an idol is nothing. It cannot do anything. But evil rites are real, and one cannot sit at the ‘table of demons’ without being unfaithful to the ‘Table of the Lord’.

CHAPTER 11

INTRODUCTION

[1 Corinthians 11:1-16](#) may be one of the toughest passages in Scripture to understand, where Paul deals with the subject of the use of veils. As we go through this study, we need to ask the following questions:

What did the veil represent in that culture? What kind of message were they sending out to others by wearing them? Is there a difference between customs and commands?

In the days of the early church, there were different customs regarding head coverings. For example, Jewish women would wear a head covering, but Jewish men didn't. Generally speaking, among the Greeks, only slaves were covered, and the uncovered head was a sign of freedom. The Romans reversed this.

The Roman freeman wore the pileus; the slave went bareheaded. The Romans were accustomed to praying while they were veiled, but Greek men didn't. The Greek custom was to pray with the head uncovered.

The Jews had the same custom as the Romans during worship, and we should not forget that Paul was originally a Jew. This veiling expressed reverence, the proper feeling of unworthiness to appear before God with an open face. Maimonides says, 'Let not the wise men, nor the scholars of the wise men, pray unless they be covered.' The Jewish covering was called the tallith.

Even today, the Jews cover the head, as a gesture of respect to God; the head is covered during prayer, either with a hat or a skullcap, 'kippah'. Pious Jews wear a head covering at all times, recognising God's constant presence. In the Corinthian culture, the veil was a sign of submission to another person.

As we can imagine, when you've got a church full of people from different backgrounds, we can easily begin to understand why the wearing of a veil became an issue for the church in Corinth.

In this chapter, Paul responds to those issues and says the answer is found in orderliness, 1 Corinthians 14:33. He says that their worship should be orderly and they should be guided by the natural order which already exists in creation. It appears that the real problem wasn't so much the wearing of veils, but what they thought order was.

THE DIVINE ORDER

'Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.' 1 Corinthians 11:1

We must remember that there are no chapters and verses within the Scriptures, so the above verse carries on from 1 Corinthians 10, where Paul speaks about freedom and the responsibility of freedom, that the church should follow his lead in this.

GOD'S REVELATION REGARDING THE WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE HOME AND SOCIETY

'I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you. But I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.' 1 Corinthians 11:2-3

Paul now begins to deal with the subject of veils; he praises them for their perseverance in his teaching and examples. What he writes here is all about relationships.

The word 'praise', 'epaino', 'to praise, commend, applaud'. This Greek word is identified as an active verb in the present tense, which indicates ongoing action. As long as the Corinthians would remember all of Paul's actions, 1 Corinthians 11:1 and 'hold fast the traditions' he would praise, commend, and applaud them.

When we get to 1 Corinthians 11:17, he will say, 'But in giving you this charge, I praise you not.' Paul could not praise, commend, or applaud the Corinthians because they were in sin.

The word ‘traditions’, ‘paradosis’, ‘what is delivered, the substance of the teaching or instruction’. That which was delivered, 1 Corinthians 11:23 / 1 Corinthians 15:3, is the revelation of God, the Gospel, 2 Thessalonians 2:15 / 2 Timothy 1:13 / 1 John 1:3.

He says that a woman is in subjection to her husband, and his leadership is modified because of his own subordination to Christ, and even Jesus voluntarily submitted His life to God.

Paul’s point is that there is a divinely established order between woman, man, Christ and God. This divine example is the blueprint that he will use to solve the disorder in the church created by the issue of veils.

‘Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head.’ 1 Corinthians 11:4

The word ‘veil’, in Greek, is ‘katakalupto’, and it means to cover up, having covered his head, having veiled oneself. A Christian man, therefore, wasn’t to pray with his head covered because it would disgrace or dishonour his head, that is, Christ. The reason for this was that only Christ was head over man, no other man or institution. His uncovered head indicated this fact.

‘But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.’ 1 Corinthians 11:5-6

If we examine this passage in comparison to 1 Corinthians 14:34, we find that Paul cannot be referring to their first day of the week assembly here. Women were not permitted to speak in the assembly; they were and are required to keep silent and learn at home, 1 Timothy 2:12.

The point of 1 Corinthians 11:5-6 is that if she were to go against this custom, she was resisting the customs of their society and showing a defiant attitude towards the man.

A woman praying and prophesying with her head not covered was as shameful as shaving her head. Paul compares it to being completely shaved, which was a sign of prostitution or unchastity.

Expositor’s Greek says the following.

‘If a woman prefers bare head, she should remove her hair; womanly feeling forbids the latter, then it should forbid the former, for the like shame attaches to both.’

A Christian woman, who publicly prayed, not in an assembly setting, 1 Timothy 2:12, with her head uncovered dishonours her head, which is her husband. This means that she was rejecting his leadership, and to do this in those days was shocking, that is, being unveiled in public.

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If a man were to appear publicly wearing a veil, 1 Corinthians 11:4 / 1 Corinthians 11:7, it would be shameful (as shameful as if he wore his hair like a woman), but a female publicly proclaiming or praying, having dispensed with what is female dress, is bringing dishonour on herself and up the line to God. If a woman saw a man dressing like a woman, she ought to be repelled, he is forsaking his maleness and the position he has been given before God.’

The shaving of a woman’s head is a prime example of the fact that this is a custom Paul is referring to. Nowhere in the Old Testament or New Testament do we find laws forbidding the shaving of a woman’s head, yet Paul says it is shameful for her to do so. Why Paul? Because society views a woman with a shaved head as ‘odd or shameful.’ This principle is brought about in Isaiah 3:16-24.

So far, Paul said that there is a natural order, divinely appointed in creation. What we do in our public worship of God ought to reflect that natural order to be considered decent and proper.

In practical terms, then, men should pray without a head-covering to reflect their leadership, that is, Christ, and women ought to publicly pray with their heads covered in order to reflect their leadership, that is, their husbands, or fathers for single women.

PRAYER AND PROPHECY

In regard to women praying and prophesying, please note that Paul doesn't say the woman is leading in prayer or teaching; the praying and prophesying are used in general terms. The guidance for public worship, that is, mixed assemblies, men and women, will begin later in 1 Corinthians 11:17.

Here, Paul is speaking about those times when it is proper for women to prophesy and pray. Women aren't restricted from prophesying and prayer, only in the public, mixed assembly, 1 Corinthians 14:34-36.

Paul is talking about other occasions where women were to pray and prophesy, they were to wear the head-covering. In the mixed, public assembly, their silence was their sign of submission while the men prayed and prophesied.

However, at home, or women's gatherings or other instances where they could prophesy or pray, Exodus 15:20 / Acts 16:3 / Acts 21:9, they wore the head-covering to signify their submission and respect.

The point, however, wasn't about veils; it was about how one did things in order to convey an attitude of respect and submission to God. These aren't man-made ideas; they are instructions from God.

DIVINE REASONING

Now that Paul has explained what they should do and why, he goes on to give the divine reasoning behind this teaching.

'A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels.' 1 Corinthians 11:7-10

Man's glory is that he was created first, Genesis 2:7, and to pray uncovered is to reflect that glory. Both men and women are created equally in the image of God, Genesis 1:26-27, but man's glory is that he was created first, not better.

As one who reflects the image of God, man has been given 'dominion' over all creation, Genesis 1:26. This authority over God's creation is a reflection of God and his glory. Psalms 8:5-6 / Hebrews 2:6-8.

A woman's glory is that the human race continues through her. To recognise their glory is to recognise God and what God has done, not what man has done. Man didn't create himself, nor did he have any say in the order of creation.

Within this creation of things subject to man's dominion is the woman. She is termed the 'help meet' Genesis 2:18. After the fall of man in the garden, the Lord said to the woman, 'I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labour, you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.' Genesis 3:16.

The woman is the glory of man as the man is the glory of God. This statement is examined closely in the next two verses. When, therefore, the woman wears the veil, she publicly proclaims her compliance with God's order of creation.

Paul states that the woman is of the man and not the other way around. God created the man first, and then He made the woman for the man and from the man, Genesis 2:21-24.

Woman was made as a 'helper' for the man. Again, God's creative order indicates that it would be a shameful thing for a man to veil his head. The man who veils his head has not taken God's order of creation seriously, and likewise, the woman who will not veil her head in subjection has not taken God's order of creation seriously.

Women publicly praying with their heads uncovered suggested that they should be in a man's place. This is shameful because it rejects God's order and, in that culture, the husband's position. A woman should recognise her place in creation and reflect her belief and acceptance of this; the veil was that symbol at that time.

The key is that Paul recognised that it was a cultural symbol of his day. Why should she wear a veil? Because of the angels, Jude 6 / 2 Peter 2:4. Paul appears to be reminding the women of the danger they play with when they reject their own domain or proper sphere.

'Nevertheless, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.' 1 Corinthians 11:11-12

Paul reminds them that man's authority doesn't mean independence. We're united biologically and submitted to one another spiritually. Man needs the woman, and the woman needs the man.

Neither one may now exist without the other. This relationship exists 'in the Lord,' that is, by the Lord's will, man needs the woman, and the woman needs the man. This order isn't meant to create dominance or competition; this order is meant to create mutual dependence and glory to God in reflecting the divine order.

'Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering.' 1 Corinthians 11:13-15

Again, Paul uses the word 'judge' as he did in 1 Corinthians 10:15 to mean consider or reason with me. Here, Paul uses an example from nature to underline his point. Some things are suggested by nature; for example, long hair on a man is unnatural, but considered proper and beautiful on a woman.

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

'Nature is the way things can be observed to exist. A horse is a horse, a rock is a rock, a male is a male, and a female is a female. Nature is not an 'innate moral instinct'. Nature (in this passage) has nothing directly to do with birth. Nature is not 'inbuilt knowledge' or some inner illumination. Nature (in this passage) is the observable make-up of reality. What is it that nature teaches them? It teaches them that something is shameful. It teaches that men were not to act like women. Men who wear their hair like women are acting shamefully.'

It's natural because a woman's hair will grow longer than a man's in normal circumstances. Social custom supports and promotes this natural phenomenon. Long hair on men has always been out of the ordinary; even Jews who did it did it because of a vow, not because of style, Numbers 6:1-5 / Numbers 6:18-19 / Judges 13:5 / Judges 13:7.

Some have argued from 1 Corinthians 11:15 that the hair is the covering. But that cannot work in this text because if the hair is the covering, then what is the man to do when he wants to pray or prophesy? The man would have to be bald or have his head shaved if the hair on his head is not to be covered.

McGuiggan, in his commentary, says the following.

'Who gives the woman her long hair for a covering? The passage doesn't say. If God gave long hair to the woman as her glory and covering, it would appear that women ought to be hesitant about having their hair cut short, as they characteristically do in the West. My own judgment is that the long hair of a female became her trademark rather than

being a positive ordinance of God. I don't think God gave the woman the veil any more than he gave her long hair. So that 'is given' is equivalent to saying, 'is recognised as being peculiarly hers.'

The point there is this: any social custom, such as the veil, which emphasises an idea suggested by nature, must be proper. In other words, social customs are ok if they reflect accurately what is natural and already in the divine order.

'If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.' 1 Corinthians 11:16

Paul says all the churches at that time were following this custom and the reasoning behind it. Women don't publicly pray or prophesy with their heads uncovered.

MODERN APPLICATIONS

Paul says that the Corinthians must respect customs that reflect divine truth and order. The problem for us today is what to do when customs change, especially when we're caught in the middle of that change.

Some churches, even today, have female members who wear head coverings because they feel that the instructions in this passage are binding for all time. Most don't because they believe that the teaching here is about custom, not command.

CUSTOM AND COMMAND

Here are a few ideas on this passage that will help us when we have to discern between custom, that is, cultural, and command, that is, divine. Although customs change, commands never change, and so, in the case of the Corinthians, it was customary to wear the veil in order to show submission and respect. This wasn't invented by apostles or commanded by God; it was already a custom that existed in many societies.

This custom wasn't in itself an eternal truth; it merely reflected an eternal truth regarding the relationship of men and women before God. Since the custom accurately reflected the divine truth, Paul commanded them not to change or rebel against the custom for fear of creating a bad witness.

With time, this custom changed as societies changed, and it no longer reflects eternal truth in our culture. We see the same thing happening with the 'holy kiss', [Romans 16:16](#) / [1 Corinthians 16:20](#) / [2 Corinthians 13:12](#) / [1 Thessalonians 5:26](#), which has been replaced with a handshake.

The command remains to submit, to maintain the order of God, Christ, man, woman, but the customs that reflect this truth change. We need to focus on ways to make sure we're keeping the command and not maintaining meaningless customs, and that we don't violate the commands with customs that reflect disobedience. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to submit to those customs that reflect God's eternal truth as a way of honouring God and maintaining order in the church.

SUMMARY

I don't believe the head covering still applies today because the text is referring to women publicly praying and using the spiritual gift of prophecy, 1 Corinthians 11:5. This is directly who Paul is talking to in this text.

As we know from 1 Corinthians 13:8-12, spiritual gifts ceased at the completion of the revealing of the Gospel, the perfect had come, the part will pass away. This text even names prophecy as one of the things that will pass away. Since spiritual gifts have ceased, the things contained in this text can't apply.

But suppose some don't understand this text to be talking about spiritual gifts, well, in that case, the text still clearly states that these 'traditions' were given because of the culture of the day. Consider how many times Paul refers to the 'customs' of the day in his arguments for the use of the covering.

1 Corinthians 11:6 argues that being uncovered is like having your hair cut short or shaved, which was a shame in those days. 1 Corinthians 11:13 asks what is proper, 1 Corinthians 11:14 asks about nature, and 1 Corinthians 11:16 is the clearest of all, where Paul flat out calls the wearing of the covering a custom, that is, a practice.

This is clearly a custom that Paul is asking the women to do because it was a custom of the day, and he didn't want them to go against that custom. If some Christians are still convinced that the covering is still in force today, then they must fully obey this passage and the practices found concerning the head covering.

A covering must be worn at all times when a woman prays publicly, outside of mixed worship. A covering was something to cover the head and face, not the hair only.

Many who practice the covering don't do so properly, for Paul clearly says in 1 Corinthians 11:5 that the head is to be covered. And so, a covering is that which we see in the Middle East, where the women have coverings that you can only see their eyes and nose. A covering isn't a lace cloth on the top of the head or a hat.

ABUSES AT THE LORD'S SUPPER

"In the following directives, I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent, I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry, and another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!" 1 Corinthians 11:17-22

In 1 Corinthians 11:17-26, we see that Christ is in the midst of the church. On the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Lord Himself says in Matthew 18:20, 'where two or three are gathered together into my name, there am I in the midst.'

In the Upper Room, John 20:19, Jesus is central to our worship as the sacrificial Passover Lamb. Jesus is the reason for our being present each Lord's Day. Not once a month, not quarterly, not annually, as with the so-called 'Witnesses', but every first day of the week.

And Jesus keeps His promise. If we come together in the right spirit and for the right purpose, if we gather in His Name, He will be here, and He will not come without a blessing.

The early Christians recognised this because the central act in their Worship was the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup, which spoke of his Body and His blood. This is the wonderful thing about the Lord's Supper.

Were it not for the fact that Jesus came and died, we would not be meeting together. We remember a Jesus who bore our sins. Who suffered the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God.

Again, the ‘charge’ has been delivered in 1 Corinthians 11:2. Paul could not praise, commend, or applaud the Corinthian brethren for the following reasons. The brethren assembled themselves together on the first day of the week for ‘the worse’ as opposed to ‘for the better,’ 1 Corinthians 11:17.

For the worse is represented in the factions that existed, 1 Corinthians 11:18 / 1 Corinthians 1:12, the division between poor and rich, 1 Corinthians 11:21, and perversion of the Lord’s Supper, 1 Corinthians 11:20-33. To gather for the better would be an atmosphere of edification and glorification of God, Hebrews 10:22-25.

The ‘first of all’ begins the explanation of the Corinthians coming together for the worse in 1 Corinthians 11:17. The word church, 1 Corinthians 11:18, is ‘ekklesia’ in Greek, and it’s here used as the first day of the week assembly during which the five acts of worship are conducted. Not all assemblies are the same.

Sometimes the brethren assembled during the week for Bible studies, Acts 19:9. As the brethren assembled together, there were ‘divisions’, ‘schisma’ that existed. Schisma is defined as the division of opinion.

Notice that Paul had ‘heard’ this from other brethren, 1 Corinthians 7:1. Apparently, so much talk was circulating about the church in Corinth that Paul didn’t know what to believe and what not to believe. He concludes by saying, ‘and I partly believe it,’ 1 Corinthians 11:18.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Evidently, those who had reported this abuse in the Corinthian church to Paul had given him much detail about what was happening. Paul said he believed enough of this to conclude that there was a serious problem.’

Later, Paul will give us instructions regarding the manner that we communicate about the state of others, 2 Corinthians 13:1. Such revealing of facts is solely out of love, care and concern for souls.

The Greek word ‘dei’ for the English ‘must’ is used in 1 Timothy 3:2-7. Paul said the ‘bishop must be’ giving all the qualifications. Dei is defined as needful, binding on one to do a thing; that which is necessary is that divisions occur among brethren, 1 Corinthians 11:18.

The word ‘divisions’, in Greek is ‘haireisis’ and means a taking, means for taking a place, a taking for oneself, a choosing, choice. Within the body of Christ, those approved, 1 Corinthians 11:19, which is the Greek word ‘dokimos’, and it means one who is of tried faith and integrity of God, in fellowship, and those out of fellowship with God will be made manifest by their deeds and words, 1 John 2:19.

Within the body of Christ, there will always be those who do not follow the doctrine of Christ and those who want to form cliques, looking down their nose at others, as was occurring in Corinth. These collect together because they share the one mind as do the faithful children of God, Revelation 17:13.

Paul tells us to admonish these disorderly with longsuffering and patience, 1 Thessalonians 5:14; however, if they will not repent, we must mark them and turn away from them, 2 Thessalonians 3:6 / 2 Thessalonians 3:14.

Here is an inference to what takes place on the first day of the week assembly, i.e. the Lord’s Supper is taken. Paul states, however, that at this assembly, ‘it is not possible to eat the Lord’s Supper’, 1 Corinthians 11:20.

Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper in Matthew 26:26-29. This Supper is to be partaken every first day of the week, Acts 20:7, because each week has a first day, Exodus 20:8. Why was it not possible? The entire assembly had been perverted into some sort of feasting time. The picture painted of this church is truly ultra-liberal.

PAUL MENTIONS THREE THINGS THAT HAD GONE WRONG

1. Some took food only for themselves, which resulted in some eating and drinking to excess, whilst others remained hungry, 1 Corinthians 11:21.

In other words, the idea of fellowship was lost because they had separated themselves into groups, created a chasm between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', the rich with their own meals, eating to excess, whilst the poor were not being allowed to share and were being left hungry, and, no doubt, feeling excluded.

So the event, which was designed to stress unity and promote a sense of brotherhood in the church, was actually promoting and emphasising class distinction.

2. Not only was each eating his own food, but the inference is that the wealthy were beginning their own supper, without waiting for their brethren, 1 Corinthians 11:21. Were they afraid of being asked to share it?

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'A Church is not a true Church where the art of sharing is forgotten.'

3. And what must be regarded as the most shameful occurrence, some were drinking so heavily at their so-called 'love feast' that they were proceeding to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a drunken state, 1 Corinthians 11:21.

Brethren were bringing food and intoxicating wine and getting 'drunk', 1 Corinthians 11:21. The word for drunk in Greek is 'methuo', which is defined as being drunken with wine. It may be that the more affluent brethren had things to bring to the feast and eat, whereas the poorer brethren had not and were therefore hungry.

It is difficult to determine whether the Corinthians were physically drunk or drunk with pride over their welfare above others. Either case indicates a heart that is perverted.

To eat and drink at the assembly was to 'despise the church of God and put them to shame that have not,' 1 Corinthians 11:22. The word, 'despise', is 'kataphroneo' in Greek is to think down upon, i.e., to look down upon, think slightly off, to regard slightly, despise, to be thought little of.

These liberal-minded brethren took the church of God as a mere means of gathering people together for a party and thereby showed their disdain for the church that Jesus purchased with His blood.

Those who had little were belittled and shamed by the rich brethren in this party atmosphere. They brought their abundance of food early, ate it all before the poor arrived and refused to share, 1 Corinthians 11:22.

This verse lends strong evidence to the metaphorical use of 'drunken'. For this conduct, Paul states, 'I praise you not, 1 Corinthians 11:22. Clearly, we see here that it was not a function of the church or the assembly to eat and drink. The brethren were to eat and drink in their homes, 1 Corinthians 11:22.

Now, against this background, it is not surprising that Paul tells the Corinthians, 'I am not praising you! 1 Corinthians 11:17. You do not come together for the better but for the worse.' He says, 'In the way in which you are behaving, IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO EAT THE LORD'S SUPPER!' 1 Corinthians 11:20.

The assembly was for singing, Ephesians 5:19, praying, 1 Timothy 2:8, preaching, Acts 20:7, partaking of the Lord's Supper, Matthew 26:26-29 / Acts 20:7 / 1 Corinthians 11:23-34, and giving as one has been prospered, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.

Have you ever thought about why we call it the Lord's SUPPER when we celebrate it on the Lord's Day MORNING? Surely, morning is the time for Breakfast! But this is a SUPPER! I might point out that some religious groups have taken the word supper, so literally that they have insisted on an evening celebration of the feast.

But it is called a supper because the word suggests the main meal of the day, and that is how the supper was regarded in that age. The main meal. The most important meal. The meal at which you were most likely to meet your friends and relatives in fellowship.

The Greeks knew nothing of the proverbial ‘English Breakfast’. Their breakfast was more like the frugal ‘Continental breakfast’ about which British holiday-makers overseas speak of with such disappointment.

They would ‘breakfast’ on just a piece of bread dipped in wine, and the mid-day meal was a little better. It was more like an office-worker’s sandwich lunch, eaten in the street, or in a park, or anywhere that happened to be convenient. It was certainly not a formal meal, but the supper was something quite different.

People came together, and they sat down intending to enjoy their fellowship at the Table, treating the occasion rather like the French or the Italians treat a main meal today. It was something to be lingered over, not just for the food they ate but also for the fellowship they enjoyed.

You can see then, why the New Testament speaks of this simple meal as the Lord’s SUPPER. The destination not only stresses its importance, but also the fellowship.

Personally, I have been saddened when I have visited congregations where the actual supper is hurried through, sometimes with scarcely a word being spoken, so that the preacher may have more time for the sermon.

It is a sad fact that in some places they have developed this practice because they unthinkingly, perhaps, regard the preaching as the most important event in the service.

Obviously, I am not saying that we should deliberately extend the time spent around the actual table. Indeed, we should avoid falling into the error of thinking that we should spend a long time talking at the table, or that we should find something to talk about.

This, also, can be distracting and detract from the beauty of the feast. We should never rush through the Feast but proceed with reverence and respect, and allow it to take as much time as is necessary.

It is a fellowship, and it is wonderful how, when Christians meet around the Table, race and colour and language and class are irrelevant and forgotten. This is as it ought to be. Any congregation that maintains the sort of class distinction that was seen at Corinth is not a true Church of the Lord Jesus.

A true church is, after all, a body of men and women who are united to one another because they are individually united to Christ. But, as I have already said, at Corinth, more harm than good was being done, and Paul says, ‘If all you think about is having a good meal, then your congregational LOVE FEASTS should STOP! STAY AT HOME AND EAT’, 1 Corinthians 11:22.

Of course, this was directed at the wealthy members, who were guilty of this abuse. They had establishments of their own, houses of their own, where they could conveniently have a meal, without embarrassing anyone. On the other hand, those poorer brethren, probably from the slave class, had no such convenient facilities available to them.

THE PURPOSE OF COMING TOGETHER AS AN ASSEMBLY

“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

They have evidently forgotten what they have been taught, so he reminds them, 1 Corinthians 11:23.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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, Deuteronomy 16:3. Jesus did the same for His disciples when He instituted the Lord’s Supper.’

The verses which follow are significant for several reasons.

1. This is the earliest New Testament account of the institution of the Lord’s Supper.

It was written before Matthew, Mark, or Luke wrote the Gospel narratives which bear their names.

2. In 1 Corinthians 11:24, we have the earliest account of the actual words of Jesus.

That is, this is the first record of anything that Jesus ever said.

Notice how Paul attempts to impress these thoughtless and irreverent Corinthians with the solemnity of the Supper.

1. He tells them that he received it from the Lord Himself, 1 Corinthians 11:23, probably during that time of which he speaks in Galatians 1:11-12.

2. It was in the night in which He was betrayed that He instituted it, 1 Corinthians 11:23.

The very night that Judas would betray the Lord with a kiss, Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, 1 Corinthians 11:23 / Matthew 26:26-28. The bread that Jesus took was unleavened, Exodus 12:15-20 / Matthew 26:1 / Matthew 26:17.

Paul might simply have said that it was before the Lord’s arrest that He instituted it. Or even that it was before He was crucified. But no! He says, ‘in the night in which He was betrayed’, and perhaps implies that, when Christians abuse or neglect the Lord’s Supper as the Corinthians were doing, they also are guilty of betrayal.

A prayer was said to God by Jesus on behalf of the unleavened bread; He broke it, and then gave the reason for the disciples partaking of it, 1 Corinthians 11:24-26.

Note that when we partake of the Lord’s Supper today, we do not have Christ saying a prayer for us, and neither do we have Christ actually breaking the bread for us.

The bread was a representation of Christ’s body, not the literal body. The sacrificial body of Jesus was and is ‘for you,’ 1 Corinthians 11:24 / Hebrews 10:1. The body and blood of Jesus served as a perfect Passover lamb, John 1:29, that would provide a way for God’s wrath to pass over a sinful people, 1 Corinthians 5:7. A memorial of remembrance is to take place each and every first day of the week.

The word ‘remembrance’, 1 Corinthians 11:24-25, in Greek is ‘anamnesis’, and it means a calling to mind, recollection. Brethren were to assemble each first day of the week and partake of the Lord’s Supper to recall what Jesus did on the cross.

The content of the cup is a representation of the new covenant in my, that is, Jesus’ blood, 1 Corinthians 11:25. The cup itself was not drunk, and neither does the cup itself equal the new covenant. As the cup represents the blood of Christ, so the cup represents the new covenant.

After Jesus broke the bread and passed the loaf around, He passed the cup of wine around, stating, ‘for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins,’ 1 Corinthians 11:25 / Matthew 26:28.

Blood was to be shed that the new covenant, that is, the Law of Christ, might be made effective, Isaiah 2:3 / Jeremiah 31:31 / Hebrews 9:13-22. As the bread was not the literal body of Christ, even the fruit of the vine was not the literal blood of Jesus. These emblems were to be taken to ‘remember’ what Christ did on the cross, that the new covenant would be effective.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Remembering in biblical terminology does not mean just calling to memory. It includes realising what the event remembered involved, Exodus 13:3 / Exodus 20:8 / Deuteronomy 5:15 / Deuteronomy 7:18.’

The words, ‘whenever’, 1 Corinthians 11:26, would be every first day of the week until the Lord comes again or we die. The word ‘proclaim’, in Greek is ‘kataggello’, which means to make a ‘proclamation’, it’s a proclamation of the Lord’s death,’ 1 Corinthians 11:26.

When the saint partakes of the Lord’s Supper, he makes a public proclamation of faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. This shall be done until we die or ‘till he comes,’ 1 Corinthians 11:26.

Wiersbe, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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!’

Notice that 1 Corinthians 11:24 stresses that this is a Feast of Remembrance, but 1 Corinthians 11:26 also points out that it is a Proclamation. He uses a word which literally means, according to Professor F. F. Bruce, ‘You tell again’, or, ‘You show forth the Lord’s death’. In fact, he believed that at the Lord’s Table, week by week, the early Christians retold the story of the Lord’s death, burial and resurrection.

It was a story that they never tired of telling! And they never became used to hearing it! Familiarity did not cheapen it or rob it of its meaning for them. And because it was a Proclamation, they did not do what has sometimes been done in this country; they did not discourage non-Christians from being present to witness the feast.

It is true, and there can be no doubt about it, that the Lord’s Table is in the Lord’s House and is meant for those who are the Lord’s people, and that unless a man has given his heart to Jesus Christ, the Lord’s Supper can have no real meaning to him.

The result is that sometimes, we have seen congregations discourage non-Christians from even attending the Lord’s Day morning service, perhaps fearing that these strangers might partake of the supper by mistake.

Well, the intention may be to protect the Table from those who have no proper place there, but I think it is a well-meant intention which is a mistake because when Christians meet around this table, and the story of his death and resurrection, and His return is told again, it constitutes a most powerful proclamation of the Gospel.

One lady hymn writer wrote a hymn which says, ‘No gospel like this feast, Spread for thy church by Thee. No teacher nor evangelist, Preach the glad news so free.’

We are drawn together because of our belief in His atoning work. And because He said, ‘do this in remembrance of me!’ Jesus wants us to remember Him, not as the world professes, every 25th of December, to remember His birth in Bethlehem, but rather to remember His death for our sins.

Notice that you proclaim, the Greek text says, ‘you tell again’, His death, you repeat the story of His death. But the world is not really interested in the death of Christ. He would much rather think about his birth. It would prefer to look at a cradle, rather than at a cross! Because a birth is a far happier event.

There is joy and happiness when the birth of a child is announced, but the sight of a man dying on the cross is something quite different because it reminds us of the sin, our sin, which made His death necessary. And if there is one thing that we do not care to be reminded of, it is the fact that we are sinners!

Such a message is disturbing and makes us feel uncomfortable, but, as Christians, we meet to remember the One Who died for us. Our gratitude to the Lord for what He has done for us makes coming here today, not a burden or a duty, but a privilege and a joy.

Any Christian, or professing Christian, who finds it difficult to prepare himself to come and sit at the Lord's Table in response to the Lord's request, should take a good look at himself because he is spiritually sick and in real danger of dying spiritually, 1 Corinthians 11:30.

But for those who appreciate that the death of Jesus created the church, the situation is different. They realise that they cannot live without this fellowship, and they will say with the hymn writer, 'Remember thee? Thy death, thy Pain, our hearts! Sad load to bear? Ah! Memory, leave no other name than His recorded there.'

“So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ, eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.” 1 Corinthians 11:27-32

Something was happening at Corinth that we could not imagine happening in the church today, and certainly, we would not tolerate it. The Lord's Supper was being degraded to the level of a social party at which people were becoming intoxicated.

We might even go so far as to say that things were happening among the Corinthian Christians that no respectable Greek would have tolerated in his own home, and which Paul certainly found shocking, in spite of his statement in 1 Corinthians 11:1.

THE GUILDS

In Greek cities, there were guilds similar to the Trade Guilds, which were known in this country centuries ago, and which have left us with Guild Halls in some of our major cities. Each guild or society had its patron, one or other of the gods, just as the medieval guilds in this country had their Patron Saints.

Also common in those days was the practice of people joining together in associations or societies in a social way because the Greeks attached great importance to this kind of social life. These guilds and societies used to meet for a feast once a month, or each week, or if circumstances made it possible, even every day.

These occasions were similar to the fellowship meals held in my modern congregations, and indeed, the idea was good, because the act of eating together was intended to foster the spirit of brotherhood and friendship. What was very important was that when the members met around the table, they met as equals, with equal privileges.

Obviously, this was commendable because both rich and poor belonged to these societies and, when they met to hold a Feast, the members each contributed food to the common table, according to their ability.

The wealthy were able to bring much, whilst the poor contributed their little and, as they pooled their resources in this way, the poor were able to enjoy a good meal with the rest, without being made to feel they were accepting charity and without being embarrassed.

The Corinthian Christians had taken over this practice, though they gave it another name. Among the Greeks, that meal was known as an 'Eranos' whilst in the early church, it was called 'Ho Agape', the Love Feast.

No doubt it began with the very best of intentions; no doubt also, the first Fellowship Meals, i.e., 'Love Feasts', were highly successful and promoted a wonderful spirit of brotherhood and closeness among the early Christians.

However, as so often happens in arrangements that are devised by human wisdom without a direct command from the Scriptures to support them, it was probably not very long before the ‘agape’ was being so greatly abused that it became a mockery to call it a ‘love-feast’, and was doing more harm than good.

The early Christians used to meet on the ‘first Day of the week’ for this meal, and, in some places, they apparently celebrated it as a prelude to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. In other words, they had the ‘agape’ meal first and then stayed together to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

If we could have asked them for their reason for doing it this way, they would probably have pointed to the fact that in the Upper Room, Jesus and His disciples first had a meal together, the Jewish Passover meal, after which Jesus instituted the Christian celebration, the Lord’s Supper, Matthew 26:26-28. But things began to go sadly and tragically wrong.

The Fellowship Meal was being so greatly abused that when it came to celebrating the Supper of the Lord, the memorial meal was turned into a shameful mockery.

Those brethren in Corinth who turned the Lord’s Supper into a common meal served with drunken pride partook in an ‘unworthy manner’, 1 Corinthians 11:27. The word is ‘anaxios’ in Greek, which is defined as unworthy, not deemed or held worthy of, worthless.

The brethren in Corinth treated the Lord’s Supper as though it were ‘worthless’ by the manner in which they partook. Clearly, they were not remembering the Lord’s blood and body sacrifice.

Such a condition of heart makes one ‘guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, 1 Corinthians 11:27. The word ‘guilty’, in Greek, is ‘enochos’, and it means held in, i.e., liable to, subject to, liable to the penalty of death. Clearly, Paul states that to partake of the Lord’s Supper in such a way is sinful, 1 Corinthians 11:27 / Romans 6:23.

One is spiritually dead while doing so, 1 Corinthians 11:30. Christ died for the remission of the sins they were now committing, and thereby they are guilty of the Lord’s body and blood.

The context so far indicates a perversion of the Lord’s Supper by the Corinthians, by treating it as a common meal served with intoxicating pride. Such treatment of the serious nature of the Lord’s Supper deemed their efforts as ‘unworthy’, worthless, 1 Corinthians 11:27. Such sinful worship to God is deemed worthless to the Lord, Isaiah 1:11-31.

Their efforts are termed sinful, and they were guilty before the Lord for such a superficial manner in which they partook, 1 Corinthians 11:27. Paul’s efforts are directed toward getting the Corinthians to see their error.

One who would partake of the Lord’s Supper is to ‘examine’ himself before he eats and drinks the emblems, 1 Corinthians 11:28. The word ‘examine’, in Greek is ‘dokimazo’, and it means to assay or test metals, to see if they are pure, of persons, to put to the test, make trial of, scrutinize, then, to approve.

Wiersbe, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Corinthians neglected to examine themselves, but they were experts at examining everybody else.’

One who would partake of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner receives ‘judgment’ upon himself because he is in sin, 1 Corinthians 11:29. The word ‘judgment’ in Greek is ‘krima’, and it means a sentence of condemnation. Without repentance, Paul’s audience was doomed.

Now, Paul clearly states the issue of sin and the manner of unworthiness on the part of the partaker. One who does not ‘discern’ the body and blood of Jesus partakes in an unworthy manner, 1 Corinthians 11:29.

The word ‘discern’, in Greek, is ‘diakrino’, and it means to separate one from another, to part combatants, to part and join different parties, to distinguish. The brethren who would not make a clear distinction between the body and blood of Jesus and a common meal were guilty!

When one partakes of the Lord's Supper, he is to 'remember' the body and blood of Jesus and not treat it as though he were taking a snack; they had their homes to do that in. Whether that remembrance is done with one or two cups matters not. What matters is the remembrance of the body and blood.

The words, 'that is why', 1 Corinthians 11:30, undoubtedly point back to the 'judgment' of condemnation against the guilty one who partakes of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner by not making a distinction between the body and blood of Jesus and a common meal.

Paul states that the consequence of such action is that many brethren are 'weak and sick, and fallen asleep,' 1 Corinthians 11:30. By partaking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, the Corinthians portrayed themselves to be spiritually weak and sick, and the end result, without prayer and repentance, is spiritual death. Physical illness and death have no part in this verse.

Once again, Paul admonishes the brethren to 'discern', in Greek that is 'diakrino', ourselves, 1 Corinthians 11:31. 1 Corinthians 11:29 commanded a 'diakrino', a making a distinction between the body and blood of Jesus and a common meal.

Here, Paul commands a distinction to be made of ourselves before partaking to avoid sin. Making the proper distinction of the body and blood of Jesus avoids the consequential condemnation of sin, to be 'judged', which is the Greek word, 'krino', 1 Corinthians 11:31.

To be judged is to not discern ourselves and thereby partake of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy fashion. Such a state of condemnation leads us to the 'disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world,' 1 Corinthians 11:32.

The word 'disciplined', in Greek, is 'paideuo', and it means to bring up or rear a child, to train, teach, educate, correct, discipline, chastise, and punish. The statement means that the Lord either educates the sinner through the process or the sinner is punished in some manner through the process.

It seems to me that when we sin, the Word of God points out to us our sin by our own study or by means of a caring brother, and thereby we are 'educated'. We are moved to repent through this knowledge and thereby spared the 'condemnation of the world', 1 John 2:15-17. I see no discipline or punishment in this context.

Where does the word of God say that we are punished or disciplined with each occurrence of our sin? We are not punished or disciplined now, but will be without education, confession and repentance, Hebrews 4:11-12.

"So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together, it may not result in judgment. And when I come, I will give further directions." 1 Corinthians 11:33-34

In light of the thought that I can be condemned for my not discerning the body and blood of Jesus and turning the Lord's Supper into a common meal, Paul admonishes all to 'eat together', the KJV uses the words, 'wait for each other', 1 Corinthians 11:33 / 1 Corinthians 9:22 / Mark 10:45 / Romans 15:2 / Galatians 1:10 / Philippians 2:3.

Earlier, they were partaking of the Lord's Supper as though it were a common meal and not waiting upon each other to partake. Paul now admonishes the assembly to come together for the purpose of partaking in the Lord's Supper properly discerning the body and blood of Jesus, 1 Corinthians 11:33.

Does this mean that the saints can only serve the Lord's Supper one time on Sunday, at a time when we have all waited for all else to be present? Clearly, the waiting has to do with the wealthy purposely assembling at times unknown to the poor and having their great feast because they felt higher than the poor saints.

This does not address the issue of time or frequency of the Lord's Supper. Time and frequency served is thereby a liberty of the Christian. The general command to partake is given, and we are left at liberty as to what time of day to do so on the first day of the week.

We can conclude by inference that the Corinthian brethren had a place of assembly away from the home, 1 Corinthians 11:34. The home was the place for common meals. Brethren were admonished not to partake of common meals at the assembly!

There is a purpose in 1 Corinthians 11:33-34, a purpose for the first day of the week assembly was spiritual, not social. To turn the assembly into a social or recreational atmosphere is to fall under the condemnation of sin. Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The selfish attitude that marked the Corinthian church comes through strongly in this section of the epistle. It manifested itself in a particularly ugly display at the Lord’s Table. Paul dealt with it severely for the sake of the reputation of the Saviour and for the welfare of the saints.’

Apparently, there were other errors associated with the Corinthians’ partaking of the Lord’s Supper because Paul said, ‘when I come I will give further directions,’ 1 Corinthians 11:34. What these other errors are, we are not told.

SUMMARY

1 Corinthians 11:1 ends the discussion of 1 Corinthians 6-10, regarding liberties and matters of expedience. Paul said, ‘Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ,’ 1 Corinthians 11:1.

Paul’s aim was always to bring glory, not shame, to the name of God, 1 Corinthians 10:31. If the Corinthians and all Christians today would follow the example of Paul, we would save our souls and the souls of others, 1 Corinthians 8:13.

The apostle now moves to another issue in the church at Corinth, i.e., the role of women in society and the Lord’s Supper. An established fact in the Word of God is man’s and woman’s standing in the eyes of God.

The man has been designated ‘head’, superior or supreme of God’s creation, 1 Corinthians 11:3 / 1 Corinthians 11:8-9. Any woman who rejects God’s order in His creation is to understand the shame involved, 1 Corinthians 11:5-6. A woman could have a gift from the Holy Spirit as did a man; however, she was not at liberty to express her gift publicly in such a manner that would indicate her liberation from man and God’s design for her. Both males and females cannot exist without each other, and each part must respect their authorised roles in society, 1 Corinthians 11:11.

Apparently, some of the Corinthian Christian women had lost sight of their role and were liberating themselves from God’s order. It is possible that the stronger Christian women may have believed that they were at liberty to boldly display their gift. Paul reveals God’s mind on the matter.

A custom of this Roman-Greek society was to wear a veil to indicate subjection. Paul recommended that the Christian women wear this veil for propriety’s sake and thereby indicate their submission to men when prophesying and praying. One must understand that the wearing of veils by women was a simple custom of their day, 1 Corinthians 11:16 / John 18:39.

Propriety in our society today does not demand a veil to be worn, indicating subjection. This being true, women are nonetheless commanded to illustrate God’s divine role of subjection in His creation. The woman must value the distinction she has from the man that comes from her hair.

The man, too, must recognise God’s distinction between male and female. A man who would want to appear as a woman is an abomination to God, and likewise a woman wanting to appear as a man is an abomination to

God, Deuteronomy 22:5. Though customs change, the Word of God does not change regarding the woman's subjection to the man because of God's order, 1 Corinthians 11:8-9.

Another problem discussed in 1 Corinthians 11 was that factious parties had formed, 1 Corinthians 11:18. A separation of the brethren occurred on the first day of the week assembly. One set of brethren came early, ate food, and drank in pride for the Lord's Supper. Another set of brethren came later and had nothing.

The Corinthian brethren were ultraliberal in their worship of Jehovah God. Paul set out to refocus their minds regarding the seriousness of partaking in the Lord's Supper. When one partakes of the Lord's Supper, he is 'remembering,' 1 Corinthians 11:24 and 'discerning' the body and blood of Christ, 1 Corinthians 11:29.

One who partakes in the Lord's Supper without remembering and discerning the Lord's body and blood does so in an 'unworthy' manner, 1 Corinthians 11:27 and is guilty of 'despising the church of God,' 1 Corinthians 11:22. Such a state of spiritual sickness leads to spiritual death, 1 Corinthians 11:30.

The remedy is repentance through study and understanding of the word of God, 'disciplined', 1 Corinthians 11:32 / Hebrews 12:5-11. Paul concluded the chapter by reiterating that the nature of the assembly is spiritual and not social, 1 Corinthians 11:34.

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION

The Corinthian Christians had coveted the gift of speaking in tongues. Apparently, this gift was viewed in higher esteem than other gifts due to the fact that many pagan converts had made their way into the church.

These pagans once worshipped idols and spoke ecstatic utterances, thinking that they were controlled by the respected idol deity. Those who had the gift of tongues exalted themselves over others as though they were superior or closer to God than others. 1 Corinthians 12-14 deals with the issue of gifts. Paul sets these gifts in their proper order and gives the purpose for their use.

While the function of gifts are discovered throughout God's Word, i.e., to prove that God is the one and only Lord, Isaiah 46:9-10, confirms the words spoken by the miracle worker as being of a divine origin, Mark 16:20 / Hebrews 2:3-4, produce faith in those who witnessed the gifts, John 20:30-31 / Acts 8:4-25, and to display God's mercy, Matthew 14:14, these listed functions are not the objective of 1 Corinthians 12.

The Corinthians had lost sight of God's intentions for gifts and thereby needed to be brought back to the objective by going back to the basics. 1 Corinthians 12 identifies gifts and instructs the Corinthians to see that their objective is not to benefit individuals only but rather the whole church, 1 Corinthians 12:7.

Paul explains to the Corinthians that the church is not comprised of one member but many. Whatever individuals in the church do ought to be done in consideration of others.

THE QUESTION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

"Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other, you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore, I want you to know that

no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:1-3

WHAT IS A SPIRITUAL GIFT?

The word ‘spiritual gift’ is a transliteration of the Greek word ‘pneumatikon.’ The word ‘gift’ in Greek is ‘charismaton’, which is a word that simply means ‘favour’.

The gifts were God’s favour to the Christians to prove to the world that God is the one and only Lord, Isaiah 46:9-10. They also confirm the words spoken by the miracle worker as being of a divine origin, Mark 16:20 / Hebrews 2:3-4, which produces faith in those who witnessed the gifts, John 20:30-31 / Acts 8:4-26, to display God’s mercy, Matthew 14:14, and as this chapter reveals to edify and unify the local church.

There are thirteen gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12-14. The apostle Paul did not want the Corinthians to be ‘uninformed’ of the gift’s purposes, 1 Corinthians 12:1.

Apparently, the Corinthians had lost sight of the objective of these gifts. The emphasis was taken away from God’s real objectives for gifts and placed upon the self-importance of individuals. Again, the Corinthians were thinking like the world, 1 Corinthians 14:4.

Through these ‘spiritual matters,’ gifts, God was made manifest, Isaiah 46:9-10. The idols or gods worshipped, on the other hand, had no such manifestation because they were ‘dumb,’ speechless, 1 Corinthians 12:2 / 1 Corinthians 10:20 / Psalms 115:4-7.

The Gentiles were ‘led away unto those dumb idols’ by the devil, 1 Corinthians 12:2 / 1 Corinthians 10:20. God is not ‘dumb’ but rather intelligent as the creator of all things. The Corinthians need not be ‘uninformed’ of God’s will for these gifts.

One who would claim that Jesus is ‘anathema’ can only do so through ignorance and a spirit of ‘dumbness.’ 1 Corinthians 12:3. The living God moves man to speak divine things for divine purposes. The ignorant and dumb do things for selfish purposes that have no real backing other than that of Satan, 1 Corinthians 12:3 / 1 Corinthians 10:20.

A conclusive test is now given to the Corinthians that they may determine who is performing gifts according to divine influence and who was not, 1 Corinthians 12:3. The apostle John gives a test as well that all may know who is truly in fellowship with God when he said, 1 John 3:10.

Paul’s test is likewise simple. If one were to call Jesus ‘anathema’, he is certainly not doing so of God. The word ‘anathema’ means anything devoted to evil, an accursed thing. Jesus is not devoted to evil, and neither is our Lord accursed, 1 Corinthians 12:3.

Remember, the idol is dumb and cannot speak. Those speaking so are not being governed by God. There is only one left to blame, i.e., Satan, 1 Corinthians 10:20. Conversely, one who would claim, ‘Jesus is Lord’ is in the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12:3. The apostle John says the same, 1 John 4:2-3.

Apparently, there were false teachers and or selfish brethren in Corinth posing as spiritual, yet proclaiming false doctrines. Paul is clearly telling the Corinthian brethren that we can determine whether a teacher is false by his doctrine.

The words ‘spirit of truth and spirit of error’ are clearly distinguishable through the doctrines brought forth, 1 John 4:6. Therefore, a man speaking from God or against God would be known by his words, Deuteronomy 13:1-5.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD'S GIFTS TO MAN

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone, it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

The word ‘different’, in Greek, is ‘diairesis’, and it means a dividing, division, of money, in the reckoning of the votes on either side. As there are different denominations of currency, i.e., 1p, 5p, 10p, 20p, so there are differing gifts, 1 Corinthians 12:4.

These different ‘gifts’ were ‘distributed’ to different people, that is, believers, by the Holy Spirit. The recipient of these gifts did not earn them. It was by the grace of God, through the Holy Spirit, that these gifts were ‘distributed’ for the confirmation of his Word, learning, and unity.

Though there are different gifts, there is only one Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12:4. There were no gods responsible for each gift man possessed. Paul begins to explain to the Corinthians the oneness of the church as opposed to the multi-directional Corinthians paths of selfishness, faction, and division. These things are not how God would have the church function.

The word ‘service’, 1 Corinthians 12:5, in Greek is ‘diakonia’, and it means the office of a diakonos, servant, deacons, members of the church, etc. Clearly, the ‘diakonia’ represents the service or function of these spiritual gifts as compared to bishops, preachers, teachers and all who would serve in proclaiming the Gospel.

Each individual is given a gift for the purpose of confirming and learning the Word of God. Though there are different functions, for each gift, there is but one Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:5.

The point is that just because an individual has a different gift with a different function than other members, it does not mean that this individual is separate from the one church or the one God!

The word ‘workings’, 1 Corinthians 12:6, is the Greek word ‘energima’, and it means work, produce, and effect. Though there are different effects or outcomes to be performed by members of the body of Christ, there is but one same God, 1 Corinthians 12:6.

Interestingly, Paul has compared the oneness of the Godhead, i.e., the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and God the Father, with the plurality of gifts, their functions, and effects or outcomes upon man.

Though there are many men and women with various functions within the church, there is only one God. The church is an organisation with a single objective, yet many members to achieve that objective.

Just as a business has structure and organisation to obtain its goals, so does the church. While a business has labourers, managers, supervisors, and presidents, the church has elders, deacons, preachers, and members, Philippians 1:1. The church in the beginning also had members with gifts to achieve its objective.

Each of the above-mentioned servants is distributed with the ‘manifestation of the Spirit’, 1 Corinthians 12:7. The word ‘manifestation’, in Greek, is ‘phanerosis’, which comes from the root word ‘phaino’, and is defined as to bring to light, make to appear, to shew forth, make known, reveal. Each individual who receives a gift has received a clear disclosure of the revelation.

This clear disclosure of revelation is evident to all and is to profit all rather than a few, 1 Corinthians 14:31. One God, many members, and all are to disclose their gifts to profit all, 1 Corinthians 12:7.

All are intended to be one through the gifts, as the Godhead is one. Paul’s point is that unity ought to be the outcome as the Holy Spirit distributes a plurality of gifts with a plurality of functions.

THE AGE OF THE SPIRIT'S MINISTRY

In John 14:15-16, having in mind His own imminent return to the Father after the fulfilment of His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus spoke to His followers about the coming of the Holy Spirit.

He promised His followers, 'I will pray to the Father, and He will send you another Comforter'. The word that is used, 'parakletos', translated as 'Comforter' in the A.V. and the R.V., describes 'one called alongside to help'.

Furthermore, Jesus promised that when the Spirit of Truth came, He would abide with believers 'forever'. The Greek word 'meno' means to abide, it means to remain permanently.

He also explained in John 16:7-15 that the Holy Spirit's ministry would be to 'convict the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment'. That ministry commenced on the Day of Pentecost, as Acts 2:1-4 reveals. The Holy Spirit came, as the Lord had promised. And the Holy Spirit has never left!

Today, we see the ridiculous sight of 'Pentecostal' congregations earnestly praying for someone to come who has never gone away! What is more, He will not leave until the close of the Christian Age, when the Lord Himself returns.

So, we see then, that the plan of salvation which originated in the mind of the Father, was implemented and fully realised in the life, death and resurrection of the Son, and today it continues to be made effective by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the Good News.

That Gospel was first presented in its fullness by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, and it was on that day that he announced that those who believed the message, repented and were baptized would receive not only the forgiveness of their sins but also the gift of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:37-39.

GIFT NOT GIFTS

As I have already suggested, it is this second promise that many Christians find difficult to understand. Let us notice, therefore, that Peter spoke of the 'gift' not 'gifts' of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 2:38, the word 'gift' is the Greek word 'dorea', which is accurately defined as 'free gift'. One translation renders it rather expressively as, 'the plus of the Holy Spirit'.

The word describes the Holy Spirit Himself as the extra gift, provided by God, for those who obey the Gospel.

Thus, Acts 2:38 does not refer to some sort of miraculous or spiritual gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit.

It tells us that the Holy Spirit Himself is the Heavenly Father's own gift to His obedient people, given to enable them to live a successful and satisfying Christian life. The 'gifts', another subject. When, later, Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about 'spiritual gifts', he was dealing with a very different subject.

In 1 Corinthians 12-14, the nine gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit are described as 'charisma', or 'grace gifts', and it is important to distinguish between the Holy Spirit as God's own gift, and the miraculous gifts which, in the New Testament age, the Spirit Himself bestowed.

Please notice the following.

1. The 'charismata' were various miraculous abilities or endowments, which the Holy Spirit Himself gave to individual believers, according to His own will, 1 Corinthians 12:11.
2. Believers did not all receive the same gift/s, 1 Corinthians 12:29-30.

3. Nor were these gifts intended to last, 1 Corinthians 13:8.
4. In contrast, the ‘gift of the Holy Spirit’ is the gift of God Himself, offered to every obedient believer, Acts 5:32.
5. All are offered the same gift, the indwelling presence of His Spirit, 1 Corinthians 6:19 / Romans 8:9.
6. And, along with salvation, the gift of the Spirit’s presence will continue to be offered until the end of the Christian Age.

THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFT

What will this ‘gift’ do for us? This is a question worthy of a separate study, but think about just two aspects of His ministry.

- a. The Holy Spirit is described as the ‘Comforter’, John 14:26.

That English word comes to us from the Latin, ‘con fortis’, which literally means, ‘with strength’. Thus, the Holy Spirit strengthens us. We need to learn to lean on Him.

- b. Romans 8:26-27 tells us that the Holy Spirit helps us when we pray, taking our faltering, stumbling petitions and presenting them to the Father, as our intercessor.

We should make use of His intercession. If you have obeyed the Gospel and accepted God’s gift of forgiveness, the question is, have you also accepted His ‘extra’ gift?

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

“To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.” 1 Corinthians 12:8-11

The spiritual gifts might be classified as follows.

1. Gifts having to do with intellectual powers are wisdom and knowledge, 1 Corinthians 12:8.
2. Thaumaturgic gifts, which are gifts involving miraculous powers.

The Greek word ‘thauma’ means ‘wonder’, thus, acts that produce wonder. These would include powerful faith, the gift of healing and the working of miracles, 1 Corinthians 12:9-10.

3. Gifts that had to do with the spoken word.

Preaching and teaching, prophecy, in Greek is the word ‘pro fetes’, which means to speak forth. The ability to distinguish between spirits, which is possibly related to exorcism. The ability to speak other languages, languages that had not been learned and the ability to interpret the languages used, 1 Corinthians 12:10.

Remember, at that time and in those circumstances, these were not merely extravagant demonstrations of miraculous power, but eminently practical gifts, the purpose being to edify and build up the entire church, 1 Corinthians 14:12. Since that was the Spirit’s purpose in bestowing the gifts, it was not necessary that every member of the church should possess them, nor were members regarded as second-class Christians if they did not possess gifts. 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 proves this. The implied answer to these questions is no!

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE MIRACULOUS GIFTS

1. Gifts having to do with intellectual powers.

1. Wisdom, 1 Corinthians 12:8.

The Greek word for wisdom is ‘sophia’, and it means sound judgment, intelligence, and practical wisdom.

Individuals were given the gift of wisdom, and all other gifts by being ‘moved, that is to tell or announce by the Holy Spirit’, 2 Peter 1:21. The Holy Spirit simply told these people what to say and do.

2. Knowledge, 1 Corinthians 12:8.

The word, knowledge, in Greek is ‘gnosis’ and it means a knowing, knowledge. This gift is distinguished from the ‘word of wisdom’ in that information, that is, knowledge, is in contrast with judgment and the practicality of knowledge. The one with this gift had knowledge, and the one with wisdom made application of that knowledge.

2. Thaumaturgic gifts, that is, gifts involving miraculous powers.

3. Powerful faith, 1 Corinthians 12:9.

This would not be the faith of Romans 5:1. This is a miraculous faith that enabled one to ‘remove mountains’, 1 Corinthians 13:2 / Matthew 17:20.

4. The gift of healing, 1 Corinthians 12:9.

The gift of ‘healing’, the Greek word is ‘iama’, and it means to heal, cure, or make one recover. Such a one helped the physically sick and diseased so that all may know the reality of Jehovah God.

Note once again the significance of the various gifts yet the ‘one Spirit.’ The gifts, though many, contributed to the public and brethren’s understanding of one God’s will. I want us to consider the gift of healing and the claims of those who profess to exercise this gift today.

1. I would like you to think about the confusion which we find in the religious world on the subject of healing.

2. Then, I want you to think about the unscriptural, false and misleading claims that are often made by so-called ‘faith healers’ today.

3. Then we shall see what the true gift of healing meant in New Testament times.

4. Finally, how the gift was received and how long it was meant to last.

Let us clearly understand what we are talking about. We are talking about healing, not from the medical standpoint, but from the religious standpoint.

THE CONFUSION OF NAMES

The religious world uses different names; it is sometimes called divine healing, spiritual healing or faith healing. In fact, none of these descriptions is really accurate.

1. For instance, to call it ‘divine healing’ is much too vague and loose a description because examples of ‘divine healing’, that is, examples of people being healed by God, can be found in the Scriptures centuries before spiritual gifts were bestowed. Elijah, 1 Kings 17:21-22, and Elisha, 2 Kings 5:1-19, and others healed people miraculously.

2. And to call it ‘spiritual healing’ misses the point because the ailments which the gift of healing dealt with were unmistakably physical, not spiritual.

3. And as for ‘faith healing’.

When so-called ‘Faith-Healers’ fail to heal the sick people who come to them, they always claim that the failure occurs because the faith of the sick person is not strong enough, or that they lack faith altogether. But the gift of healing had nothing whatsoever to do with ‘faith’ healing. Healing was bestowed whether faith was present or not.

So what precisely are we looking at? We are not asking if God can heal because we know He can. We are not asking if God heals because we know He does. We are not asking if God heals in answer to prayer because we know that [James 5:15](#) tells us to pray for the sick. We are not discussing healing in response to faith, which is, in fact, very closely related to healing in response to prayer.

What we are asking today is, are there people who possess the gift of healing, which was bestowed by the Holy Spirit in New Testament times? This is something I would like you to think about.

So today’s so-called ‘faith healers’, do they possess and demonstrate the gift of the spirit, the gift of healing? It is positively amazing how many confuse the gift of healing with faith healing, when the two are very different indeed.

For example, my friend has a report concerning a healing campaign, which featured a man named Theo Jones. At one of his meetings, it was reported as follows. ‘There was a totally blind woman led in by her husband. You are NOT BELIEVING, sister,’ Jones warned her. ‘Your faith is weak.’

The blind woman was hustled off the platform immediately. I imagine you know what that really meant!

Faced with a real physical problem and not some psychosomatic, neurological, or undiagnosed or unproven ailment, Mr Jones was absolutely powerless and therefore tried to cover his impotence by brazenly accusing the poor woman of not having sufficient faith. The element that was lacking in that case was not faith, but power. The man had no power.

If we turn to [Acts 5:12-16](#), we see the miraculous power in action. Many wonders and signs were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. They carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and pallets, so that, as Peter came by, his shadow might fall on some of them. Furthermore, people of the area around Jerusalem, ‘brought the sick, those afflicted with unclean were ALL healed’, [Acts 5:16](#).

If we look at [Acts 19:11-12](#), we see that the same thing happened in Paul’s ministry. God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul so that handkerchiefs and aprons were carried from him to the sick and the diseases left them. When a person possessed the gift of healing, it did not matter if the patient had great faith, or faith, or little faith or no faith at all! But the power which the Spirit of God had granted.

What produced the healing was a gift possessed by the healer, and it did not depend on the faith of the sufferer. This is why we say that ‘faith’ healing and the gift of healing are very different matters.

Needless to say, when people are suffering from a severe illness, they are understandably willing to try anything in order to obtain a cure. And the trust and confidence they demonstrate in so-called faith healers, who mercilessly take advantage of them, is really pathetic.

Putting it bluntly, most of what passes as faith healing in modern faith healing campaigns is fraudulent and false. Some of the people who conduct the campaigns may be sincerely mistaken in their belief, but the vast majority of faith-healing cases have proved to be frauds, people who are prepared even to lie in order to create a reputation for themselves.

And at the same time, to make money for them under the guise of running non-profit making organisations, whose assets run into millions of dollars. A friend of mine has in his possession a letter sent by an organisation calling itself ‘the Osborn Foundation’ of Tulsa, Oklahoma.

It enclosed a piece of burlap, sacking, which, the letter said, had been ‘prayed over’ for seven days by Osborne and his wife, and on receipt of ‘seed money,’ they would spend more time in prayer, for whatever was asked for by whoever sent the ‘seed money’ to them.

To crown this fraud, the Osbornes had the audacity to claim that they had sent the letter under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Do you think a man and his wife are exceptions? Nothing of the kind!

Some time ago, I cut an article out of a magazine called ‘Coronet. It reported that such men as Jack Coe, Asa A. Allen, and the even better known Oral Roberts have all built up vast personal fortunes out of their so-called healing campaigns.

I recall a few years ago, Roberts hit the news headlines because he announced to the world that, ‘if he did not receive the money that he needed for one of the projects that he was building by a certain date, ‘The Oral Roberts University’, the lord would take him.’

Another fraud, Orval Jagers, opened a briefcase on a plane, and a stewardess caught sight of bundles of dollar notes. Thinking that they might have something to do with a bank robbery that had recently taken place, the pilot radioed ahead, and the police were waiting for Mr Jagers when he stepped off the plane. It took him two hours to convince the police that the 70,000 dollars in the briefcase were what he had taken in from his latest campaign.

Similarly, A. A. Allen, the magazine reported, was driving home from a ‘healing campaign’, with money in the boot of his car, when he was stopped by the police and arrested for drunk driving. He had to deposit \$1000 in bail, which, I might add, he forfeited because he did not turn up at court.

He was excommunicated by the Pentecostal church of which he was a member, and his private secretary signed a sworn statement, which declared that not one of Allen’s alleged cures could be verified, despite his claims that people had been instantly healed.

Let me also mention at this point that in the faith-healing business, most of these men began in the so-called Pentecostal church, and today most of the religious bodies which hold such campaigns have originated, either directly or indirectly, from that religious body.

The men whom I have named, Coe, Jagers, Allen and Roberts, ALL began in the Pentecostal movement and were either disfellowshipped or left to start their own organisations. At least sixty of these ‘faith-healers’ have set up their own organisations, and some have made extremely grandiose claims for themselves.

Here is a final example, which would be hilarious if it were not so tragic. My friend took it from an Associated Press report. From Washington DC, August 4th 1951. It concerned a meeting in Fairmont Heights, Maryland. And I quote the following.

‘A coffin was lowered into a grave after a tent-meeting Revivalist told his audience that the doomed man would be raised from the dead.’ As the earth was shovelled onto the coffin, someone saw the corpse crawl out of a tunnel just outside the tent. The corpse escaped during the ensuing riot.’

Some years ago, the British Medical Association, which, as you know, is the highest medical authority in the land, conducted a two-year-long study of all kinds of healing, at the request of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York.

A special committee of eminent medical men was set up to conduct the investigation, and their report was published in a special report during their Annual Conference. This is the report which my friend cut out of the British Medical Journal.

1. It states that three prominent RC doctors were invited to be on the committee, but they declined. Probably because they knew that they would be expected to investigate the alleged miracles, which are reported from Lourdes.
2. Most of the ‘cures’ of organic diseases claimed are explained in the view of the Committee, by mistaken diagnosis, or prognosis, alleviation or remission, spontaneous cure, or combined treatment. Some cases, which were said to be epilepsy, appeared to be cases of hysteria.
3. As for the ‘miracles’ of Lourdes. An authority in Lourdes, known as the ‘Bureau Des Constatations’, investigates cases of so-called ‘miracles’, in order to exclude psychogenic and hysterical conditions and here follows a quotation from the Bureau.

‘Despite the immense pressure of popular enthusiasm, the number of miracles actually attested and registered over the years has been exceedingly small, not even one a year, and every attempt is made to emphasise the spiritual value of the pilgrimage, rather than such healings as may be claimed’.

The report continues as follows.

‘As far, then, as our observation and investigation have gone, we have seen no evidence that there is any special type of illness cured solely by spiritual healing, which cannot be cured by medical methods which do not involve such claims. The cases claimed as cures of a miraculous nature present no feature of a unique and unexpected character outside the knowledge of any experienced physician or psychologist. The Committee finds no evidence that there is any type of illness cured by spiritual healing ALONE, which could not have been cured by medical treatment, which necessarily includes consideration of environmental factors’.

5. The working of miracles, 1 Corinthians 12:10.

This individual produced ‘miracles’, in Greek, it is the word ‘dunamis’, which means power, might, strength, then, generally, strength, or power, ability to do a thing.

In Matthew 22:29, the Word of God said, ‘You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.’ The word translated power is the same word translated as miracles in 1 Corinthians 12:10.

Jesus tells us that these powers include healing the sick of diseases, Mark 6:5 / Luke 9:1, inspired teaching, Luke 1:17, removal of unclean spirits, Luke 4:36, raising the dead, John 11:1-44, and so forth.

3. Gifts that had to do with the spoken word.

6. Prophecy, 1 Corinthians 12:10.

The word ‘prophecy’, in Greek, is ‘propheteia’, and it is the gift of interpreting the will of the gods. In the New Testament, the gift of expounding scripture, of speaking and preaching.

A ‘propheteuo’ is one who speaks and preaches under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Later, Paul will reveal the importance of prophecy over tongues, 1 Corinthians 14:5.

Gifts of prophecy, including the ability to foretell future events, were the endowment of certain Christians in the apostolic age, and there would appear to have been two orders of these.

The higher, including those mentioned under 1 Corinthians 12:8, and others whose ability concerned the prediction of events such as those prophesied by Agabus, Acts 11:28 / Acts 21:11. But not always ‘prediction,’ but elevated and inspired discourse, the power of preaching to edification.

What does Paul mean when he says, ‘do not despise prophesying’ in 1 Thessalonians 5:20? When one encounters a problem passage, it is important to consider the context.

In practice, this means looking at the verses which go before, and those which follow. That is always sound advice, and it is advice worth following as we consider the question before us this month.

1 Thessalonians 5:19 says, ‘quench not the Spirit.’ The Spirit is unquestionably the Holy Spirit. Notice that in this verse, the present imperative tense is used, which means that we have here a statement that relates to something which the believers in Thessalonica had evidently been doing and were continuing to do up to that moment. An ‘imperative’ is a command or an instruction, so the sense of this verse is literally, ‘do not continue to quench the Spirit’. This tells us that the Thessalonians were offending the Holy Spirit. They were disregarding and perhaps even repressing a particular manifestation of the Spirit.

We see from the next verse, 1 Thessalonians 5:20, that the specific gift involved was the gift of prophecy because the word which is translated ‘prophesyings’, in Greek it is the word ‘propheteia’, and it occurs on only two other occasions, 1 Corinthians 14:6 / 1 Corinthians 14:22, where Paul discusses the exercise of spiritual gifts. The church at Thessalonica, therefore, is told in effect, ‘do not continue what you have been doing, quenching, or suppressing, this manifestation of the Spirit’. Certainly, at the very least, they were discouraging the exercise of the prophetic gift.

Notice that there is a significant difference between the Authorised Version and many modern versions in the way in which 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20 are rendered.

In the A.V., we find two short sentences, ‘Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesying.’ But in modern versions, the Revised Standard Version, for example, the two verses are separated only by a comma, so that they read as one sentence. ‘Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying.’ The implication is that to despise ‘prophesying’ was to quench the Spirit.

Clearly then, Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, regarded the exercise of that particular gift, the gift of prophecy, as of very real importance to the spiritual growth and well-being of the infant church in Thessalonica.

This letter was written during the second missionary journey, and is, therefore, reliably regarded as one of the earliest of the apostolic letters. It was written from Corinth, where Paul arrived about 50 AD, after leaving Thessalonica, and where he stayed for eighteen months. Acts 18:11.

We arrive at this date because we know that the proconsul Gallio, who is mentioned in Acts 18:12, took up his position in Corinth about that time. The letter was probably about 51 or 52 AD.

It is even likely, although not stated, that it was Paul himself who imparted spiritual gifts to the Thessalonian church as he had at Corinth during the year and a half he remained in that city.

On the matter of spiritual gifts in the infant church, we learn that Paul informed the Ephesian believers that prophets were among the Lord’s gifts to the church, Ephesians 4:11.

Earlier in the same letter, he had stated that apostles and prophets had laid the foundation on which the Church is built, that foundation being Christ himself, Ephesians 2:20. He followed this, in Ephesians 3:5, with the assertion that the Spirit used apostles and prophets as instruments for the revelation of truth.

Although we do not believe that there are such inspired men alive today, it should not be difficult for anyone to understand that in those days, apostles and prophets fulfilled an essential role in the revelation of the truth and the establishment of the church.

Bear in mind that the New Testament had not then been compiled. Indeed, as I have already implied, many of the books which comprise our present New Testament had not even been written.

Therefore, instead of being able to study written instruction and teaching, we find that prophecy, ‘oral,’ that is, spoken instruction, was how the early Christians were taught.

Bear in mind also that the word ‘prophesying’ does not mean that a new revelation was presented every time the prophet opened his mouth! The Greek word ‘profetes’ means ‘to speak forth’, and covers preaching and teaching generally.

And if you examine the Old Testament books, you will find that many of the writers never foretold future events, but simply delivered a message on God’s behalf. In fact, in the Old Testament, a prophet did the following.

1. Delivered a message from God.
2. Interpreted current events and explained what was happening at that moment. And very often, the explanation the prophet gave was very different from what the people thought!
3. And sometimes was able to tell the people what God was going to do.

In the New Testament, the exercise of the gift of prophecy simply meant that men were led by the Holy Spirit to speak so that the church might be strengthened and built up, 1 Corinthians 14:12.

It is clear from 1 Thessalonians 5:20 that some of the Thessalonian Christians had been inclined to undervalue this particular gift because the word ‘despise’ means ‘set at nought’. So Paul is urging them not to ‘set at nought’ these Spirit-led teachers, or the messages they delivered. However, he also issues this warning: ‘test everything’. In other words, ‘Be on your guard, and hold fast what is good’, 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

I stress again that this instruction, to pay attention to the prophets, was valid as long as the spiritual gifts, which included apostles and prophets, remained. But when they were removed, the specific sense of these words ceased to apply.

Yet there is a sense in which they contain a message for us today. As I mentioned earlier, the word ‘prophesying’ means ‘speaking forth’ and prophecy, in the general sense of the word, is that which is preached. It is preaching and teaching.

There is no one today who possesses the gift of prophecy, about which Paul writes. Be on your guard, and do not trust those who claim to predict future events.

Remember that almost two thousand years ago, Paul said that prophecies would fail; the word means ‘cease’. The gift of tongues, which was the ability of people to speak in languages they had not learned, would cease, and the gift of miraculous knowledge would end, 1 Corinthians 13:8-10.

We have no inspired, Spirit-led messengers; we have no apostles and prophets such as those who served the infant church. But we do have those who preach and teach that which the Holy Spirit has preserved for us and presented to us in the Word.

We have inherited the rich blessing of ‘all things that pertain to life and godliness’, in the New Testament Scriptures. We have the recorded words of ‘holy men of God who were moved by the Holy Spirit,’ 2 Peter 1:3 / 2 Peter 1:21. It is as imperative today as it ever was that we who love the Lord should not undervalue and despise the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. We should never forget that the Lord Himself told his apostles, Luke 10:16. I wonder how anyone can claim to accept the authority of Christ, whilst rejecting the writings of the apostles whom He authorised to speak on His behalf.

We need to remember to keep this in the context of its date. When the writer was writing, they were still in the age of miraculous revelations from God. We know miracles, wonders and signs had a purpose and were to confirm the preached Word, Mark 16:20 / Hebrews 2:4.

We also know what these miracles, signs and wonders were, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, and finally, we also know when the miraculous would cease, 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 / Ephesians 4:7-16.

It was the Holy Spirit who was the one who empowered those who prophesied for the purpose of giving God's revelation to men, and so to despise prophecies would be to quench the work of the Holy Spirit, and so remove oneself from the life-giving revelation of God, Ephesians 4:30.

Today, if we turn our back on the result of the Spirit's work, that is, the Word of God, we can, in a sense, quench the Spirit. God's word was made known through His Holy Spirit, John 16:13.

In Old Testament times, God did this through prophets, 1 Peter 1:10-11 / 2 Peter 1:20-21, and in New Testament times, God did this through the apostles and prophets of Jesus Christ, John 16:13 / John 14:26.

Throughout history, mankind has always had problems accepting God's Word; even God's own people, Israel, struggled with this, Hosea 4:1. Romans 1:18-23 reminds us that even the Gentiles had problems accepting God's Word.

What the writer is telling the Thessalonian church is, don't refuse to listen and obey what the Holy Spirit was making known to them through revelations at that time.

He's reminding them not to despise prophecies, in other words, don't belittle the prophecies which were being made through the prophets, and don't refuse to accept what God was revealing through them.

But this is important, they cannot simply just accept any 'new' revelation, they have to test them, 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22, and the reason they had to test them was that they had to recognise that NOT every claim to be from God was true. John reminds us in 1 John 4:1 that we are 'not to believe every spirit, but test the spirits.' Why? Because many false prophets have come into the world.

And so today, especially within the charismatic churches, we need to test what people say when they claim they have a 'new' revelation from God, or God is still performing miraculous signs and wonders through them.

Today, we need to be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11, who received the word with great readiness, but they also searched the Scriptures daily to find out for themselves as to whether what Paul was teaching was true or not. We should accept everything which is in harmony with the Scriptures and their teaching, and reject everything which is not, 1 John 4:6 / Acts 2:42.

We are to hold on to everything that is good and reject everything which is evil. Amos 5:15 / Psalms 97:10 / Romans 12:9. The word reject is sometimes rendered abstain, the Greek word for abstain is the Greek word, 'apechomai' and it literally means to run in the opposite direction. Are we actively running away from evil or running towards it?

7. The ability to distinguish between spirits, 1 Corinthians 12:10.

The word 'spirits' has to do with one's character or disposition in the New Testament. It is often used of one's attitude toward truth, John 4:23 / 1 Corinthians 5:3 / 1 Corinthians 6:17 / 1 John 4:1-2 / 1 John 4:6.

We know a man's character, regarding truth, by what he teaches and practices. Others may claim that a false teacher's character is good; however, God refers to his character as that of 'error', 1 John 4:6.

The one with the gift of 'discerning', that is the Greek word 'diakrisis', is one who is able to make a separation, dissolution, a decision, judgment, regarding who is of error and who is of truth.

We must remember to try to understand these gifts in the context of the historical period during which they were exercised. 1 Corinthians 12:10, which seems so strange to us, would be perfectly understood by the people alive at the time of the writing of Paul's letter.

For example, his readers would understand that when he writes in 1 Corinthians 14:37, about those whom he describes as 'spiritual', he was referring to those who were believed to be possessed by a spirit, because this was the name by which such people were known.

Also, Christians were not the only ones who believed in 'spirit- possession', i.e. individuals who were regarded as being under the influence of spirits that used them as their 'instruments'.

Both Jewish and Pagan religions also had their prophets, whom they believed were under spirit control. Paul hints at this in 1 Corinthians 12:1-2. But because men recognised the existence of both good and evil spirits, it was essential to determine by which spirit a person was being ‘possessed’ and ‘controlled’.

We know that during the ministry of the Lord Himself, there were times when He encountered and dealt with people who were possessed by evil spirits. The man at Gadara, Luke 8:26-39, and the spirit-controlled son of the man who came to Jesus because, he said, the disciples could not cure the lad, Matthew 17:16. Acts 16:16-18, records the experience of Paul at Philippi, in dealing with a spirit-possessed girl.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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 Acts 16:16 was dominated by the same kind of ‘pythonic’ spirit.’

With this in mind, Paul lays down two criteria that must be used in making this judgment.

1. ‘Sanity’.

For centuries, about 500 B.C., the Greeks had flocked to temples where priests or priestesses were believed to contact and be controlled by the gods, for whom they acted as ‘mouthpieces’, as the gods spoke through them to deliver messages.

Whether it was real or faked, when these people were under the control of their gods, they foamed at the mouth, their hair streaming out, and their limbs wildly flailing, as in an epileptic fit, all of which was taken to prove that they were being ‘moved’ by the spirit of the god whom they served.

Not so the prophets of the church. They did not scream or foam at the mouth, or roll on the ground! 1 Corinthians 14:32. The Holy Spirit enlightened their minds and sharpened their vision. They did not claim that they were the Mouthpiece of God, but the Messengers of God.

2. The ascription of honour to Christ.

The well-used Christian confession of faith in New Testament times was ‘Jesus is Lord’, and, as Paul reveals in 1 Corinthians 12:3, this was the formula by which the prophets were to be judged either true or false.

Bear in mind that beginning with Caesar Augustus, Roman Emperors had begun to regard themselves as ‘gods’, and everyone in the Empire was required to recognise and acknowledge this! Citizens had to declare their loyalty to Caesar as a god by saying the words, ‘Caesarea Kyrios’, that is, ‘Caesar is Lord’.

In fact, at the entrance to every Roman camp there was an altar onto which the soldiers were expected to throw a pinch of incense in the worship of the Emperor, whilst saying those words, ‘Caesar is Lord’, and, woe betides any man who failed to do so!

But when the favour with which Rome had originally looked on Christians turned into persecution, this affirmation of loyalty to Caesar was something that the Christians were also required to make, and failure to make it usually meant death.

At the same time, there was a quite different affirmation that was being freely made by both Jewish and Pagan enemies of the church. They were saying, as Paul records in 1 Corinthians 12:3, ‘Jesus is accursed’, and obviously, only the enemies of Christ would utter those words!

Furthermore, when a Christian refused to speak those words, which were taken as an acknowledgement of Caesar’s deity, their refusal was taken as a denial of his deity, and that was treason that brought the death sentence.

Thus, the distinction between the prophet inspired by the Holy Spirit and the false prophet was, in this way, easily made. The one was happy to say, 'Jesus is Lord', whilst the other, because he was under the influence of an evil spirit, said, 'Jesus is accursed', 1 Corinthians 12:3.

John also writes about the importance of making this distinction in 1 John 4:1-3. One needs little imagination to understand that in a pagan world, many pretended to be possessed and controlled by the gods so that they might claim to be speaking in their names.

The significant contrast between these frenzied fakers and the calmness of the Spirit-led Christian prophets is as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33, 'The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets'.

In other words, there was no wild abandonment in the manner in which they delivered their message. Everything was done in an orderly manner, because 'God is not the author of confusion, but of peace', 1 Corinthians 14:33. A final observation, the exercise of the gift of discerning of spirits was to be used when several prophets spoke in the service, 1 Corinthians 14:29.

8. The ability to speak other languages, 1 Corinthians 12:10.

The word 'kinds' in Greek is the word 'genos', which means race, stock, family. The word 'genos' is used twenty-one times in the New Testament and, for the most part, indicates one's nationality. This helps us understand what the gift of tongues was all about.

The word 'tongues', in Greek, is 'glossa', which is defined as a tongue, language. Clearly, the language spoken was of differing nationalities. One who had the gift of tongues was able to speak a language of another race of people without ever studying the language.

MODERN-DAY 'TONGUE SPEAKING'

1. Books giving instruction on how to speak in tongues are easy to obtain; instruction is often given in 'Pentecostal' assemblies to those who are anxious to learn!

2. Scientific studies by highly qualified people have proved that 'glossolalia' is a learned behaviour.

This is how it is described by Dr Felicity Goodman, a Psychological Anthropologist, in her work entitled 'Speaking in tongues. A cross-cultural study in Glossolalia,' which was published by the University of Chicago Press in 1972.

She studied tape recordings of tongue-speaking, made in Pentecostal Churches in America, Spain, Mayan, and other English-speaking groups, as well as pagan rituals in Japan, Africa, Borneo and Indonesia. Her concluding statement reads, 'Glossolalia is a learned behaviour because direct instruction is given on how to speak in tongues.'

Just over twenty-five years ago, in 1987, in 'The Encyclopaedia of Religion', Dr Goodman wrote, 'Modern researchers accept that there is an association between trance and glossolalia.'

Another Researcher, Dr Sheila A. Womack, pointed to the similarities between modern tongue-speaking and what is called 'T.S.', the abbreviation used for 'trouette syndrome', which is a disorder of the nervous system that is demonstrated by 'uncontrolled movements and sounds.'

And one more testimony, the University of Pennsylvania took brain images of five women who were said to be speaking in tongues and discovered that the frontal lobes, the 'thinking' reasoning part of the brain, through which people control what they do, were inactive. And the sounds were being produced by the part of the brain that is responsible for emotions and feelings.

Furthermore, the scans also recorded a reduction in the activity of the left claudate, the part of the brain which is active when the subject is experiencing positive emotion or pleasure. The researchers concluded that the subjects had yielded some control over their bodies and their emotions. And they knew it. And we were enjoying it.

My friend was told that to speak in tongues one must put their mind into ‘neutral, take a deep breath, and let the sound come out’! It is impossible to believe that they were acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

BIBLICAL REFERENCES

‘Tongues’ are mentioned three times in the Book of Acts. Note that in 1611, the word ‘tongue’ meant ‘language’. Notice in [Acts 2:4](#), we find the definition, ‘other tongues’, the text says ‘other languages. The phrase, ‘unknown tongues’, is not found in the Scriptures. What was heard was not incomprehensible noises, not ‘babble’, but known languages, [Acts 2:4](#).

Considering the number of nations represented in [Acts 2:9-10](#) / [Acts 2:16](#) in all, the miracle was that they all heard in the language in which they were born, [Acts 2:11](#). This fact has raised an interesting question: Was this only a miracle of speech? We often forget there was also a miracle of hearing! [Acts 10:44-48](#).

THE HOUSE OF CORNELIUS

Although Cornelius was a Roman, it seems evident from the special attention he received from the Holy Spirit that he was a Proselyte. He had embraced Judaism, to some extent, so that his prayers were being heard in Heaven, [Acts 10:1-4](#).

Notice also that the reference is to ‘the same ‘gift’ as at the beginning’. [Acts 11:17](#) suggests that the bestowal of this gift was not something that had recurred very frequently up to that time. This kind of event was not something that Peter and his Jewish brethren had encountered before.

EPHESUS

The men involved in this incident in [Acts 19:1-7](#) were also Jews who had received the baptism of John after it had been superseded by the Lord’s Baptism. These examples suggest that the gift of tongues was bestowed, initially at least, to enable the message to be preached in a manner that proved to the Jews that the Gospel was from God.

1. Peter in [Acts 2:16-17](#), refers to [Joel 2:28](#), ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.’
2. In [Isaiah 28:11](#), the A.V. use of the word ‘stammering’ is likely to be misunderstood. It does not mean stuttering! Look at [1 Corinthians 14:21](#), and you will see that Paul reveals that the statement of Isaiah predicted the gift of tongues! Using Paul’s statement, we see that through the prophet Isaiah, God declared that He would speak to ‘this people,’ the disobedient Jews, through the gift of language.

Now look at [Acts 18](#), and you will see that one of the first Converts in Corinth was Justus, a ‘God worshipper,’ which is a term for a devout keeper of the Law. And his house was ‘next to the synagogue’, [Acts 18:7](#).

We must imagine the first meetings of the Christians in Corinth meeting with the Apostle Paul, in the House of Justus, next door to the synagogue, exercising the gift of tongues, after Paul the Apostle had laid hands on them! If this occurred, the Jews would wonder what was happening!

The gifts were originally bestowed by the Holy Spirit, as witnessed on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2:1-4. Later, they were bestowed by the imposition of the hands of the Lord's Apostles, Acts 8:14-18 / Acts 19:1-7. Hence, Paul writes to Timothy, 'do not neglect the gift', 2 Timothy 1:6.

In Acts 8, the apostles Peter and John went to Samaria and laid hands on the converts, Acts 8:17, and Simon the Sorcerer saw that in this way the Holy Spirit was given, Acts 8:18.

This can only refer to the bestowal of the gifts of the Spirit because at their baptism, the Samaritans would have received the 'dorea' of the Spirit, as promised in the Gospel.

Furthermore, the laying on of the hands of the apostles must have been followed by a demonstration of spiritual gifts, because Simon 'saw' something that led him to ask that he, also, might be given the same power, Acts 8:18.

However, since those who received the gifts in this way were not able to pass on the power, the bestowal of spiritual gifts by the laying on of the hands of an apostle passed away with the deaths of the apostles themselves.

We have already looked at the claims of those people who profess to speak in tongues today, and I hope we have seen how mistaken they are. Perhaps 'self-deceived' is the kinder and more accurate description of their condition.

BIBLICAL TONGUE SPEAKING

1. In 1 Corinthians 14, the term 'unknown', regarding tongues, was italicised in the KJV because it does not appear in the original Greek text, 1 Corinthians 14:2-4 / 1 Corinthians 14:13-14 / 1 Corinthians 14:19 / 1 Corinthians 14:27.

By inserting this word into their translation, the translators were attempting to aid the English reader. They undoubtedly were hoping to convey the idea that the languages to which Paul referred were unknown to the speaker, i.e., the speaker had no prior training by which to learn or know the language. He spoke the language strictly by God's miraculous empowerment.

The word 'unknown' certainly was not intended to convey the idea that the tongues were unknown to all humans and, as such, were non-earthly, non-human languages.

2. The events reported at the very beginning of the Christian religion, Acts 2:1-11, set the precedent for understanding that tongue-speaking entailed no more than the ability to speak a foreign human language, which the speaker had not studied, to people from a variety of geographical locales, Parthians, Medes, Arabians, Acts 2:9-11.

The unbiased Bible student must conclude that what is described in detail in Acts 2 is the same phenomenon alluded to in 1 Corinthians 14. All tongue-speaking in the Bible consisted of known human languages, ideally known to the very audience being addressed, which were unknown, i.e., unstudied, unlearned, by the one who was speaking the language.

3. There is simply no such thing as an 'ecstatic utterance' in the New Testament.

The tongue-speaking of 1 Corinthians 14 entailed human language, not incoherent gibberish. A simple reading of the chapter demonstrates that known human languages are under consideration.

For example, Paul paralleled tongue-speaking with the use of the trumpet in warfare. If the bugler sounded meaningless noise, the military would be thrown into confusion, 1 Corinthians 14:8.

The bugler needed to blow the proper notes and tones, i.e., meaningful musical ‘language,’ so that the army would understand what was being communicated, whether to charge, engage or retreat. Sound without sense fails to achieve the very purpose of tongue-speaking.

Paul then stated, ‘So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air,’ 1 Corinthians 14:9.

Undoubtedly, there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me.’ 1 Corinthians 14:9-11.

Obviously, Paul was referring to human languages, those that exist ‘in the world,’ 1 Corinthians 14:10. He envisioned a scenario where two individuals, who spoke different languages, are attempting to communicate with each other. If one speaks in Spanish and the other in German, as they attempt to speak to one another, each would be a ‘foreigner’ to the other. Neither would understand what the other was attempting to say. Hence, the need for tongue-speaking, i.e., the ability to speak a human language unknown to the speaker but known to the recipient.

Later in the chapter, 1 Corinthians 14:21, Paul quoted Isaiah 28:11-12, where God threatened the Israelites with the fact that their failure to listen to Him. By means of the words spoken by His prophets, He meant that He soon would be communicating to them through the language of their Assyrian conquerors, conquerors whom God would send against them.

This powerful illustration presupposes the fact that in both Isaiah and 1 Corinthians, human languages are under consideration. After quoting Isaiah, Paul concluded that tongue-speaking was intended by God to be directed to unbelievers, 1 Corinthians 14:22. Why?

Because it would prove to the unbeliever that the tongue-speaker, who did not possess the natural ability to speak that language, was being empowered by God to speak in the language spoken by the unbeliever.

The unbeliever would recognise the divine origin of the tongue speaker’s ability and thereby be willing to consider the words being spoken as the instructions of God, 1 Corinthians 14:23.

An examination of 1 Corinthians 14 yields the result that no contextual justification exists for concluding that the Bible refers to, let alone endorses, the notion of ‘ecstatic’ speech.

TONGUES OF ANGELS!

What about Paul’s passing reference to the ‘tongues of angels’ in 1 Corinthians 13:1? Would not this reference prove that tongue-speaking could involve languages beyond those spoken by humans?

In the first place, consider the role, purpose, and activity of angels described in the Bible. The word ‘angel’, in Greek is ‘angelos’, in Hebrew it is the word ‘malak’, and it simply means ‘messenger’, one who ‘speaks and acts in the place of the one who has sent him’.

It does not mean merely ‘to send,’ but rather ‘to send a messenger/message’. It is true that angels in both the Old and New Testaments carried out a wide range of activities beyond message-bearing, including worshipping

God, Revelation 5:11-12, comforting, aiding, and protecting, Daniel 6:22 / Matthew 4:11 / Luke 22:43 / Acts 5:19 / Hebrews 1:14, and executing judgment and inflicting punishment and death, Matthew 13:49 / Acts 12:23.

But it still remains true to say that the meaning of the term ‘angel’ is a messenger, one who communicates a spoken message. Therefore, their principal role in God’s scheme of things was to function as messengers to humans.

Consequently, angels are always represented in Scripture as communicating in human language.

In the second place, what logical reason exists for humans to speak in an alleged ‘angelic’ language that is different from human language? What would be the spiritual benefit?

The Bible certainly makes no provision for humans to communicate with angels in such a language, nor would there be any need for an angel to communicate to a human in a non-earthly language.

The whole point of 1 Corinthians 12-13 was to stress the need to function in the church in ways that were meaningful and understandable. Since God, by His very nature, never would do anything superfluous, unnecessary, or frivolous, it follows that He would not bestow upon a human being the ability to speak in a non-human language.

The ability would serve no purpose! The Bible simply offers no rationale nor justification for identifying the ‘tongues of angels’ in 1 Corinthians 13:1, with some heavenly, otherworldly, non-earthly languages.

In the third place, if the ‘tongues of angels’ refer to known human languages, what was Paul’s point? Since angels were God’s appointed spokesmen, they naturally would perform their assignment in such a way that God would be represented as He would want to be.

God’s own angelic emissaries would have complied with their responsibility in such a way and manner that they would have God’s approval. In other words, angels would naturally articulate God’s message as well as it could be expressed, i.e., perfectly.

When God inspired mere humans to communicate His will, He integrated their own educational background, stylistic idiosyncrasies, and vocabulary into their oral and literary productions. No such need would have existed for angels.

Their communications would have been unfiltered through human agency. Their announcements would have been the epitome and pinnacle of eloquence and oratorical skill.

Perhaps then, Paul was not drawing a contrast between human and nonhuman languages at all. Before referring to the ‘tongues of angels,’ he referred to ‘the tongues of men,’ 1 Corinthians 13:1.

Why would Paul say, ‘though I speak with the tongues of men’? After all, isn’t that precisely what all adult humans do? We, humans, speak at least one human language! Paul must have been referring, then, not to the ability to speak a human language, but to the ability to speak all human languages.

No tongue-speaker in the first-century church had the ability to speak all human languages. In fact, the textual evidence indicates that most tongue-speakers probably had the ability to speak only one human language, which he himself did not understand, thus necessitating the need for an inspired interpreter, 1 Corinthians 12:30 / 1 Corinthians 14:26-28.

Paul could apparently speak more languages than any of the others, 1 Corinthians 14:18. If the ‘tongues of men’ referred to the number of human languages, rather than referring to the ability to speak a human language, then the ‘tongues of angels’ would refer, not to the ability to speak an angelic language but to the ability to speak human languages the way angels do.

Here then, would have been Paul’s point. Even if a tongue-speaker could speak every human language known to man, and even if that tongue-speaker could speak those human languages with the efficiency, skill, and perfection that God’s angelic messengers have spoken them in history, without love, the ability would be wasted, 1 Corinthians 13:1. With this understanding of the text, Paul was not contrasting human with nonhuman language. He was encompassing both the quantity, if I could speak all human languages and the quality, if I could speak them perfectly, of speaking human language.

One final point on the matter of the ‘tongues of angels’ merits mention. Even if the expression actually refers to angelic tongues that are nonhuman, it is still likely that tongue-speakers were incapable of speaking such languages. Why?

Paul was speaking hypothetically and hyperbolically. No human being, with the exception of perhaps Jesus, has ever been able to speak in all human languages. For Paul to suggest such was to pose a hypothetical situation. It was to exaggerate the facts.

So Paul's meaning was, 'even if I were capable of speaking all human languages, which I'm not.' Likewise, no human being has ever been able to speak the tongues of angels. So Paul's meaning was, 'even if I were capable of speaking the languages of angels, which I'm not.'

This conclusion is supported further by the verse that follows the reference to the 'tongues of angels.' Paul never claimed to speak the languages of angels; he said if I could.

Paul used two additional hypothetical events when he said, 'If I know all mysteries and all knowledge' and 'if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains,' 1 Corinthians 13:2.

But no one on the planet, with the exception of deity, has understood all mysteries and all knowledge, nor has had faith that could literally remove mountains, 1 Corinthians 13:2. Notice again the word 'if'. Again, Paul was merely saying, 'even if I could do such things, but I can't'.

4. Paul stated very clearly that tongue speaking was a sign to unbelievers, not believers, 1 Corinthians 14:22.

Tongue speaking was to be done in their presence, to convince them of the truth being spoken, i.e., to confirm the Word. The tongue-speaking being practised today is done in the presence of those who already believe.

Tongue-speaking occurs when an unbeliever, who is sceptical of the genuineness of the activity, makes an appearance in such an assembly; the claim often is made that tongue-speaking cannot occur because of the presence of unbelief. Once again, the New Testament teaches the very opposite of those who claim the ability to speak in tongues today, 1 Corinthians 14:22.

5. The recipient of a miraculous gift in the New Testament could control himself, 1 Corinthians 14:32.

He was not overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit so that he began to babble or flail about. Tongue-speaking today is frequently practised in a setting where the individuals who claim to be exercising the gift are speaking uncontrollably at the very time that others are either doing the same thing or engaging in some other action.

This overlapping activity is in direct violation of three of Paul's commands,

1. That each takes their turn one at a time, 1 Corinthians 14:27.

2. That no more than three tongue speakers speak per service, 1 Corinthians 14:27.

3. That tongue-speakers remain silent if no interpreter is present, 1 Corinthians 14:28.

The claim by many today to be able to speak in tongues is simply out of harmony with New Testament teaching.

Anyone can babble, make up sounds and claim he or she is speaking in tongues, but such conduct is no sign today.

It is precisely the same phenomenon that pagan religions have practised through the centuries. In the New Testament, however, no one questioned the authenticity of tongue-speaking. Why?

The speaker was speaking a known human language that could be understood by those present who knew that language and knew that that particular speaker did not know that language beforehand.

If and when self-proclaimed tongue-speakers today demonstrate that genuine New Testament gift, their message could be accepted as being from God. But no one today has demonstrated that genuine New Testament gift.

9. The ability to interpret the languages used, 1 Corinthians 12:10.

As one had the gift of speaking a language from other countries, so some were able to miraculously understand the language and expound the meaning to others in the native tongue of the audience, even though they had no formal training in the language.

The gift of interpreting tongues is the ability to translate a foreign language into the language of the hearers. The gift of interpreting tongues is always alongside the gift of speaking in tongues. It is a separate gift, but it is always used in conjunction with the gift of speaking in tongues.

A person with the gift of interpreting tongues could understand what a tongue-speaker was saying even though he did not know the language that was being spoken. This is what distinguishes the spiritual gift from the natural gift of being able to understand and speak a variety of languages.

The tongues interpreter would then communicate the message of the tongues speaker to everyone else, so all could understand and benefit from the truth being spoken.

The tongues were known languages, not ecstatic utterances. According to the apostle Paul, and in agreement with the tongues described in Acts 2:1-11, speaking in tongues is valuable to the one hearing God's message in his or her own language, but it is useless to everyone else unless it is interpreted/translated. Remember, Paul's concern is the edification of the church, 1 Corinthians 14:5 / 1 Corinthians 14:12.

Paul's conclusion regarding tongues that were not interpreted is powerful. There is no benefit to others in hearing something they cannot understand. More importantly, there is no benefit, and much harm, done in churches where the speaking and interpreting of a tongue brings forth that which does not line up with Scripture or which cannot be verified in Scripture, 1 Corinthians 14:19.

Paul was also concerned about order in worship, 1 Corinthians 14:33. His concern was that everything is done for the edification of the church. He goes on to say that there should only be two or three speaking in a tongue and one should interpret, 1 Corinthians 14:26-28.

If there is no interpreter present, then one should be quiet, 1 Corinthians 14:26-28. The temporal nature of the gift of tongues assumes that the gift of interpretation of tongues was also temporal.

If the gift of speaking in tongues were active in the church today, it would be performed in agreement with Scripture. It would be a real and intelligible language, 1 Corinthians 14:10.

It would be for the purpose of communicating God's Word to a person of another language, Acts 2:6-12, and it would also be in accordance with 1 Corinthians 14:33, 'For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.'

Each of the nine gifts mentioned above was given to individuals by the Holy Spirit for divine functions that all may profit from. Though there are nine gifts listed, there is only one Godhead. Though there are many members with many gifts, there is yet one church. The Lord never intended man to be separated by gifts.

The personality and individuality of the Holy Spirit is seen here in that He distributed gifts to individuals, as he will,' 1 Corinthians 12:11. The Holy Spirit made a judgment as to who was to receive what gift.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'This section concludes with another reminder that though these manifestations of the Spirit vary, they all indicate the presence and working of the Spirit of God. Paul also stressed the Spirit's sovereignty in distributing the gifts, John 3:8. The Corinthians should not try to manipulate the Spirit but accept and submit to His distribution of the gifts as He saw fit.'

The scope of spiritual gifts was that they were to profit and edify all in the church, 1 Corinthians 12:7 / 1 Corinthians 14:12, and that all may learn, 1 Corinthians 14:31. The guiding principle behind gifts at this time was their profitability to those hearing or seeing them and not to the individual performing them.

THE CHURCH COMPARED TO A BODY

“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so, the body is not made up of one part but of many.” 1 Corinthians 12:12-14

These verses teach the idea that the church is to be united in truth, revealed by gifts, rather than elevating self over others based on a gift. The Corinthians were obviously separating themselves by the gifts they had.

It may be that those who spoke in tongues had their followers, and those who healed the sick had their followers and so on. Such an event is contrary to the objective of gifts, the unification of the body.

The ‘one’ of the ‘body’ is both literal and figurative, [1 Corinthians 12:12](#). One indicates the singular status of the church of Jesus Christ, and secondly, it represents the purpose of all the ‘many members’ that comprise it.

The one church, the body of Christ, is indicated by several Scriptures, [Ephesians 1:22-23](#) / [Ephesians 4:4](#). The one purpose of the ‘many members’ is indicated by several Scriptures as well, [Psalm 133:1](#) / [John 17:21](#) / [1 Corinthians 1:10](#) / [Ephesians 4:1-7](#) / [Philippians 1:27](#).

The idea of [1 Corinthians 12:12](#) is that in the human body we have many parts, i.e., the hands, feet, arms, legs, head, various organs; however, individually one. Just because there are many body parts does not make a person ‘many.’ The whole of the human body functions together for the betterment of the single unit. Even so, Paul said, ‘is with Christ,’ [1 Corinthians 12:12](#). The body of Christ, the church, is like the human body in that all members function together for one purpose, heaven, [1 John 2:25](#) / [1 John 5:12-13](#).

The significance of the oneness of the Godhead as contrasted with the many gifts and members of the body cannot be underestimated. The spiritual gifts that the Corinthians had were never intended to elevate or benefit one person only.

There are many gifts for many members of the body, and they are to be used to help the one body. Christians are not to look at themselves as separate and distinct from the other members of the body.

The Corinthian gifts were to make the whole body healthy and strong, rather than being individualised into parties or factions. Notice that the same Greek phrase ‘in one Spirit’, [1 Corinthians 12:13](#), that is ‘en pneumatic’ in Greek, was mentioned in [1 Corinthians 12:3](#) / [1 Corinthians 12:9](#).

[1 Corinthians 12:3](#) revealed a test as to who was truly speaking and teaching truth versus those who were not. Those speaking the truth did so by the instructions of the Holy Spirit.

[1 Corinthians 12:9](#) indicates gifts that were distributed by the Holy Spirit. Revelation and distribution of gifts was a work of the Holy Spirit. Apparently, Paul continues the idea here of the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to revelation. By revelation, instruction, man is ‘baptised into one body,’ [1 Corinthians 12:13](#).

Divine revelation reveals a fact here regarding the consequence of baptism. Following divine revelation, regarding the instructions for baptism, one finds oneself ‘in one body,’ [1 Corinthians 12:13](#).

One who is baptised by divine instructions is now ‘in Christ,’ [Galatians 3:27-28](#). To be ‘in Christ’ is to be in fellowship with God and to abide in His truths, [1 John 1:3](#) / [1 John 1:5-6](#) / [1 John 2:6](#) / [1 John 2:24](#) / [Galatians 3:27](#).

The phrase ‘were baptised’, [1 Corinthians 12:13](#), is one word in Greek, ‘hebaptisthemen’. Clearly, baptism is a one-time act. Those baptised are no longer separated from God and the body of Christ but are now members of the one body of Christ. Why would one individual who has been baptised into the body of Christ do something that would not benefit the body as a whole?

Notice the words, ‘and were all made to drink of one Spirit,’ [1 Corinthians 12:13](#) / [John 7:37-39](#). This entire phrase is represented by one Greek word, which is ‘hepotisthemen.’ There seems to be a connection between the ‘drinking of the one Spirit’ and ‘baptism’ due to the fact that both are in the aorist tense.

Apparently, as one examines the work of the Holy Spirit in divine revelation, the meaning here is that divine instructions revealed the need for baptism at one point in one's past.

Such a one obeyed that divine revelation and now is to continue in faith. This person did a past action drink of the 'one Spirit' with a drink involving a partaking of divine instructions.

Note the significance of the oneness of the Godhead, the saints, and the church. To take a gift from God and not use it for the one body would be to go against God's divine will, Acts 16:16-40.

Many are baptised into Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, and they are then added to the body of Christ, the church, Acts 2:38-42. The forgiven sinner is no longer separated from the Lord but rather joined to the church. Once a part of the many in the world, that obedient person is now a part of the one body of Christ, Ephesians 2:1-5 / Ephesians 2:18-20 / Colossians 1:13-14.

By divine revelation, those who are in the one body are one in purpose, John 17:14-25. The members agree and are united in this one divine revelation. Though there are many members that comprise the church universal, they are one in purpose, 1 Corinthians 12:14 / Romans 12:4-5 / Ephesians 4:11-13 / Colossians 1:18 / Colossians 2:19.

As the human body, with its various parts, members, and functions, together to achieve its goal of health, so the spiritual body is made up of many members who have functions to achieve the spiritual health of the whole body, Titus 1:13 / 2 Timothy 1:13 / 2 Timothy 4:3.

The intimate relationship of the members of the body of Christ is magnified here. Christians are all part of each other and should do all things that would benefit the whole rather than self, 1 Corinthians 12:14.

When a member of the body of Christ has a different approach to divine authority, they have the potential of making a local body unhealthy, 2 Timothy 2:16-18.

"Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body." 1 Corinthians 12:15-20

These verses give us insight into the ongoingings at the church in Corinth. Apparently, some brethren did one of two things. First, they were attempting to elevate themselves over others in the body as though they were not part of that one body.

Secondly, some of these brethren who were dividing along the lines of differing gifts were making some brethren feel that they were worthless for not having a specific gift.

We are introduced here to the fact that some gifts were elevated above other gifts in the minds of the Christians. A member who said, 'I have not the gift of tongues, therefore I am not a significant part of the body,' is making a mistake.

Paul tells us what makes one a part of the body in 1 Corinthians 12:13: baptism for the remission of sins. While sin separates man from God, baptism joins a man to the body of Christ. A baptised believer is a part of the body, whether he has a certain gift or not.

A member today is in fellowship with God, whether he leads singing or not, etc. The Corinthians had apparently lost sight of the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God and began looking selfishly to spirituality.

The physical body is dependent upon all of its members to function. Likewise, the spiritual body is dependent upon all of its members to function. The church of Jesus Christ has a work to do: evangelise the lost, edify the saints and provide care for its own needy.

This work can only be accomplished when each member is doing their part. God has organised the church so that its functions can be accomplished, Philippians 1:1.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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 also necessary, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Too often, because we differ from each other, we also differ with each other.’

Each part of the body of Christ, like our human bodies, is important in relation to achieving the work of the church. Such a statement infers that each member is responsible for this work, 1 Corinthians 12:18. Not all may lead singing or preach, yet they must find what they can do and do it with all their heart for the benefit of the whole.

A fact is now given, and that is God ‘placed’ each member in the place he has ‘as it pleased him,’ 1 Corinthians 12:18. The word ‘placed’, in Greek, is ‘tithemi’, and it means to put, place, to put or plant it in his heart.

One gets ‘in the body’ through the act of baptism as mentioned above. The Holy Spirit distributed gifts to individuals ‘as he will,’ 1 Corinthians 12:4 / 1 Corinthians 12:11.

As the Holy Spirit distributed gifts as he willed, even so God adds to the church those who have been baptised for the forgiveness of their sins, Acts 2:38 / Acts 2:45 / Acts 2:47, i.e., sets them in the body.

The body is comprised of many members doing their own functions, 1 Corinthians 12:19-20. If the whole body were an eye, how would it get about? If every member had the gift of tongues, where would be the interpretation of those tongues?

If every member today did one thing, how would other work be accomplished? The beauty of the diverse gifts during these days was that they accomplished the unified purpose of the church. The body is not one member but many who are one in purpose.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Whenever we begin to think about our own importance in the Christian Church, the possibility of really Christian work is gone.’

The purpose of spiritual gifts was to establish faith, Mark 16:20, and teaching or edification, 1 Corinthians 14:31, that the whole body may be healthy, sound in the faith, Titus 1:13 / Titus 2:1.

We must note that though miraculous gifts do not exist today, there are nonetheless gifts of each member of the body in relationship to talents. There are song leaders, men who pray publicly, preachers, deacons, elders, and so forth.

Each person does what they can to benefit the whole, Ephesians 4:11-13 / Romans 12:6-8.

The preacher is not more important than those who pray. The elders are not more important to the body than the deacons. When brethren begin putting levels of importance upon certain parts of the body, they lose sight of God’s will to use each of these talents and offices to benefit or profit all!

The antecedent to ‘they’, 1 Corinthians 12:19, would be the body parts in the illustration and people in the church, those baptised and added to the church. There are many people in the church, yet one church, 1 Corinthians 12:20. Paul continues to hammer away at the oneness of all things spiritual. One Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and church. Many with one purpose!

“The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it”. 1 Corinthians 12:21-26

Some in Corinth felt that their gift was superior to others, and they were even dividing themselves up according to their gifts, 1 Corinthians 14:18-20. Paul's point in using the human body illustration was to show the Corinthians that just as the human body depends on its parts, such as the foot, hand, ear and eyes, even so the body of Christ has members with varying gifts that function together as a whole, 1 Corinthians 12:21.

The Corinthian Christians needed to understand that as each member of the body did their part, they functioned as a whole. Each member is needed, no matter what their work in the church, to achieve its divine work. Each member is significant and needed, 1 Corinthians 12:22-23.

No one is better, and no one is lesser in importance. Those who divide themselves according to gifts are working contrary to God's divine will for the gifts. How can one take the gifts of God and use them for a purpose that opposes the very one who gave them?

To be 'less honourable,' 1 Corinthians 12:23, if the Greek word 'atimos', which means not deemed worthy of, deprived of privileges, without price or value. Those people in the church who seem insignificant or without value actually are bestowed abundant honour and value, 1 Corinthians 12:23.

The moment we get to thinking that we are greater than others or that others are insignificant is the moment the germ of disunity begins. The word 'unpresentable' in Greek is 'askemon', which means parts are misshapen, unseemly.

There are some commentators who suggest that the 'unpresentable' parts are people's sexual organs. Others suggest it's referring to the hidden parts of the human body, such as the heart and lungs, etc.

Paul's point is that human reason may conclude that a member of the church is feeble, unnecessary and without value if they do not have the abilities or gifts that I have. Paul's point continues to be that the body is one and as a unit, all are needed, no matter how insignificant and weak one may seem.

Those who are 'presentable', 1 Corinthians 12:14, which means not lacking, strong and apparently valuable, seemingly have no need of the supposed weak members. Appearance is deceptive!

The word 'put the body together', 1 Corinthians 12:24, is the Greek word 'sugkerannumi', and it means to mix up with, commingle or blend with, temper by mixing with, to mix together.

The Corinthians may have viewed the gift of tongues as most prized and valuable; however, God placed it last in the list of gifts, 1 Corinthians 12:10 / 1 Corinthians 12:30. The teachers were set forth at the front of the list. The member of the body that seems to lack in gifts is actually given more abundant honour due to the 'mixing and blending together' of all members.

The members of the body of Christ, with their individual gifts, are depicted as being blended together in a homogenous mixture so that one could not tell the difference between one and the other.

The word 'division', 1 Corinthians 12:25, is the Greek word 'schisma', and it means a cleft, a rent in a garment, a division of opinion. Now Paul plainly states the issue.

If the Corinthians would recognise God's divine intention for gifts, i.e. to profit all through teaching, they would be blended together as one. 'Ignorance', however, was currently ruling their hearts in relationship to gifts, 1 Corinthians 12:1. Rather than being one, the church had 'divided.'

Each member is to rather have the 'same care one for another,' 1 Corinthians 12:25. This phrase helps us understand what type of division Paul is speaking of in its context. Apparently, there were brethren who were separating themselves by gifts.

The word 'concern' is the Greek word 'merimnao', and it means to care for, be anxious about, think earnestly upon, to be careful to do. Each individual is to think of the others, no matter what gift they possess, the same. Why?

Because as the body is one, it shares in one purpose.

All members of that body will do their part to see that the function of the body is accomplished. No one views any task as more or less important. Each is to do their given part.

When all members of the body view each other, and care for each other, then this unity will hurt when one part hurts and rejoice when one member rejoices, 1 Corinthians 12:26 / Romans 12:15.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Plato had pointed out that we do not say, ‘My finger has a pain,’ we say, ‘I have a pain.’

Herein is a commentary on the oneness of the church. Unity in the body of Christ exists in perfect form when all members are following the teachings of Jesus Christ and are in agreement with its interpretation.

So close are the saints that when one member suffers, all suffer, and when one member is valued highly, we are all valued. There is a sharing of the suffering and good because the members are united as one. Division has no place in such an environment. When brethren individualise themselves or seek a following, they bring trouble to the church.

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way.” 1 Corinthians 12:27-31

The Corinthian brethren were part of the body of Christ, the church, through baptism. It was not just one or two that made up the church but ‘severally members who are a part of it,’ 1 Corinthians 12:27.

One or two ignorant or selfish brethren within a congregation of God’s people make up a faction. Church members are blended together as one, and they do all things for the benefit of the one body rather than for themselves.

Paul once again uses the phrase God has ‘placed’. The meaning of this word was examined in 1 Corinthians 12:18, which means to put, place, or plant it in his heart.

Here, the deposit or planting is clearly identified as ‘apostles, prophets’, 1 Corinthians 12:28. These gifts were distributed so that the church may function according to God’s standards. Note that it was the Holy Spirit that distributed the gifts, and thereby we see the deity of the Holy Spirit here as he is referred to as ‘God’.

1. The word ‘apostles’, in Greek, is the word ‘apostolos’, which means a messenger, ambassador, 1 Corinthians 1:28. As one who represents another government to another, the apostles went forth from the kingdom of God to the world. These men represented Christ’s kingdom in the world ruled by Satan, Ephesians 6:20. Their work was to reveal the mind of God, Ephesians 2:20 / Ephesians 3:5.

2. The word ‘prophets’ is the Greek word ‘propheteia’, and it means to speak forth, and sometimes includes the ability to foretell future events, 1 Corinthians 12:28 / 1 Corinthians 12:10.

3. The word ‘teachers’ is the Greek word ‘didaskalos’, and it means to teach, instruct a person, 1 Corinthians 12:28.

4. The word ‘miracles’ is the Greek word ‘dunamis’, which means power, might, strength, then, generally, strength, or power, ability to do a thing, 1 Corinthians 12:28 / 1 Corinthians 12:10.

5. The word ‘healings’ is the Greek word ‘iama’, and it means to heal, cure, or make one recover, 1 Corinthians 12:28 / 1 Corinthians 12:9.

6. The word ‘helping’, in Greek, is the word ‘antilepsis’, and it means one who aids, assists, or helps, 1 Corinthians 12:28.

This same Greek word is used in Luke 1:54 to illustrate the spiritual aid God grants to man for salvation through the blood of Christ. The word is also used in Acts 20:35 to denote financial aid granted to the needy. It is an apparent gift to aid one spiritually and financially.

7. The word ‘guidance’ is the Greek word ‘kubernesis’, and it means to act as pilot or helmsman, used metaphorically to guide, govern, 1 Corinthians 12:28. The guidance gift may very well be the elder or bishop Paul had in mind.

8. The words ‘different kinds of tongues’ are the Greek words ‘gene glosson’, which means different tongues for different nationalities, 1 Corinthians 12:28 / 1 Corinthians 12:10.

The answer to these rhetorical questions in 1 Corinthians 12:29-30, is no. God has, through the Holy Spirit, distributed various gifts to individuals, ‘as he will’ or as ‘it pleased him’, 1 Corinthians 12:11 / 1 Corinthians 12:18. The function of these gifts was to produce faith, edify, and unify the body as a whole, 1 Corinthians 12:17-18. If all people were apostles how would the church function?

If all people were miraculous healers, how would the church be one in purpose? If all spoke in tongues, where would the interpretation be? We need each other in the church! 1 Corinthians 12:29-30.

The word ‘desire’, 1 Corinthians 12:31, explains the Corinthian problem. Their desire was for certain gifts, not that all may profit in the one body of Christ, but rather that they may gain personal or individual profit.

Noticeably, 1 Corinthians 12:31 helps us understand that though each member had gifts that differed from another and all were necessary, all were not equal; there were ‘greater gifts.’

Paul listed the greater gifts in order when he said, ‘first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers’. 1 Corinthians 12:28. Those who had the gift of teaching divine revelation were greater because they delivered information that was of utmost importance to the salvation of souls that all could hear and understand. Paul concludes by saying, ‘and yet I will show you the most excellent way,’ 1 Corinthians 12:31. The way of love is the ‘greatest’, 1 Corinthians 13:13. Jackson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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.’

SUMMARY

Another problem in the church of Corinth is introduced in 1 Corinthians 12. We do not see the accusations until 1 Corinthians 14. However, the exposed Biblical facts, regarding spiritual gifts, are first given. Paul begins by setting forth facts regarding the purpose of miracles.

First, God alone is deity and so proven by His servants performing miracles in His name, Isaiah 46:9-10 / 1 Corinthians 12:1-2. Secondly, spiritual gifts are designed to promote unity in the body of Christ, the church, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

As there is one God, the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and the church, even so the members of the body must be one in purpose. Other objectives of miracles are addressed elsewhere, i.e., confirmation of truth, Mark 16:20 / John 20:30-31 / Hebrews 2:3-4, and edification, 1 Corinthians 14:12 / 1 Corinthians 14:31.

Paul’s objective at this point of the study was to get the attention of certain erring Corinthian Christians away from themselves and back on the church as a whole. When one looks to self-importance and self-opinion, the end result is a faction rather than unity, 1 Corinthians 12:25.

Apparently, there were Christians in the church at Corinth separating from each other due to the specific gift they possessed. These separations were not healthy for the church and were identified as a ‘division’, 1 Corinthians 12:25. Those who had participated in this disorder were ‘ignorant’ in relation to the function and objective of gifts, 1 Corinthians 12:1.

1 Corinthians 12 lists nine spiritual gifts. The focus of this chapter is to expose the unifying effects of spiritual gifts. Christians are ‘baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free,’ 1 Corinthians 12:13. This one body is the church, 1 Corinthians 12:27-28, compared to Ephesians 1:22-23.

Though by human reasoning men may judge certain members of the body of Christ as lesser in regard to a specific spiritual gift, God reveals that all are equally significant.

Rather than fussing over who had the more desired gift, the brethren in Corinth needed to see that they were all to use their distributed gift for the betterment of all, 1 Corinthians 12:7 / 1 Corinthians 12:31.

1 Corinthians 12 is obviously followed by 1 Corinthians 13, the chapter of love. If only the Corinthians could open their minds to the function of the spiritual gifts, the church would be unified. At this point, however, they lacked love for one another in relation to these gifts.

CHAPTER 13

INTRODUCTION

The problem revolving around spiritual gifts, though not precisely identified to this point, is apparent. The Corinthians were elevating gifts and individuals who possessed certain gifts above others.

Any time an individual or a group of individuals separate themselves from the whole body, there will be trouble in the church, 1 Corinthians 12:14. Eventually, such selfish ambition will lead to a schism in the body, 1 Corinthians 12:25.

The objective of 1 Corinthians 12 is to identify the gifts and their purposes. The fundamental objective of gifts was to ‘profit all’, 1 Corinthians 12:7. Those Corinthians who did not approach spiritual gifts from this perspective had lost sight of their identity within the church.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that they were added to the church through baptism for the forgiveness of their sins, 1 Corinthians 12:13. When one is baptised into the one body of Christ, the church, they are no longer many but one in purpose and identity, 1 Corinthians 12:27.

To divide along lines of gifts goes against God’s divine will for gifts. All things done must take into consideration the welfare of the body that the saint is a part of.

Things done contrary to the one body are not healthy for the body as a whole, 1 Corinthians 12:25. To do things for reasons other than profiting the whole body is to be ignorant, selfish and lack love for other parts of the body, 1 Corinthians 12:1.

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Without love, gifts were useless, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Paul speaks of tongues first to illustrate the inverted level of importance and the apparent interest the Corinthians had in this spiritual gift.

The word ‘tongues’, in Greek, is ‘glossa’, and it is defined as ‘a tongue, language’. The languages of men vary from race to race, 1 Corinthians 13:1 / 1 Corinthians 12:10.

The language of angels is clear communication as well, 1 Corinthians 13:1 / Genesis 16:7-12. Would not this reference prove that tongue-speaking could involve languages beyond those spoken by humans?

In the first place, consider the role, purpose, and activity of angels described in the Bible. The word ‘angel’, in Greek is ‘angelos’, in Hebrew it is the word ‘malak’, and it simply means ‘messenger’, one who ‘speaks and acts in the place of the one who has sent him’. It does not mean merely ‘to send,’ but rather ‘to send a messenger/message’.

It is true that angels in both the Old and New Testaments carried out a wide range of activities beyond message-bearing, including worshipping God, Revelation 5:11-12, comforting, aiding, and protecting, Daniel 6:22 / Matthew 4:11 / Luke 22:43 / Acts 5:19 / Hebrews 1:14, and executing judgment and inflicting punishment and death, Matthew 13:49 / Acts 12:23.

But it still remains true to say that the meaning of the term ‘angel’ is a messenger, one who communicates a spoken message. Therefore, their principal role in God’s scheme of things was to function as messengers to humans.

Consequently, angels are always represented in Scripture as communicating in human language. In the second place, what logical reason exists for humans to speak in an alleged ‘angelic’ language that is different from human language?

What would be the spiritual benefit? The Bible certainly makes no provision for humans to communicate with angels in such a language, nor would there be any need for an angel to communicate to a human in a non-earthly language.

The whole point of 1 Corinthians 12-13 was to stress the need to function in the church in ways that were meaningful and understandable. Since God, by His very nature, never would do anything superfluous, unnecessary, or frivolous, it follows that He would not bestow upon a human being the ability to speak in a nonhuman language.

The ability would serve no purpose! The Bible simply offers no rationale nor justification for identifying the ‘tongues of angels’ in 1 Corinthians 13:1, with some heavenly, otherworldly, non-earthly languages.

In the third place, if the ‘tongues of angels’ refer to known human languages, what was Paul’s point? Since angels were God’s appointed spokesmen, they naturally would perform their assignment in such a way that God would be represented as He would want to be.

God’s own angelic emissaries would have complied with their responsibility in such a way and manner that they would have God’s approval. In other words, angels would naturally articulate God’s message as well as it could be expressed, i.e., perfectly.

When God inspired mere humans to communicate His will, He integrated their own educational background, stylistic idiosyncrasies, and vocabulary into their oral and literary productions.

No such need would have existed for angels. Their communications would have been unfiltered through human agency. Their announcements would have been the epitome and pinnacle of eloquence and oratorical skill.

Perhaps then, Paul was not drawing a contrast between human and nonhuman languages at all. Before referring to the ‘tongues of angels,’ he referred to ‘the tongues of men,’ 1 Corinthians 13:1. Why would Paul say, ‘Though I speak with the tongues of men’?

After all, isn’t that precisely what all adult humans do? We, humans, speak at least one human language! Paul must have been referring, then, not to the ability to speak a human language, but to the ability to speak all human languages.

No tongue-speaker in the first-century church had the ability to speak all human languages. In fact, the textual evidence indicates that most tongue-speakers probably had the ability to speak only one human language, which he, himself, did not understand, thus necessitating the need for an inspired interpreter, 1 Corinthians 12:30 / 1 Corinthians 14:26-28.

Paul could apparently speak more languages than any of the others, 1 Corinthians 14:18. If the ‘tongues of men’ referred to the number of human languages, rather than referring to the ability to speak a human language, then the ‘tongues of angels’ would refer, not to the ability to speak an angelic language but to the ability to speak human languages the way angels do.

Here then, would have been Paul’s point, even if a tongue-speaker could speak every human language known to man, and even if that tongue-speaker could speak those human languages with the efficiency, skill, and perfection that God’s angelic messengers have spoken them in history, without love, the ability would be wasted.

With this understanding of the text, Paul was not contrasting human with nonhuman language. He was encompassing both the quantity, if I could speak all human languages and the quality, if I could speak them perfectly, of speaking human language.

One final point on the matter of the ‘tongues of angels’ merits mention. Even if the expression actually refers to angelic tongues that are nonhuman, it is still likely that tongue-speakers were incapable of speaking such languages. Why?

Paul was speaking hypothetically and hyperbolically. No human being, with the exception of perhaps Jesus, has ever been able to speak in all human languages. For Paul to suggest such was to pose a hypothetical situation. It was to exaggerate the facts.

So Paul’s meaning was, ‘even if I were capable of speaking all human languages, which I’m not.’ Likewise, no human being has ever been able to speak the tongues of angels. So Paul’s meaning was, ‘even if I were capable of speaking the languages of angels, which I’m not.’

This conclusion is supported further by the verse that follows the reference to the ‘tongues of angels.’ There, Paul used two additional hypothetical events when he said, ‘If I know all mysteries and all knowledge’ and ‘if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains,’ 1 Corinthians 13:2.

Lipscomb, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Judas Iscariot is an example of faith to perform miracles, but with no love of Christ. ‘Judas had faith to work miracles, Matthew 10:1, but he did not possess love, betrayed the Lord, and went to his own place.’

But no one on the planet, with the exception of deity, has understood all mysteries and all knowledge, nor has had faith that could literally remove mountains. Again, Paul was merely saying, ‘even if I could do such things, which I can’t.’

It’s important to note the word ‘if’ because Paul never said he could speak in tongues of angels, etc., he says ‘if’ I could, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Without love being the motivation for speaking in tongues, the gift would be useless, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

When one, through ignorance, separates from the body they were baptised into so that they may form a schism based upon an individual gift they ‘have not love’, 1 Corinthians 12:1 / 1 Corinthians 12:25 / 1 Corinthians 12:31.

The word love, in Greek, is ‘agape’ and it is defined as ‘brotherly love, charity, the love of God for man and of man for God, New Testament.’ The apostle John gives us a clear commentary on what this love is, John 15:12-17.

John said, ‘God is love’, 1 John 4:8 / 1 John 4:16. God’s love is made manifest in the fact that He sent His Son, Jesus, for the propitiation of our sins, 1 John 3:16 / 1 John 4:10. Christians are commanded to love as God loves, 1 John 4:17. God loved in that He provided a way for man to rid himself of sin.

Christians are to care for brethren in such a way that helps them get rid of the sin in their lives, Acts 20:26. The Corinthians had this opportunity by delivering the Gospel of our salvation. Secondly, God cares for the physical well-being of His people, and so must we, Isaiah 63:9 / 1 John 3:17.

The Corinthians, who practised their spiritual gifts without this love as its motivation, were as a ‘sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal,’ 1 Corinthians 13:1. The word ‘resounding’, in Greek, is ‘echo’, and it means ‘to sound, often of metal, to let it sound’.

The word ‘brass’, in Greek, is ‘chalkos’ and is defined as referring to its colour. Copper was the first metal wrought for use, hence chalkos came to be used for metal in general, and when men learnt to work iron, chalkos was used for sideros, and chalkeus came to mean a blacksmith.

Chalkos also meant bronze, i.e., copper alloyed with tin, not brass, i.e., copper alloyed with zinc, which was a later invention, and this was its sense when applied to arms. Paul’s use of a ‘sounding brass’ is obviously intended to mean an annoying or unnatural sound made with the metal.

The word ‘clanging’, in Greek, is ‘alalazo’ and it means to raise the war cry, to shout the shout of victory, to cry or shout aloud. The word ‘cymbal’ in Greek is ‘kumbalon’, and it means one of a pair of concave brass plates that are struck together as percussion instruments. Again, the idea is an annoyingly loud sound that disturbs the peace.

In an orchestra, a percussion instrument serves its purpose among the strings, woodwinds, and brass instruments. Take the percussion or brass, trombone or French horn out, and the loud noise is useless. Likewise, one who speaks tongues that others do not understand is useless and lacks love.

If the tongues speaker properly understood the function of the tongues, out of love, he would speak with an interpreter for the purpose of edifying all hearers, 1 Corinthians 14:12. Paul’s point is that the single instrument or gift can only serve its designed purpose when acting together with the whole body, 1 Corinthians 12:14.

If love, care and concern for my brother’s physical and spiritual wellbeing is not the motivation for the Corinthians exercising their gifts, then their efforts amount to ‘nothing.’ The word ‘nothing’, 1 Corinthians 13:2-3, in Greek is ‘oudeis’, and it means to be good for nothing, to make of no account.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul teaches two things by this: 1. that the exhibitions of the Corinthian tongue speakers were of the same significance as heathen worship and 2. that both were noisy, empty and worthless.’

The spiritual gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and faith were discussed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. As a single instrument is good for nothing, so is the one who exercises gifts for a single motivation of pride.

Those Corinthians who were divisive and formed divisions with the use of their gift were actually ‘nothing’, though they and others thought they were something special.

The word ‘give’, 1 Corinthians 13:3, in Greek is ‘psomizo’, and it means to employ in feeding others. What if I do such good work without love as its motivation? Am I doing this to be recognised by others as generous, rather than doing it because I see a real need?

Is my personality such that of needing a pat on the back for all the good works I do? It is obviously wrong to have such pictures of men. Paul says, ‘if I give my body to hardship’, 1 Corinthians 13:3, means through persecution so that I may bring myself glory, it profits me nothing.

Here were brethren who may have displayed a great spirit of conviction and zeal, yet they lacked love and thereby their profit is ‘nothing’ in relation to God’s will to profit the whole church. When spiritual and physical benevolence is achieved without love it profits nothing in relation to the church as a whole, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7.

SIXTEEN CHARACTER TRAITS OF LOVE

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

The apostle Paul gives such a wonderful description of what love is all about. You will notice that he doesn't describe love in terms of feelings or emotions but in practical ways. In fact, we could say he is describing the love of God, 1 John 4:8 / 1 John 4:16, which should be displayed in all our lives, Galatians 5:22-23.

The love Paul is describing is a motivation for action that we are free to choose or reject. It's the Greek word 'Agape' which describes a sacrificial love that voluntarily suffers inconvenience, discomfort, and even death for the benefit of another without expecting anything in return, Ephesians 5:1-2. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and replace the word 'love' with the word 'God'.

LOVE IS PATIENT

1. Love patient. 1 Corinthians 13:4.

The word 'patient', in Greek, is 'makrothumeo', and it means to patiently endure wrongs or difficulties. This word is found nine times in the New Testament and generally means to be patient with those in error as the Lord is with us, 2 Peter 3:9. The one who truly loves will not just give up on a brother who is in sin, but rather is willing to study the matter.

In the New Testament, patience has to do with how we should respond to abuse. Taking a long time to get angry! Love patiently waits and attempts to win over our adversary.

William Barclay tells the following enlightening story. Edwin Stanton was the bitter opponent of Abraham Lincoln in the early days of their political careers. Stanton characterised the awkward-looking Lincoln as a clown, a gorilla, etc.

When Lincoln became president, however, he appointed Stanton as his secretary of war because he felt that he was the best man for the job. Later, when President Lincoln lay dead from Booth's bullet, at the bedside, Stanton tearfully said, 'There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen.' To be patient is to be God-like, 2 Peter 3:9. Can you think of an occasion where patience won the day? How did it make you feel?

LOVE IS KIND

2. Love is kind. 1 Corinthians 13:4.

The word 'kind', in Greek, is 'chresteuomai', and it means to be good and kind. God is a loving and kind God, Jeremiah 9:23-24. Such goodness and kindness led to sending His Son, Jesus, into the world so that we might have the opportunity to be saved from our sin, John 3:16. Christians are commanded to be just as kind and good. Think about the souls and well-being of others.

A wise man declared, 'that which makes a man to be desired is his kindness.' Proverbs 19:22. Kindness includes attributes like friendliness, compassion, generosity, and tenderness. In a world that is saturated with harshness, a kind character is a refreshing breeze.

There are many a woman who would trade a handsome husband for a kind one. Kindness would stifle the plague of child abuse. More kindness among brothers in the Lord would alleviate so much church trouble.

The Scriptures demand that we be kind to one another, Ephesians 4:32. To be kind is to be God-like, Luke 6:35. Can you think of an occasion where kindness has changed someone's life? How did that make you feel?

LOVE IS NOT ENVIOUS

3. Love does not envy. 1 Corinthians 13:4.

The word 'envy', in Greek, is 'zeloo', and it means to rival, to be jealous of, envy. This word describes the condition of the Corinthian brethren. They were rivals and jealous of each other in the realm of spiritual gifts.

Such conduct revealed their true lack of love for brethren and caused the existing schisms, 1 Corinthians 1:10 / 1 Corinthians 11:18 / 1 Corinthians 12:25. Real love does not envy others, but it rejoices when others rejoice and hurts when brethren hurt, 1 Corinthians 12:26.

What is jealousy? Jealousy is a feeling of displeasure caused by the prosperity of another, coupled with a desire to extract the advantage from the person who is the object of one's envy, Song of Songs 8:6.

The loving person will rejoice at the success of others. Jealousy has destroyed many a home and church. Envy was one of the sins responsible for the death of Christ, Matthew 27:18 / Acts 7:9 / Acts 17:5. Can you think of an occasion where envy may cause someone problems? How did it make you feel?

LOVE IS NOT BOASTFUL

4. Love does not boast. 1 Corinthians 13:4.

The word 'boast', in Greek, is 'perpereuomai', and it means to boast or vaunt oneself. A Christian who truly loves his brother will not boast or vaunt himself above his brother. All the Christian's efforts are in elevating the brother rather than self, Philippians 2:3.

The Corinthian who boasted of his abilities in the area of tongue-speaking lacked love, a true care and concern for his brother's physical and spiritual well-being. All were to open their eyes and note these truths. Those who formed parties based upon gifts did not truly love the Lord.

Is there anyone more tedious than listening to someone bragging about what they have done or are doing? Genuine love is selfless; it seeks to praise the virtues of others. Love has words of encouragement for the lonely, the downtrodden, and others who deserve and need uplifting Proverbs 27:2.

But some like to blow their own horns. When a Christian begins to boast, if it wasn't for them, the church would be lost; we can't help but think of the word boasting. Can you think of an occasion where someone was boasting about something? How did it make you feel?

LOVE IS NOT PROUD

5. Love is not proud. 1 Corinthians 13:4.

The word ‘proud’, in Greek, is ‘phusioo’, and it means to be puffed up, inflated with pride, to be proud, vain, arrogant. When one views his brother’s soul with great value and is desirous to do any and all things to benefit that brother, where is the room for arrogance and inflated pride?

The tongue-speaking Corinthians apparently felt that they were superior in some way to a brother who did not have this ability, Proverbs 6:16-19. When the church acts as one, there is no place for a part of the whole to act as though it were more significant than the other parts, 1 Corinthians 12:21-31.

The original language here denotes someone who is inflated with a sense of personal pride. Pride is unreasonable self-esteem, generally accompanied by insolence and rude treatment of others.

Pride deceives the heart, Jeremiah 49:16, hardens the mind, Daniel 5:20, and results in destruction, Proverbs 16:18. Love is characterised by genuine humility, Philippians 2:3-4. Can you think of an occasion where someone was full of themselves? How did it make you feel?

LOVE DOES NOT DISHONOUR OTHERS

6. Love does not dishonour others. 1 Corinthians 13:5.

The phrase ‘does not dishonour itself’ is one Greek Word; it is the word ‘aschemoneo’, meaning to disgrace oneself, to be put to shame. What brings shame and disgrace to someone?

The spirit of pride, self-importance, and divisions in the realm of gifts certainly would be disgraceful because such attitudes are antithetical to gifts in the first place.

The Greek expression here literally suggests the notion of being ‘without form’. It encompasses all sorts of evil activity, bad manners, and brutal rudeness. The Christian’s vocabulary should be characterised by such expressions as ‘no, you first,’ ‘please,’ ‘thank you,’ ‘how may I help you?’ etc.

Love operates with determined politeness. The terms ‘gentleman’ and ‘lady’ should reach their high point in the context of Christianity. Love doesn’t deliberately seek to be offensive. Have you ever witnessed someone who loves nothing more than putting other people down? How did it make you feel?

LOVE IS NOT SELF-SEEKING

7. Love is not self-seeking. 1 Corinthians 13:5.

The word ‘seek’, in Greek, is ‘zeteo’, and it means to search after, search out, to search or inquire into, investigate. The word ‘own’, KJV, in Greek is ‘heautou’, and it means himself, herself, itself, etc. Here is one who seeks to please self alone.

One who wants all actions to benefit oneself alone. One who so acts has lost sight of the whole body, 1 Corinthians 12:13-14. Again, such a disposition is antithetical to the love of God and is therefore against the love of a Christian. Have you ever experienced someone who thinks of themselves all the time? How did it make you feel?

8. Love is not easily angered. 1 Corinthians 13:5.

The word ‘easily angered’, in Greek, is ‘paroxuno’, and it means to be urged, prick or spur on, stimulate. What kind of brother would purposely irritate or exasperate another brother?

The answer is, one who does not truly love has no care and concern for a brother's physical and spiritual wellbeing. Again, what kind of brother would allow himself to be irritated or exasperated at another brother? Truly love suffers long!

Love does not pursue its own interests; love is not selfish. It has been said that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who are always thinking of their rights and those who concentrate on their responsibilities. In our world today, there is a lot of selfishness around.

Everyone is protective of their own rights, but all too often, many people say, 'let others fend for themselves; I'm looking after 'Number One.' After all, it's a jungle out there, a dog-eat-dog world. Whence came the origin of this fang and claw philosophy?

By way of stark contrast was the sacrificial example of the Son of God, Philippians 2:5-8, the apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 12:15, Timothy, Philippians 2:20, and numerous souls since those ancient times. Love thinks of others and seeks to serve. Have you ever had someone help you, and they didn't want anything in return? How did it make you feel?

LOVE IS NOT EASILY ANGERED

9. Love keeps no record of wrongs. 1 Corinthians 13:5.

The phrase, 'keeps no record of wrongs', in Greek, is 'logizetai', and it means to count, reckon, calculate. Here is the brother who is quick to point a finger at another in the body and blame them for some wrong. Christians are to be careful not to make quick judgments about their brethren.

We ought to think the very best of our brethren until proven guilty. Those brethren who have repented of sins committed are to be forgiven, rather than another keeping a ledger of others' sins.

Anger in and of itself isn't sinful but it's what you do with that anger, which causes you to sin, Ephesians 4:26-27. Some people are bubbling, just ready to explode, and their day is ruined if someone doesn't provide the opportunity for them to give a piece of their mind.

Genuine love does everything possible to avoid combat. If conflict for truth has to come, so be it; but a person shouldn't live in such a way that they can't wait for an excuse to kick off at someone.

Love doesn't have a short fuse; it doesn't walk about with a chip on its shoulder. Have you ever witnessed someone kicking off for apparently no real reason? How did it make you feel?

LOVE KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONGS

10. Love does not delight in evil. 1 Corinthians 13:6.

The word 'evil' in Greek is 'adikia', and it means injustice. Love doesn't delight in evil; the Christian will focus on that which brings him joy, the faith of my brethren, 2 John 4 / 3 John 4. One who truly loves will find no joy in another Christian falling from grace.

This doesn't mean that love ignores evil; that view would contradict numerous other passages of Scripture. There are times when evil must be exposed, rebuked, and disciplined.

The Greek word for ‘record’ is from ‘logizomai’, a commercial expression which suggests writing a transaction in the record so as not to forget it. Love does not keep score, as in, ‘three times this month they have neglected to speak to me.’

The one who says, ‘I must forgive you, but I will never forget what you did,’ has miserably failed the test of agape love. Love does not harbour bitterness nor does it plot revenge, [Hebrews 8:12](#). Have you ever heard someone raise an issue which happened years ago? How did it make you feel?

LOVE DOES NOT DELIGHT IN EVIL BUT REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH

11. Love rejoices with the truth [1 Corinthians 13:6](#).

The word ‘truth’ in Greek is ‘aletheia’, and it implies that truth brings true joy to the man and woman who loves his brethren and works to promote unity for the betterment of the whole body.

Since love always seeks the good of others, it can never rejoice when evil prevails. When someone falls, even an obnoxious person, we should never entertain secret thoughts of satisfaction. Rejoicing in moral wickedness conflicts with biblical love and doesn’t have humanity’s welfare at heart.

For example, those who rejoice in parades for ‘same-sex marriage,’ or who cheerfully celebrate the liberalisation of abortion laws, have utterly no perception of what real love is.

Divine love cannot be divorced from objective truth, [Psalm 1:1-2](#). Have you ever seen people celebrate something contrary to what the Bible teaches? How did it make you feel?

LOVE ALWAYS PROTECTS

12. Love always protects. [1 Corinthians 13:7](#).

The word ‘protect’, in Greek, is ‘stego’, and it means to cover closely, so as to keep water either out or in, to keep water out, to keep off rain from oneself. When a brother sins against me, my love will not permit me to let the world know of the matter, but to work the sin out with my brother and thereby contain the matter.

A brother who continues in his error and even teaches it, however, must be marked and avoided, [Romans 16:17-18](#). Love supports and uplifts those who are in need of protection. Jesus was constantly in trouble with His Jewish critics because of His encouragement of the downtrodden, [Luke 15:1-32](#).

Anyone who operates out of love will cover, i.e., be slow to expose the mistakes of another. Love ‘would far rather set about quietly mending things than publicly displaying and rebuking them.’ Unfortunately, some are quick to expose and rebuke, but so stubbornly resistant to forgiving.

There may come a time when someone needs to be challenged about what they are doing, [1 Corinthians 5:1-13](#) / [1 Timothy 5:20](#), but this shouldn’t be our first response. Christians should be eagerly waiting for an opportunity to expose people’s shortcomings. Have you ever seen people who are quick to expose but slow to forgive? How did it make you feel?

LOVE ALWAYS TRUSTS

13. Love always trusts. 1 Corinthians 13:7.

The word 'trust' in Greek is 'pisteuo', and it means until proven wrong, a loving brother gives one who is at fault the benefit of the doubt. This does not state that the loving brother is to be gullible nor foolish, but that we simply hear, and believe one unless two witnesses expose otherwise, 2 Corinthians 13:1. I am to always believe and hope the best for my brethren in the body of Christ.

This doesn't mean that love is gullible; we need to be careful about what is being taught to us, 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12. Paul is speaking about giving people the benefit of the doubt.

All too often, we come to the wrong conclusions about people because we haven't taken the time to listen to the facts. We should always trust our brethren until they give us a reason not to trust them.

When you hear a distasteful report concerning a fellow Christian, do you hesitate to believe it until the evidence is overwhelming? Have you ever heard people being accused of something, but you know the accusers don't have all the facts? How did it make you feel?

LOVE ALWAYS HOPES

14. Love always hopes. 1 Corinthians 13:7.

The word 'hope', in Greek, is 'elpizo', and it means to hope for, look for, expect. It is the desire and expectation of one who truly loves to think the best of a brother before we ascribe evil and sin to one.

Love is optimistic; it entertains the highest expectations. Sometimes we see someone struggling with their faith, and some may think, 'that person will never make it.' What we should be thinking is, 'I believe that with God's help and mine, they will make it!'

We should never give up hope, Jude 22-23. Have you ever helped someone who was struggling as a Christian and went on to become a stronger, faithful Christian? How did it make you feel?

LOVE ALWAYS PERSEVERES

15. Love always perseveres. 1 Corinthians 13:7.

The word 'persevere', in Greek, is 'hupomeno', and it means to stay behind, survive. The Christian who loves the souls of his brethren will 'endure.' Such a one will take the wrongs of others patiently while standing his or her ground in a discussion about a matter.

The attributes of love revealed here help us identify those who are causing the true schisms in the church. Those who are overzealous spiritual bullies who seek to cause all to conform to their individuality and personal convictions are guilty of schisms in the body.

The Corinthian brethren who formed factions in the church tried their hand at this, and Paul exposes them. Let truth and the unity of the church be the motivating factor that moves our zeal.

When challenges, trials and temptations come our way, love should continue to work in and through our lives. Agape love is hard; it's not easily discouraged. It may leave us feeling down or broken-hearted, but it keeps us pushing forward. True love doesn't give up on God, or on others, James 1:2-4. Have you ever had moments when you wanted to give up on God? How did it make you feel?

LOVE NEVER FAILS

16. Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:8.

The word 'fail', in Greek, is 'ekpipto', and it means to depart from, digress, or to fall off. There appears to be a play on words here. Love is sandwiched in between gifts.

Those who do not perform actions within the church that are motivated by love for brethren are identified as those who are 'nothing', i.e., good for nothing, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

While the man or woman who seeks to form divisions in the church, due to a lack of understanding of God's purpose for gifts, comes to nothingness, this is not the case with love. Divisions will have their doom and end, yet love is eternal.

The love of God is a care and concern for the spiritual well-being of His creation, 1 John 2:5. Whenever I keep God's commandments by loving my own soul and the soul of my brethren, 'love for God is truly made complete in them'.

The word 'perfected' is in the perfect tense, which indicates the present state of one based on past actions. I am now perfect, without the guilt and due punishment of sin because I previously confessed those sins in a spirit of humility unto God and asked for forgiveness, 1 John 1:9.

As long as I have this type of character, I will not 'fail', 1 Corinthians 13:8, depart or digress from the truth and come to nought. The ultimate failure in life is to depart from and digress from the truth. As long as the Christian exercises a disposition of genuine care and concern for brethren, our efforts will not come to nought!

The apostle concludes by telling us that agape love, 'never fails'. By saying this, Paul is saying that God's type of love will not fall or falter; it's constant and forever, Jeremiah 31:3.

Have you ever had moments when you wanted to give up on God? How did it make you feel? Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 again, this time replacing the word 'love' with 'your name'. How does it make you feel when you put your own name in the text?

CONCLUSION

When we read what love is, we can't help but see our own failings, but love as described in these passages should always challenge us to love right. After all, this love shows that we belong to Christ, John 13:34-35.

LOVE AND SPIRITUAL GIFTS CONTRASTED

"But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I

became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” 1 Corinthians 13:8-12

Now notice that the same three gifts mentioned here were mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The obvious conclusion is that these three gifts stand as a representation of gifts as a whole.

And as we will see in a moment, Paul is going to tell us that all the miraculous gifts will one day ‘be done away’ with, 1 Corinthians 13:8. And I say, ‘one day’ because the text implies it’s in the future because Paul uses the word, ‘will’, 1 Corinthians 13:8.

‘Prophecy’ is the gift of expounding Scripture, of speaking and preaching. The apostle Peter explains the process in 2 Peter 1:19-21. Both knowledge and prophecy have to do with divine revelation, the word of God, truth, or the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The phrase ‘they shall cease’ is one word in Greek, ‘katargethesontai’, which means to be abolished. In other words, at some point in the future, gifts given by the Holy Spirit to man will be abolished or cease to happen. The miraculous gift of prophecy will one day in the future cease to exist, 1 Corinthians 13:8.

Hodge, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The gift (of prophecy) shall cease to be necessary, and therefore shall not be continued.’

Notice that ‘tongues shall be ‘stilled’, 1 Corinthians 13:8, the word ‘stilled’ in Greek is pausontai. The Greek verb ‘pausontai’ is future tense as well. The word ‘cease’ means to bring to an end, make an end of. The miraculous gift of tongues will one day in the future cease to exist, 1 Corinthians 13:8.

Notice that ‘knowledge’ shall ‘pass away’, 1 Corinthians 13:8, this is the Greek word, ‘argethesetai’. Again, the Greek verb ‘argethesetai’ ‘katargethesontai’ is future tense. The miraculous gifts of Knowledge will one day in the future cease to exist, 1 Corinthians 13:8.

Wallace, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The miraculous endowments designated SPIRITUAL gifts have FAILED, have CEASED, have VANISHED AWAY and are therefore no longer in force. All such powers were temporary and provisional and cannot now be exercised.’

If the supernatural gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will cease, what about the other miraculous gifts? The three ‘gifts’ mentioned are but representative of the more complete list in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10. None of these supernatural gifts will remain after ‘that which is perfect’ arrives.

It is no coincidence that Paul used the three gifts of knowledge, prophecy, and tongues due to their direct relationship with the Gospel message and the coming to an end of gifts. Remember, we’re dealing with the will of God being miraculously revealed here.

The word ‘for’, 1 Corinthians 13:9, naturally brings this thought along as a representation of the present time as opposed to what shall take place in the future. Paul says, ‘For we know in part, and we prophesy in part,’ 1 Corinthians 13:9.

He’s talking about those miraculous gifts. Do not lose sight of the fact that Paul is explaining to the Corinthians the fact that gifts will one day, in the future, come to an end.

The word ‘know’, 1 Corinthians 13:9, in Greek is ‘ginosko’, and it means knowledge of a special kind and relatively high character. The word is used of the word of God in 1 Timothy 6:20.

The obvious conclusion is that some were given the gift of knowledge, whereas others had to gain knowledge of truth through actual study. If I only possess a part of something, I don’t possess the whole thing. He’s saying that the church only possessed bits and pieces of God’s will.

You get a little bit of God's will when someone prophesies, you get another little bit of God's will when someone speaks in tongues, and you get another little bit of God's will when someone has supernatural knowledge revealed to them by God.

Paul continues to add to divine revelation. As a new revelation was being proclaimed 'ek meros', that is 'in part', it was being confirmed by the signs that followed, [Mark 16:20](#) / [John 20:30-31](#) / [Hebrews 2:3-4](#).

Men and women were being edified, [1 Corinthians 14:12](#), and God was revealed as the one true deity, [Isaiah 46:9-10](#), all of which promoted unity in the body of Christ, [1 Corinthians 12:12-27](#).

We naturally conclude that there is a direct correlation between spiritual gifts and the process of divine revelation. The gifts confirmed the reality and validity of any new revelation.

The natural conclusion would thereby be that when all revelation was completed, gifts would come to an end; they would no longer be needed. When Revelation was made complete, there would be no more need for gifts.

And so, the natural question would be, when will prophecies, tongues, and knowledge, i.e., when will all the miraculous gifts be abolished or cease to exist? Paul tells us, doesn't he, 'when completeness comes', [1 Corinthians 13:10](#), or 'perfect' as most translations have it.

In other words, the 'in part', in Greek, that the word 'ek meros', [1 Corinthians 13:9](#), would end when the 'perfect' came. Paul proclaims to the Corinthian brethren the relationship between inspired knowledge and prophecy to the 'once for all' delivered Gospel, [Jude 3](#).

Piece by piece and bit by bit, the Gospel of Jesus Christ was being revealed by the aid of spiritual gifts. An example of this would be the full disclosure of the Gentiles' part in the kingdom of God, [Acts 10:13-16](#) / [Acts 10:34-35](#). The information in [1 Corinthians 14-16](#) illustrates this point.

PERFECT

And so, the next natural question would be, what is the perfect? [1 Corinthians 13:10](#). Does it mean perfect love? Does it refer to Jesus's final coming? Does it refer to heaven?

LOVE

Before we get into the three main views concerning what the word 'perfect' means, let me share with you a recent view I heard. Some people believe the word 'perfect' refers to love. This particular view holds that it does not refer so much to 'perfection' but to the 'totality' or 'maturity' of the Corinthian Christians in terms of agape love.

The context of [1 Corinthians 13](#) is the supremacy of love, suggesting that the 'perfect' refers to a state of maturity where the church operates in complete love, rendering childish spiritual gifts unnecessary.

We must bear in mind that, in context, Paul was not contrasting qualities. He is contrasting quantities, i.e., those things that were incomplete and partial, that is, the miraculous gifts, with that which would be total and complete.

How would love make miraculous gifts unnecessary? Since the text indicates that it was miraculous gifts that would be done away with when the 'perfect' came, if the 'perfect' is love, this would mean they didn't have full love, and the miraculous gifts would still be in effect today.

The problem with this interpretation is that it implies that the early church didn't have the capability to fully love God, each other or their enemies. The New Testament clearly teaches us to love completely not only God, but also each other and our enemies.

If the early church wasn't capable of loving fully, this would make no sense of everything Paul spoke about earlier concerning love, 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. It would also imply that Jesus's command to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbour as ourselves, Mark 12:30-31, couldn't be fulfilled until we have complete love.

It would also imply the early church couldn't obey the command of Jesus, when he said if we love him, obey his commands, John 14:15. It also implies that the early church couldn't obey the commands of Jesus to love one another, John 13:34-35.

Let's go ahead and look at the three main views concerning the word 'perfect'.

JESUS

Some people believe that the word 'perfect' refers to Jesus. It is quite clear that this phrase is referring to an inanimate object, not a person. The phrase 'that which is perfect is come' of 1 Corinthians 13:10 does not refer to Jesus Christ or His return.

The KJV says, 'when that which is perfect is come'. Jesus is never referred to as a 'that' or 'thing' in the Bible. The word 'perfect', in this form, 'teleion', is Neuter in gender, and would never be used to describe a mature person.

The fact that it is 'that which is perfect' and not 'he who is perfect' indicates that we are referring to a thing and not a person. If the Holy Spirit had intended us to understand this as a reference to Christ, it would have been easy for Him to have said, 'when He who is perfect', or even, 'when Christ comes again'.

HEAVEN

Some people believe that the word 'perfect' refers to heaven. The word 'perfect' isn't once used in the Bible, in reference to Heaven's state of perfection. This word, 'perfect', common though it is in the New Testament, is not once used with reference to Heaven's state of perfection.

1 Corinthians 13:10 says nothing about us going anywhere, but it does teach that something is coming to us. Something coming to us and us going somewhere are two completely different situations.

CANON

Some people believe the word 'perfect' refers to the completed Canon of Scriptures. Remember, 1 Corinthians 13:10 says nothing about us going anywhere, but it does teach that something is coming to us. The question is, what is coming to us?

The word ‘perfect’, in Greek, is the word ‘teleios’, and it means something which is complete. It has to do with ‘reaching maturity’, or ‘the attaining of a purpose or goal,’ Matthew 5:48 / Matthew 19:21 / 1 Corinthians 2:6 / 1 Corinthians 14:20 / Hebrews 5:14.

Paul wrote that there would come a day when the gift of prophecy would fail, the gift of tongues would cease, and the gift of knowledge would vanish away, 1 Corinthians 13:8.

Such gifts were to reveal and confirm the Word, Mark 16:19-20 / Hebrews 2:3-4. Once the Word was completely revealed and confirmed, the need for such gifts ceased, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 / 2 Peter 1:3 / Jude 3.

The church would move away from doctrinal immaturity and into doctrinal maturity. In other words, the completed revelation from God would be given, and this would bring about mature saints, people who fully grasped what God wanted them to know, Ephesians 4:11-14.

Therefore, the contrast is between something incomplete, in part, and therefore transient, 1 Corinthians 13:9, and something complete and abiding. Paul is making a contrast between something that is incomplete and something that is complete.

So, what is the perfect? Let’s allow the Bible to interpret itself. James speaks about the ‘perfect law of freedom’, James 1:23-25, which most commentators agree is the Word of God.

And so, the perfect is the completely revealed New Testament Scriptures. In other words, the complete Bible, which helps us to become Christ-like and mature, 1 Peter 2:2 / 2 Peter 3:18.

Houghton, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Because believers today possess complete revelation, they are able to understand what God’s Word teaches about themselves, their potential, their limitations, and the means that God has made available for them to obtain victory over sin in a clear and detailed manner that was not possible before the completion of the canon. The Scriptures equip a believer for every good work by being profitable for teaching, reproving, correcting, and training, 2 Timothy 3:16–17.’

When the church only possessed bits and pieces of God’s will as revealed through scattered miraculous gifts, the church couldn’t mature. It was still in its infancy; it was still a spiritual baby.

Paul had already told them that back in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2, and he will tell them again in 1 Corinthians 14:20. And so, because they weren’t mature or couldn’t mature as Christians, Paul says you guys are still like children.

That’s why he says, ‘When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child,’ 1 Corinthians 13:11. When God’s will for the New Testament era had been revealed, the church then had the means available to be a man and grow up.

That’s why Paul goes on to say, ‘When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me,’ 1 Corinthians 13:11.

Children need help in the early days of life so that they may grow up to be men and women. Children do not know many things and must be taught.

Likewise, the infant church needed divine guidance and help as it grew spiritually. Miracles gave the infant church the spiritual sustenance that confirmed truths and established faith in their minds.

Adulthood is compared to a time in the future when man would not need a guiding hand to teach them the difference between right and wrong, and so forth. As adults, the people of God would have the completed revelation at their disposal.

All that God intended for man to know was given, and they would be able to spiritually sustain themselves without the aid of gifts. Adults’ faith and conviction are formed through the completed revelation of God. Such individuals do not need a miracle to convince them of the truths that have already been delivered. Do you see how he contrasts being a ‘child’ with being a fully mature ‘man’?

When I go for a shower, the bathroom usually gets all steamed up, and sometimes, I go to have a shave, but I can't see all of my face; I can only see parts of my face, and it's really difficult to go ahead and have a shave. But for me to see my face clearly, I need to clear away the steam off the mirror, so that I can see my face clearly.

And that's what Paul uses as an illustration in 1 Corinthians 13:12. Remember, they didn't have mirrors like we have today; they would use highly polished brass to see their reflection. But even at that, they couldn't see themselves clearly like we can today, using the mirrors we have.

The word 'now' means present-day, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, meaning gifts and revelation, in part, 1 Corinthians 13:12. The word 'then' means a time in the future when all revelation had been revealed, meaning revelation, perfect or complete, 1 Corinthians 13:12.

The point is this: the existence of the miraculous gifts to acquire God's Word is compared to looking through a clouded mirror. Once the complete New Testament was available in written form, the miraculous gifts were no longer necessary.

Paul says, it's like standing face to face with someone, rather than looking through a clouded mirror. Paul uses the same language as James did, James 1:23-25. Note that 1 Corinthians 13:12 does not say, we will see 'God' face to face.

Paul says God's will isn't clear right 'now', but 'then' we will be able to see clearly 'then' everyone will be able to know the full will of God, 1 Corinthians 13:12. Paul says the same thing over in Ephesians 4:8.

Paul speaks about the gifts that were given in Ephesians 4:11-15. The gifts were given 'until' we all reached unity in 'THE faith' and have 'the knowledge'. Remember the word 'faith' in Ephesians 4:13, doesn't mean belief, it means the entire teaching and words we find within the Scriptures. The apostle Paul kept 'the faith', 2 Timothy 4:7.

Notice also in Ephesians 4:11-15, how he contrasts and uses the same words as he uses in 1 Corinthians 13:11, he uses words like 'mature', 'infants' and 'grow up'.

In other words, Paul knew that when we finally get the Bible, God's completed revelation to man, we won't fall for every kind of doctrinal teaching that comes along. Why?

Because we can check it out for ourselves, we can measure what's been taught with the Bible itself. Paul's speaking about the complete revelation of God, which we call the Bible, so now we can all grow and mature as we read and study the Bible.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The comparison which Paul at once made contrasted the childhood age of the church with the church's maturity, not the present dispensation with the ultimate condition of the saints in heaven; and this demands that the expression 'that which is perfect' must be associated, not with conditions in heaven, but with the maturity of the church; and that condition is met only by referring the words to God's completed revelation, the Bible.'

Now, did that time come when God's word was complete? According to Jude, it did. 'The faith', the complete Bible, was entrusted or delivered once for all, Jude 3.

'Once for all' means it's done, there will be no more revelations from God. Someone once explained these miraculous gifts to me like this, and I hope this helps your understanding of the subject.

The next time you are walking somewhere, and you see a new superstructure being built, and you see that new building starting off with its foundation, and as it starts to grow, the builders usually erect temporary scaffolding around it, to keep it steady and so that they can do more work on it.

These miraculous gifts in the first-century church were like scaffolding, which was temporally erected while the superstructure was being built. But what do you do with the scaffolding when the building work is finished? You

remove it and take it away because its job is done, it's served its purpose. Once the structure is complete, the scaffolding is removed and discarded.

Lipscomb, in his commentary, says the following.

'These gifts were to continue in the church to guide and instruct it until the completed will of God was made known. They were to serve a temporary purpose; then, when their office was fulfilled, they were to pass away and give place to the revealed will of God.'

The miraculous gifts were only temporary; they were to help build up the church until the Bible was readily available. The miraculous gifts have ceased, all of them; we don't need them anymore because we have everything we need to know about God in His word.

The question Christians need to ask themselves is simply this: Is the Bible enough? And if you answer yes, but you still believe we need miraculous gifts of some kind, then you've just contradicted yourself with the Scriptures.

The Bible either thoroughly equips us, or it doesn't! 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The Bible either gives us everything we need to live our lives right for God and gives us all the knowledge of God we will ever need, or it doesn't! 2 Peter 1:3. The question the Christian world needs to ask itself is this: how long will they continue to be deceived or deceive themselves? Now I know the word deceive sounds a bit harsh, but it's not my word; it's the word Paul uses, 2 Timothy 3:12-13. The gifts have ceased.

'And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.' 1 Corinthians 13:13

The word 'remain' helps us identify the 'but now' statement, but the very fact that Paul uses the word 'remain' here implies that the miraculous gifts were never to stay. And though spiritual gifts will pass away, 'faith, hope and love' will remain.

Faith is produced by the word of God, as Romans 10:17 tells us. As divine revelation is revealed through His word, faith continues to be produced. And a consequence of this faith is 'hope.' Christians are confident, through divine revelation, that a heavenly home awaits the faithful, as 1 John 2:25 and 1 John 4:13 tell us.

But why is love greater than faith and hope? The word 'greatest' indicates the level of importance in relation to faith and hope. The reason that love is greater than faith and hope is that love is an act of the reality of our faith and hope. Love acts for the benefit of others, love looks at both the physical and spiritual needs of others and acts upon those needs.

A street preacher once asked me if I spoke in tongues. I replied, It depends on which language you're speaking about, he said, It's an unknown language. I said if that is the criterion, then no, I don't speak an unknown language.

He went on to tell me that I wasn't a Christian, and the proof that a person is a Christian is the ability to speak in tongues, which is a complete contradiction of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:29-30.

Jesus didn't say, 'they will know you are His disciples because you speak in tongues or have some other miraculous gift'. He said everyone will know we are Christians by our love, not only for Him and each other, but also for those who aren't believers, John 13:34-35.

Coffman, in his commentary, asks, Why is love the greatest thing? and answers as follows.

'Love is the fulfilment of the law, which was never true of faith, Romans 13:10. Love outranks faith in the power to motivate people. Love includes obedience, John 14:15, which is not true of faith or hope. Love is to be the motivating factor in every Christian's life.'

SUMMARY

Gifts without love were truly worthless. When an action has a specified purpose, and that purpose is not met, what good is the action? Even so, gifts exercised without the salvation, ‘profit’ of the souls of other people as its motivation were truly useless.

There would come a day, Paul explains, when gifts would be done away with; however, love will always remain. Gifts were never intended to continue throughout time. Love, however, lasts forever.

The Corinthians needed to learn their true purpose as God’s people and put away their childish attitudes toward the gifts. When the completed revelation of God had come, gifts would forever be gone, 1 Corinthians 13:9-10. Where would this leave the Corinthians? A proper view of the gifts would leave them in a state of continuation.

Gifts would end, and Christians would continue to teach out of the same motivation and love for the souls of men, to profit all. If, however, an individual only performs gifts for selfish purposes, when the gift is gone, where would that leave this person? Truly, love is to be the motivating factor in every Christian’s life.

All Christians today ought to take note that the revelation of God is now complete, Hebrews 1:1-2 / 2 Timothy 3:16-17 / Jude 3 / Revelation 22:18-19. There are absolutely no reasons for the Holy Spirit to distribute gifts of prophecy, knowledge, tongues and so forth.

Those who claim to have gifts today have been deceived and deceiving themselves, 2 Timothy 3:13, and the truth is not in them, 1 John 2:4. While there is no doubt God continues to work in men’s lives through providence, there is equally no doubt that no man is being moved by the Holy Spirit to perform miracles.

CHAPTER 14

INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul encourages the Corinthian brethren to open their eyes to the damage they were causing within the local church. Some brethren were placing greater emphasis on the gift of speaking in tongues, and many were elevating the tongue speaker above others.

The very gifts that they used to divide themselves over would one day cease to exist, 1 Corinthians 13:8-12. The Corinthians needed to re-examine their spiritual priorities.

Now was the time to recalibrate their direction and service to the Lord. Paul instructs the Corinthians to do all things through love, which in turn will bring about the greatest effects of the gifts they possess.

INTELLIGIBILITY IN WORSHIP

“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in

tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.” 1 Corinthians 14:1-5

1 Corinthians 13 exposed a flaw in the Corinthians who exercised their Holy Spirit-given gifts without love, ‘care and concern for others’. Those who used their gifts for reasons other than to profit all were doing so without God’s seal of approval, 1 Corinthians 12:7.

Secondly, they needed to understand that gifts would cease to exist when the completed revelation of God was made known. This being the case, they were to conduct themselves presently in a spirit of love toward others. Gifts would one day end, yet love abides eternally, 1 Corinthians 13:8 / 1 Corinthians 13:13.

Paul now admonishes the Corinthian brethren to pursue love, 1 Corinthians 14:1; however, this pursuit is not to be to the exclusion of gifts. Consider the Bible in Basic English’s wording of 1 Corinthians 14:1, ‘Go after love; still desiring to have the things which the Spirit gives, but most of all that you may have the prophet’s power.’

While love is the ‘greatest’ due to its eternal nature, Paul nonetheless continues to encourage the Corinthians to pursue gifts due to the fact that revelation had not yet been finished or completed. Gifts served their purpose as stated in 1 Corinthians 13.

Though Paul commands that the Corinthians ‘desire earnestly spiritual gifts,’ 1 Corinthians 14:1, we understand that this is not a command for New Testament Christians today due to the completion of divine revelation. The Corinthians lived in the ‘now’, and we live in the ‘then’, days of perfect or completed revelation, 1 Corinthians 13:12. Paul introduces the superiority of prophecy by saying that they should desire ‘prophecy,’ 1 Corinthians 14:1. The word ‘prophecy’ is defined as ‘the gift of interpreting the will of the gods, and in the New Testament, the gift of expounding scripture, of speaking and preaching’. The apostle Peter defines prophecy as men being miraculously ‘moved’ by God to speak divine revelation, 2 Peter 1:19-21.

1 Corinthians 14:2 gives the reason for such a desire. Again, the word ‘tongue’, in Greek, is ‘glossa’ and is defined as ‘a tongue, language’. One who had the gift of speaking another language that others did not understand without an interpreter was communing only with God, 1 Corinthians 14:2.

To speak in tongues with no interpreter would be to lack love and display a spirit of selfishness, arrogance, and desire to be seen by men as great, glory of men.

It comes to be somewhat fascinating to note that apparently, these Corinthians were able to perform these Holy Spirit-given gifts even when done with a wrong attitude. The gift, in other words, did not depend upon their faith.

Many today claim that if you cannot speak in tongues or perform miracles, then your faith must be little; however, we see here that these brethren performed gifts in ways that God did not approve of. Apparently, once one had the gift, they were at liberty to use the gift as they judged fit. Many Corinthians’ judgment of their gifts was wrong.

Paul says, ‘they utter mysteries by the Spirit,’ 1 Corinthians 14:2. As one is guided by the Holy Spirit to perform the gift of tongues, 1 Corinthians 12:11, he speaks ‘mysteries.’ To speak of a ‘mystery’, in Greek, it’s the word ‘musterion’, and it is a mystery or secret doctrine, a divine secret, something above human intelligence.

The doctrines taught by the unknown tongue were without benefit to the hearer, and thereby was a message of mystery or divine secret. God never intended for some to have truth and others not to have it, as though there were ‘divine secrets’ that only some could have. The Gospel is indeed for all, as the hymn says.

Note the word ‘but’, 1 Corinthians 14:3, places prophecy in contrast to speaking in tongues that no one understands. Paul had said that the Corinthians ought to ‘desire earnestly the greater gifts,’ 1 Corinthians 12:31.

The desired greater gift is now revealed to be that of prophecy. Paul now explains why prophecy is a greater gift than speaking in tongues. Those who prophecy do three things that benefit or profit all, 1 Corinthians 12:7.

1. Those who prophecy speak ‘strength’ unto men, 1 Corinthians 14:3.

The Greek word for strengthening is ‘oikodome’, and it means a building or structure. When a man or woman prophesied, they promoted spiritual growth and advancement of others, an act of love.

2. The prophet brought ‘encouragement’ to his hearers, 1 Corinthians 14:3.

The Greek word for encouraging is ‘paraklesis’, which is defined as a calling to one’s aid, summons, and encouragement. Consider the use of ‘paraklesis’ in Romans 15:4 / 2 Corinthians 7:4 / 2 Thessalonians 2:16 etc. Interestingly, the apostle John used the Greek word ‘parakletos’, being transliterated ‘Advocate’, to describe the merciful work of Jesus in the forgiveness of our sins, 1 John 2:1.

When a prophet spoke divine revelation, these words helped, aided, encouraged, and instructed people. Again, such an act is a display of love because it illustrates care and concern for people’s spiritual well-being.

3. The prophet’s words were ‘comfort,’ 1 Corinthians 14:3.

The Greek word for comfort is ‘paramuthia’, which means any address, whether made for the purpose of persuading, or of arousing and stimulating, or calming and consoling, comfort, 1 Corinthians 14:3. Comfort is a word that soothes a heavy burden or pain.

Prophecy did this for people, and thereby it was an act of love. The content of all Gospel preaching today must be done so that brethren are strengthened, encouraged, and comforted.

Paul is building a case for the superiority of prophecy. Prophecy provides strength, encouragement, and comfort, not only to the individual performing it but to the church, 1 Corinthians 14:4.

The Corinthians were to learn that gifts were designed for the profit of all in the church, 1 Corinthians 12:7. Those with gifts were to promote unity and personal growth for the whole body.

When they came to this understanding, then they would understand why the gift of prophecy was superior to the tongue speaker who had no interpreter. While the appearance of speaking in tongues must have been impressive, it actually served little to no purpose as far as the entire body was concerned.

1 Corinthians 14:5 indicates the overall interest of the Corinthians in speaking in tongues. Paul’s statement helps us understand that the gift of speaking tongues was not to be dismissed; however, it needed to be placed in a proper perspective within the minds of the Corinthian Christians.

Prophecy is a greater gift because the church, as a whole, is edified, whereas a tongue without an interpreter benefits no one except one who understands the language being spoken, 1 Corinthians 14:5 / 1 Corinthians 12:31 / 1 Corinthians 14:1. The objective of tongues was twofold.

1. It would no doubt create a sense of awe when the one who heard a man speak in a language he had no former training in.

2. The people who actually spoke the language of the miraculous tongue would be benefited, edified, exhorted, and consoled, yet no one else.

The tongues without interpreters benefited only those who understood the language spoken. When tongue-speaking occurred with interpretation, it was on par with prophecy. A parallel today would be like a man standing before an English-speaking congregation and teaching a class using French.

While it may sound neat to hear another language, the English-speaking brethren would not be edified, exhorted, and consoled. What purpose then would the French-speaking brother serve?

“Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the

air. Undoubtedly, there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me. So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church". 1 Corinthians 14:6-12

‘Profit’ to the entire body of Christ continues to be the overall objective of gifts, 1 Corinthians 12:7. Note that the profit one receives from gifts is understanding of spiritual matters brought about by tongues, knowledge, prophecy, and teaching, all of which equal ‘revelation,’ 1 Corinthians 14:6.

Gifts as a whole are directly associated with revelation. This is important to understand because Paul said that these gifts would one day in the future be done away with, 1 Corinthians 13:8-12.

Complete revelation is now revealed, and thereby there is no need for spiritual gifts such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, performing various miracles and so forth. Those today who claim to have the power of the Holy Spirit to do these miraculous gifts are lying.

Paul reasons with the Corinthians, if the apostle Paul came and spoke to you Corinthians in a language that no one understood and no interpreter was present, where would be the edification, exhortation and consolation? 1 Corinthians 14:6.

Furthermore, where would be the authentication of the deity of God and His word if no one understands what you are saying? No ‘profit’ occurs unless that which is spoken is understandable! This illustrates a fact that the word of God is designed to be understood.

1 Corinthians 14:7-8 appears to be a commentary on 1 Corinthians 13:1. Without a ‘distinction in the sounds’, the instrument will only give off incomprehensible sounds. The ear of an army is trained to react to a certain blast of the trumpet; however, if the trumpet sounds in unfamiliar tunes, ‘Who shall prepare himself for war?’

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If the bugler blows a confused tune, the army will not know whether to attack or retreat. The harp and the flute, as well as the bugle, were commonplace in the Greco-Roman world.’

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If such an illustration as this has any meaning, it has to be that uninterpreted tongues are as noisy, disagreeable, useless, cacophonous and worthless as a kitten on the keys of a piano. Paul, of course, made the comparison with instruments known in his day.’

Like an unfamiliar sound of an instrument, the tongue speaker who speaks an unfamiliar language. No one will understand, and no one can possibly respond. Such efforts are likened to throwing words into the air and letting them drift away, 1 Corinthians 14:9. No one can grasp these words, and thereby they benefit no one.

The word ‘languages’ 1 Corinthians 14:10, or ‘voices’, KJV, in Greek is the word ‘phone’, and it means a sound, tone, properly the sound of the voice, mostly of men, a kind of language, dialect.

The word dialect and the articulate sounds of the voice fit well here. Throughout the world, there are various dialects of a language that benefit those who comprehend and speak that language.

Each language is significant in its respective society. If, however, one comes from another part of the world speaking a different dialect than I am familiar with, it shall profit me nothing.

The person would sound like a ‘foreigner’ to me and me to him, 1 Corinthians 14:11. The KJV uses the word ‘barbarian’, in Greek, it’s the word ‘barbaros’, and is defined as not Greek, foreign, originally all that were not Greeks, especially the Medes and Persians, so the Hebrews called the rest of mankind Gentiles.

Again, if I attempt to preach the Gospel in English to a French-only speaking man, he will gain absolutely no insight or understanding of the word of God through my English.

The issues are becoming more and more clear. The Corinthians were clearly ‘eager for spiritual gifts,’ 1 Corinthians 14:12. Paul was not trying to kill this eagerness but rather redirect the Corinthians’ objective with gifts. The problem existed in their approach and use of the gifts.

Paul states clearly the objective of these gifts by saying, ‘excel in those that build up the church,’ 1 Corinthians 14:12. Again, this is a reiteration of the 1 Corinthians 12:7 statement.

Here, we find love being the motivating factor for all. A love for man’s souls is to be our motivation to preach and teach. The one with the gift of tongues should stop and ask themselves, ‘Am I performing these tongues to spiritually edify others or to look great in the eyes of men?’

“For this reason, the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding. Otherwise, when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an inquirer, say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying? You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified.” 1 Corinthians 14:13-17

Apparently, the tongue speaker could not always interpret what he was saying and depended upon another to do that work, 1 Corinthians 14:13 / 1 Corinthians 12:10.

Prayer was to be conducted by the tongue speaker so that he may be able to interpret for the sake of edification of others. It is inferred that the prayer of a tongue speaker is not understood by the tongue speaker himself and no one else in such a case, 1 Corinthians 14:15.

In such a case, the tongue speaker is praying with his ‘spirit’, purpose dictated by an understanding of truth, 1 Corinthians 14:14 / 1 Corinthians 5:4 / 1 Corinthians 6:17 / 1 John 4:1 / 1 John 4:5. The inverse of this would be that ‘if I pray in a tongue with understanding, my spirit prays and my understanding is fruitful.’

One’s purpose or character, that is, one’s spirit, is not directly related to one’s understanding of truth. This verse simply proves that one may go through the motions of religious activities without understanding what he is doing, and Paul calls the activity ‘unfruitful,’ 1 Corinthians 14:14.

No matter how sincere the person praying with no understanding is, his efforts remain unfruitful. Likewise, no matter how sincere the false teacher is, if his doctrine is erroneous, he remains unfruitful.

Paul asks, ‘What shall I do?’ 1 Corinthians 14:15. In Greek, that is ‘ti oun estin’, and he tells them rather than praying only in spirit, he should ‘pray with the spirit and with the understanding.’

This verse explains a fact, and that is my understanding of truth should be in line with my purpose and character. Understanding and purpose are thereby connected now by the one who walks in truth and is motivated by love.

Lipscomb, in his commentary, says the following concerning 1 Corinthians 14:15.

‘Neither the KJV nor the English Revised Version (1885) is correct here. The thought evidently is, ‘I will sing as the Spirit directs or inspires, and I will sing in a language that those who hear can understand.’ The following verse shows clearly that Paul’s meaning is: ‘I will pray and sing by the inspiration of the Spirit, and in a language that they will understand to their profit.’

Singing is used here as well, 1 Corinthians 14:15. Singing is to be done ‘with the spirit’ as well as ‘with understanding.’ What purpose would singing serve if I have no idea as to the meaning of my songs of praise to God? Note that this singing took place ‘in the church’, 1 Corinthians 14:19 / 1 Corinthians 14:23 / 1 Corinthians 14:26. Singing took place when the saints assembled themselves together, i.e., on Sunday.

Not only will this foreign tongue not benefit self, but anyone else hearing the praying who is ‘unlearned’ in the tongue will not benefit. To say ‘amen’, ‘amen’ is to say, verily, of a truth, so be it, certainty, 1 Corinthians 14:16. Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It was customary from the earliest times for Christians to say Amen to the public prayers and thanksgivings of the church.’

How can the one who does not understand the language, that is, the ‘unlearned’, say the words are ‘so be it,’ ‘of a truth’ or have ‘certainty’ of the truth thereof? 1 Corinthians 14:16. Again, where is the edification? 1 Corinthians 14:17.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Whenever we lead in public prayer, we should do it so the other people praying can join us and affirm our words, 1 Chronicles 16:36 / Nehemiah 5:13 / Nehemiah 8:6 / Psalms 106:48. It is clear in 1 Corinthians 14:16 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 can join in.’

Once again, this indicates a truth regarding our prayers: they should be spoken and understood in truth. We do not just utter words of no meaning or confusion, and if it were so, how could anyone say ‘amen’? Our worship of God and our preaching must be done so that all may understand and be edified, exhorted, and consoled.

“I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.” 1 Corinthians 13:18-19

Paul spoke with tongues, too. However, when ‘in the church’, a phrase that indicates the whole of the brethren assembled, 1 Corinthians 14:19-19 / 1 Corinthians 14:23, Paul desired to speak words of understanding for the purpose of instructing others.

Notice in these past few verses, Paul speaks of events occurring, ‘in the church.’ There was praying, singing, and preaching taking place ‘in the church.’ The thrust of our worship services to the Lord revolves around spiritual growth and understanding.

Here is the real issue of gifts, strengthening, encouraging and comfort, 1 Corinthians 14:3, could not occur unless the instructions were given in an understandable language.

Here we see a part of the work of the church revealed. We assemble to worship God and to learn, i.e., strengthen, encourage, and comfort one another. Truth can be understood alike; elsewhere would be the instruction?

“Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil, be infants, but in your thinking be adults. In the Law, it is written: “With other tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.” Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers. So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!” 1 Corinthians 14:20-25

The context of Paul’s address to the brethren here is that Christians are commanded to ‘not be children in mind,’ 1 Corinthians 14:20. The word ‘child’ in Greek is ‘paidion’, and it means a little or young child.

To be a ‘child in mind’ is to ‘think like a child,’ 1 Corinthians 13:11. Solomon said, ‘Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him,’ Proverbs 22:15,

Paul was ready to drive this foolishness from the Corinthian brethren with a rod, 1 Corinthians 4:21. The rod would be the word of God used in a way that would either drive the foolishness out of the Corinthian brethren or drive the foolish away.

The obvious allusion is to the Corinthians' desire to speak in tongues for selfish benefits is to be 'childlike in mind.' If a man spoke a tongue with no interpreter for the sake of being viewed as holier than others, he was indeed being 'a child in mind.' When grown adults exercise the mind of a child, it is identified as 'evil.'

The word 'evil' in Greek is the word 'kakia', and it means badness in quality, moral badness, wickedness, vice. The Corinthians' childlike behaviour with the gift of tongues placed them in a classification known as defective, ill repute and vice, an ill character or heart, corrupt habits.

The evil of the Corinthians was in the fact that some performed their gifts for show rather than to instruct other Christians. They had a heart problem. The Corinthians' lack of understanding, regarding the purpose of spiritual gifts, led them to have a character of 'evil.'

Likewise, man's lack of understanding today leads to many character flaws. If character flaws exist, it is certainly due to spiritual immaturity. With this verse, then, we see that one who would say that 'one who continues to teach false doctrine cannot be labelled a 'false teacher', 2 Peter 2:1, unless he has a character flaw,' has really got his facts backwards.

One who continues to preach false doctrines, though the truth has been revealed to him, has exposed his heart to all who know him. He has rejected truth and displayed the 'mind of a child' which is clearly identified in adults as 'evil.'

It was not the character flaw that revealed the Corinthians' hearts of evil; it was their practices! Likewise, it is not the character of one that reveals his false doctrine; it is his doctrine! When one teaches false doctrine, this exposes his true character. The one who would protect such a one is just as guilty as the false teacher, 2 John 9-11.

Though the Corinthian brethren had been Christians now for five years, they had not grown spiritually, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. Paul admonishes them to obtain, by study and meditation, a mind that is mature.

1 Corinthians 14:21, Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:11, indicating that the writings of the Major Prophets were termed 'law,' Luke 16:16. Clearly, the 'law' is the entire Old Testament, Luke 16:16 / John 10:34 / John 15:25 / Romans 3:19-20.

The prophet Isaiah had pronounced the end from the beginning regarding the coming of the Assyrians in Isaiah 28, and therefore proved that the word was from God, Isaiah 46:9-11. When these signs, such as tongues, were performed, the one witnessing them would have faith produced, Mark 16:20.

When other signs, such as prophecy, were performed, it was not the unbelieving that benefited, but the believing Christians, 1 Corinthians 14:22. Christians who heard words of prophecy were strengthened, encouraged and comforted, 1 Corinthians 14:3.

Paul examines a worship service, i.e., 'the whole church be assembled together,' 1 Corinthians 14:23. During these worship services, men would proclaim the word of God through tongue speaking or prophecy. The inference of this verse is that the tongue speaker has no interpreter.

An unbelieving visitor who comes to the assembly not knowing the language will get absolutely nothing out of the study. It would be like inviting an English-only speaking man to a French-speaking congregation. What will he get out of it? Will he be persuaded to be converted? 1 Corinthians 14:12-25. Here is a picture of the 'whole church being assembled', the local church and brethren are speaking in a tongue that no one understands.

1. There is no strengthening, encouraging or comforting occurring.

2. Paul said that both the unlearned, one who has no former training in the language and the 'unbelieving', one who is not a Christian, will consider the assembly to be filled with madmen, 1 Corinthians 14:23.

Please note that when the ‘whole church was assembled together’, there were ‘unbelieving’, non-Christian people, who were permitted and encouraged to be there too. Christians today ought to invite the unbelieving to our assembly so that they may learn the Gospel.

The word ‘convicted’ 1 Corinthians 14:24, in Greek, is the word ‘elegcho’, and it means to be convicted, shamed. The very words of truth spoken in a clear understanding manner will convict, or judge, the sinner and expose ‘the secrets of his heart’, 1 Corinthians 14:25.

Those secret, sinful practices will be exposed as sinful, and he will do one of two things. Such a one will either ‘fall down on his face’ in shame and repentance or continue in sin, 1 Corinthians 14:25.

The point is that one who does not understand a word that is being said has no way of even choosing between right and wrong. Likewise, if God’s people cannot understand truth alike today, then where is the shaming for sinful practices? One could simply say, ‘That’s your interpretation.’

An interesting point of truth is revealed here. When one preaches the Gospel to the lost, we are to expose their sin and help them see their need for forgiveness, Acts 2:37-19.

This is what the Mosaic Law did for those Old Testament worthies who waited upon the coming of the Messiah, Galatians 3:19-29. Another interesting fact is that we ought to note that we are to be encouraged to invite the unbelievers to our assembly.

GOD IS NOT THE AUTHOR OF CONFUSION

“What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.” 1 Corinthians 14:26-28

The ‘coming together’ under consideration is the ‘whole church assembly’, 1 Corinthians 14:23. 1 Corinthians 14:26 gives us a picture of the worship service in the early church.

Apparently, individual Christians delivered inspired songs to the congregation, and there was singing in general in the congregation, 1 Corinthians 14:15 / Ephesians 5:19 / Colossians 3:16.

The word ‘psalm’, in Greek, is ‘psalmos’, and it means a twitching or twanging with the fingers of a bow. Mostly of musical strings, the sound of the harp. This word is found in 1 Corinthians 14:26, in relation to the first day of the week worship service.

Interestingly, the Greek Septuagint translates the Hebrew word ‘mizmor’ to the Greek ‘psalmos’ and is the title for the Book of Psalms, meaning either ‘song’ or ‘instrumental music.’ Apparently, singing songs was a part of the first-century church’s worship.

Note that the Greek word ‘psalmos’ is a noun. A noun is a person, place, or thing. The ‘thing’ under consideration then is a song, whether that song is sung with an instrument or with the voice alone matters not, as far as the Greek word is concerned.

If the Greek word were a verb, then the action of playing an instrument or singing a song would be under consideration. Since the noun is under consideration, the subject is the song as opposed to the action of singing.

We have no inspired singers today as we have no inspired prophets today. Our instructions are to ‘sing and make melody with your hearts to the Lord’, Ephesians 5:19, and to preach from study, 2 Timothy 2:15. We are plucking the strings of our hearts as we sing.

Whatever gift was exercised, whether a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation of the tongue, the motivation for these gifts was that all be edified, enhanced knowledge of God through the effort, 1 Corinthians 14:26. There would be no benefit to any if no one understands what is said or sung.

The big picture here is the assembly of the saints. The assembly is where strengthening, encouraging, and comfort would occur among members of the one body, 1 Corinthians 14:3.

Secondly, the assembly would be where lost sinners could hear the power of the Gospel and be made to feel the shame of their sin and consequently be baptised for the remission of sins. Preaching today must point up sin.

Since there was a multitude of gifts that may be performed in any one assembly, Paul limits tongue speaking to two or three, ‘and that in turn,’ 1 Corinthians 14:27.

The phrase, ‘in turn’, in Greek is ‘meros’, and it means one’s turn, his turn of duty as a messenger, in turn, by turns. One by one, the two or three tongue speakers were to speak in the assembly and only if there was an interpreter present, 1 Corinthians 14:27.

If there were no interpreters, ‘the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God,’ 1 Corinthians 14:28. The word ‘keep silence’, in Greek, is ‘sigato’, and it means to be silent or still, to keep silence. Without an interpreter, the tongue speaker would only cause confusion. Since the object of the gifts is the edification of the whole assembly, 1 Corinthians 12:7 / 1 Corinthians 14:12, the tongue speaker is to remain silent in the assembly if there is no interpreter.

“Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.” 1 Corinthians 14:29-33

As the tongue speakers took turns, so the prophets were to take turns, and at most three would speak. The audience was to ‘weigh carefully’, that is ‘diakrino’ in Greek, which means to separate one from another, to settle, decide. The congregation was to listen to the teachings and test the validity of the message.

That which they used as the testing stone was the other divine revelation that had been delivered up to this point. Christians today ought to give the same test to speakers in the assembly, Acts 17:11 / 1 Corinthians 12:3 / 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 / 1 John 3:10 / 1 John 4:1 / 1 John 4:6.

Again, a picture is given of their assembly, 1 Corinthians 14:30. The congregation sat down while the teacher stood and taught. While one prophet taught, another may receive a revelation at the same time.

Paul instructs the one speaking to give way to the prophet who has received a new revelation, 1 Corinthians 14:30.

Again, each was to take their turn, rather than everyone singing, speaking in tongues, and prophesying all at the same time.

The purpose of the order was that ‘all may be instructed and encouraged,’ 1 Corinthians 14:31. The assembly was not only a praise session but a learning session, John 6:44.

A picture of the early church worship would have been a stark contrast to what we now experience. When we worship God on Sunday, there remains singing and teaching, yet the gifts are no longer a part of the worship.

1 Corinthians 14:32 is interesting; it says that the prophet was in control of the revelation that came over them.

Therefore, if a man were to go out of control, not speaking in turn, all would identify him as a false teacher.

This is why Paul says, ‘God is not the author of confusion,’ 1 Corinthians 14:33. Those charismatic non-denominational churches that have men explode in uncontrolled tongues or prophecy are faking it, and 1 Corinthians 14:32-33 is the proof.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets means that any true prophet could control his speaking; there was not any such thing as an irresistible compulsion for any TRUE prophet to speak. Rules like these carry the strong implication that some at Corinth had claimed otherwise.’

“Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.” 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Evidently, some of the women were speaking up in the assembly in the Corinthian churches, and this was another source of confusion. We have already noted that some women were given the gifts of prophecy, 1 Corinthians 11:5. Their only limitations to speaking to this point have been in relation to the veils of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. The prophetess was permitted to speak words of divine revelation apart from the ‘whole church being assembled together’, 1 Corinthians 14:23.

Here we see a picture of people singing solos, speaking tongues, prophesying, and women speaking up and preaching all at the same time. Again, this was an ultraliberal church, 1 Corinthians 11:21.

Paul admonishes the women to ‘keep silent in the churches’, 1 Corinthians 14:34, in the same context that he told the tongue speaker, 1 Corinthians 14:28, and prophet, 1 Corinthians 14:30.

Their silence was in relation to teaching out of turn for order’s sake. The women, however, had zero time for preaching, strengthening, encouraging and comforting, 1 Corinthians 14:3, the assembly of saints and thus Paul commands total silence in this area.

The word ‘silence’ in Greek is ‘sigato’, and it means to be silent or still, to keep silent, hush. The woman was therefore forbidden to address the assembly and was to remain in ‘must be in submission, as the law says,’ 1 Corinthians 14:34. The word ‘subjection’, in Greek, is ‘hupotasso’, and it means to place or arrange under, to post under, to subject, to be obedient.

The Law proves this statement, Genesis 2:18, especially Genesis 3:16, ‘he (the husband) will rule over you’. Paul makes the same argument in 1 Timothy 2:11-14. This is not a subjection of wives to husbands; this is a subjection of women to men in general when it comes to the assembly of the whole church.

McGarvey, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The gift of prophecy no longer exists; but, by the law of analogy, those women who have a marked ability, either for exhortation or instruction, are permitted to speak in the churches. The law is permanent, but the application of it may vary. If man universally gives woman permission to speak, she is free from the law in this respect.’

Note that 1 Corinthians 14:35 only addresses those women who are married; they should go home and ask their husbands if they have questions. The text doesn’t address those who are single or widowed.

Presumably, unmarried women would ask their fathers or some other man in the church after the service. The words, ‘women should ask their husbands’, have always intrigued me, not because of what Paul says but because of what some people believe they think Paul says.

If Paul is speaking about a Bible study situation, as some suggest, what happens if there’s a woman present who isn’t married? How is she supposed to learn anything if she has no husband to ask? The women commanded to refrain from asking questions were women with husbands capable of answering questions.

Notice also that Paul doesn't say anything about whether the teacher asks a question, even in a worship situation, a woman is allowed to answer a question, or whether she has to remain silent. Is this 'unscriptural' too!

Some have difficulties harmonising 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Corinthians 14. But it's simple, really, the woman of 1 Corinthians 11 was prophesying and praying without a veil in public, not the 'whole church assembly.' The woman of 1 Corinthians 14 was prophesying and praying in the assembly with or without the veil, and Paul termed it unacceptable.

Again, there are some who tell us that we are in sin due to our women teaching a Bible study to children or other women. What these people fail to understand is that women who teach a Bible study of unbaptized children or other women are not addressing the assembly of the whole church.

No woman may address the whole assembly, that is, Sunday, the day we celebrate the Lord's Supper together, without violating God's direct command here. When the whole church, in any given location, is assembled together for worship, women are not to speak out.

The woman may not ask a question in the worship assembly, the woman may not teach a man, the woman is not to say anything other than blending her voice with the saints in song to fulfil the command of all to sing, Ephesians 5:19 / Colossians 3:16, and say the amen.

Paul has under consideration here, 'the assembly of the whole church' or 'in the church.' Under such an assembly, the woman is not to speak a word. Often the question comes up, 'May a woman speak in a Bible study with other men present?' Again, the issue of 1 Corinthians 14 is a whole church assembly.

On the other hand, if the whole assembly has not come together for worship, that is, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, she may speak while taking into consideration her divinely appointed position of submission to the man, 1 Corinthians 11:2-8, and 1 Timothy 2:11-14.

The assembly of the whole church has been defined as the place of the first day of the week worship that includes the five 'acts' of worship. Another assembly of the whole church often takes place during the midweek, i.e., Wednesday, by custom of many churches.

However, we must keep this in its context; it's only during our coming together for worship, that is, Sunday mornings, to celebrate the Lord's Supper together, that a woman may not speak. A Bible study time is not such an assembly because the whole church is not assembled.

The church today divides itself into Bible classes of all ages and sometimes genders to have private studies appropriate to age and gender, so that the church is edified.

There are some who believe we are in sin for dividing the church into classes on Sunday and Wednesday. Note, however, that part of the work of the church is to edify the saints, Ephesians 4:11-16.

If the whole church comes together on the first day of the week to participate in the five acts of worship and no woman participates in a speaking role, then we have satisfied God's will.

If the church, for the sake of edification of its members, divides into classes before the whole assembly comes together on Sunday, where is the condemnation?

There are some who claim that there is no authority for a divided class situation, and thereby any assembly of the saints would be the 'whole assembly.' There were times when the New Testament Christians assembled apart from the 'whole assembly'; we call these assemblies 'classes' so that brethren could be edified, Acts 19:9.

It may be objected that the Acts 19:9 assembly was a 'divided assembly', but what really does that prove? Shall we condemn matters of expediency, practicality, and appropriateness on the basis of not finding one example, inference,

or command to have a divided Bible class? If so, then it would be sinful to use a pitch pipe, songbook, trays in the Lord's Supper, and have a church building.

Matters that are expedient are matters that lawfully aid in one accomplishing the commandment of God. The commandment of God is that the church would be edified, and the expedient is a Bible class for all ages.

There is no sin here, and actually, the Bible does not address the practical matters, such as taking a car to preach the Gospel and thereby accomplishing the great commission, Matthew 28:18-20.

The Bible says absolutely nothing about Bible classes, songbooks, pitch pipes, trays on the Lord's Supper and so forth. The Bible simply gives the command, and we are charged with keeping the command and accomplishing it in a lawful manner.

It is unfortunate that there are overzealous brothers and sisters today who attempt to bully other churches with their personal convictions. When these Christians begin to bind where God has not bound and loose where God has not loosed, Matthew 18:18, they bring reproach to the name of God and cause some to stumble in sin, Galatians 2:3-10. One may say that since a Bible study is not the 'whole church being assembled,' why can't a woman lead the study? The answer is found in the general subjection of women to men and is therefore not authorised by God.

"Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored." 1 Corinthians 14:36-38

Though the Corinthian church had these errors happening, women addressing the assembly and prophets and tongue speakers talking at the same time, they were not to conclude that just because they did these things, they were right.

The Corinthian brethren were to conduct themselves by the authority of God, 1 Corinthians 14:36 / Colossians 3:17, and not by their own will, just as all other churches were to do. Remember that Paul said, 'as in all the churches of the saints,' 1 Corinthians 14:33.

These regulations that Paul placed upon the women, tongue speakers, and prophets were not Paul's opinions, but 'the commandment of the Lord,' 1 Corinthians 14:37.

Those 'ignorant', 1 Corinthians 14:38, were those who sought spiritual gifts to be magnified by others rather than exercising the gift of the Holy Spirit in love. These brethren were 'ignorant', and so Paul enlightens them, 1 Corinthians 12:1.

Those who desired to remain ignorant, due to a hard-hearted disposition that enjoyed the attention tongues brought to them, rather than wanting to profit all brethren were to remain ignorant, 1 Corinthians 14:38. Such individuals will be reserved for everlasting fire, Matthew 13:10-12 / 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12.

"Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." 1 Corinthians 14:39-40

Paul's plea for the Corinthian brethren was that they understand the purpose of the gifts, i.e., confirmation, edification, exhortation, and consolation, that the whole body may be profited.

What we must continue to consider as we look through these three chapters, i.e., 1 Corinthians 12-14, is that the 'whole body, that is the church' is what is under consideration, 1 Corinthians 12:7 / 1 Corinthians 14:23.

Though Paul has placed a level of importance on prophecy over tongue speaking and regulated their uses in the assembly, he assures them that they should continue to desire these gifts, 1 Corinthians 14:39.

As the Corinthians received their gifts by the Spirit, they were admonished to be orderly with them, 1 Corinthians 14:40. Likewise, our assemblies should be orderly rather than chaotic.

SUMMARY

Paul specifically states the objective of gifts when he said, ‘but the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort’, 1 Corinthians 14:3. Tongue speaking without interpretation could in no way achieve this function.

Paul is resolute in his writing so that the Corinthians are aware of the importance of their audience’s understanding of tongues. Those brethren who spoke in tongues for show and human exaltation were ‘children in mind’, 1 Corinthians 14:20.

Secondly, 1 Corinthians 14 gives us a picture of the church’s assemblies when the ‘whole church was assembled together’, 1 Corinthians 14:18 / 1 Corinthians 14:23 / 1 Corinthians 14:26. There was preaching, singing, and praying occurring. While the preaching, praying, and singing occurred in Corinth, there was chaos.

Tongue speakers were talking at the same time with no interpreter, prophets were speaking out of turn, inspired singers were singing, and women were addressing the assembly. It is no wonder that Paul said that if a visitor came into the assembly, they would think all were ‘mad’, 1 Corinthians 14:23.

Paul states that ‘God is not a God of confusion, but of peace’, 1 Corinthians 14:33. Again, the apostle states, ‘but let all things be done decently and in order’, 1 Corinthians 14:40.

It was not orderly for tongue speakers to speak at the same time as another tongue speaker, and neither was it orderly for one to speak without an interpreter, 1 Corinthians 14:27.

It was not orderly for the prophets to speak at the same time but in order and in turn, 1 Corinthians 14:29. Though the Corinthians chaotically practised their gifts, this did not set truth for the churches universal, 1 Corinthians 14:36.

Paul made sure his point of order was understood when he said, ‘let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord’, 1 Corinthians 14:37.

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION

“Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.” 1 Corinthians 15:1-2

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

The word ‘Gospel’, in Greek, is ‘euangelion’, and it originally denoted a reward for good tidings. In the New Testament, it denotes the good tidings of the Kingdom of God and of salvation through Christ, to be received by faith, based on His expiatory death, burial, resurrection and ascension.

In the year 51 AD, the apostle Paul made His way through Macedonia and came southward to Achaia and the city of Corinth. Paul ‘preached’ the saving message of the Gospel to the Corinthians and many ‘received’ it, 1 Corinthians 15:1.

The word ‘receive’, in Greek, is ‘paralambano’ and means to receive by hearsay or report, to ascertain. Having received or learned of the Gospel message, Paul now states, ‘you have taken your stand’, the word ‘stand’ in Greek is ‘histemi’, and it means to be in a certain state or condition.

This ‘state or condition’ is a perfect tense verb indicating the Corinthians’ present state based on a past action. Their present state is that they are ‘saved’ based upon their past action of obeying the Gospel, however, this current salvation applies only to those who ‘hold fast the word which I preached unto you,’ **1 Corinthians 15:2**.

The word ‘hold fast’ in Greek is ‘katechete’, and it means to have in possession, possess, occupy; to understand. Clearly, this passage teaches, by implication, that those who are saved are those who continue in the instructions of the Gospel message. Therefore, many will hear the Gospel and obey; however, some of those will not ‘hold fast’ to the message, **2 John 1:9**.

The one who will not ‘hold fast’ has ‘believed in vain’, in Greek, these are the words ‘pisteuo eike’. The word ‘believed’ is in the aorist tense, indicating past action without indicating completion or repetition.

Salvation was obtained at a point in the past; however, its present state is based on continued action, holding fast to the word of God. This past faith is now ‘vain’, without plan or purpose, for the one who has now rejected the way of truth. Truth saves only those who truly desire salvation, **Romans 1:16**.

Paul begins to build his case for the resurrection of the dead. The initial Gospel message that the Corinthians heard and received included instructions regarding the resurrection of the dead. Something had changed in the minds of some of the Corinthians in relation to their understanding of this resurrection.

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.” **1 Corinthians 15:3-8**

Paul delivered to the Corinthians exactly what he had received by revelation through Jesus Christ, **1 Corinthians 11:23 / Galatians 1:11-12**. The message Paul delivered was, ‘that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures’, **1 Corinthians 15:3**.

Fee, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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.’

The Old Testament foretold of this expiatory sacrifice of Christ, **Isaiah 53 / Psalms 22**. The New Testament authors understood that those of old foretold of this event, **1 Peter 1:10-12 / 2 Peter 1:19 / Luke 24:44-46 / Matthew 1:21**. Notice the words ‘and that he was buried’, **1 Corinthians 15:4**. This confirms the reality of Christ’s death. He was dead and buried in a tomb, **John 19:38-42**. ‘And he has been raised on the third day according to the scriptures’. Whether Paul had seen either of the Gospels, we do not know, but this item is closely identified with the fact of Christ’s resurrection. We have it in Peter’s speech, **Acts 10:40**, and Jesus points it out as part of the prophecy, **Luke 24:46**.

The other expression occasionally found is ‘after three days’, **Mark 10:34**. This is merely free vernacular for the same idea and not even **Matthew 12:40** disturbs it.

Luke 24:1 records the empty tomb on the first day of the week, the third day, **Luke 24:46-47**. If any of the Corinthians didn’t believe what Paul had just proclaimed, he gave them proof of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord.

First of all, Cephas, who is Peter, had seen the risen Lord, 1 Corinthians 15:5 / Luke 24:34. The Lord had appeared to ‘the twelve’ disciples or apostles, 1 Corinthians 15:5 / John 20:19-23.

The Lord appeared to ‘above five hundred brethren at once’, some of whom were still alive, 1 Corinthians 15:6. Paul states this to say, Why don’t you ask these men for yourselves? It may be that these five hundred brethren were those of Galilee, Matthew 26:32 / Matthew 28:7.

Notice Paul says, ‘then he appeared to James; then to all the apostles’, 1 Corinthians 15:7. Apparently, this was a different appearance than the one mentioned above in Galilee, Matthew 28:7-10.

This James must have been the Lord’s brother, John 7:5 / Acts 15:13-21 / Galatians 1:19 / Galatians 2:9. Jesus appears to all the apostles before His ascension into heaven, Acts 1:4-11.

Lastly, the resurrected Lord appeared to Paul while on the road to Damascus, 1 Corinthians 15:8 / Acts 22:6-11. No other appearance of the resurrected Lord was made to any other.

To be ‘abnormally born’, in Greek, it’s the word ‘ektroma’, and it means to be a child untimely born, an abortion. Premature birth, untimely birth, miscarriage. So Paul calls himself, taking up an insult as a term of contempt, a horrible thing. The Lord appears to Paul in a resurrected, glorious state, and Paul views himself as somewhat of a monster that was undeserving of such a sight.

“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.” 1 Corinthians 15:9-11

1 Corinthians 19:9 may help us with the understanding of 1 Corinthians 15:8. Paul viewed himself as least among the apostles, as far as worth goes, due to his earlier persecution of the church, 1 Corinthians 15:9 / Acts 26:9-11.

As a child that did not come about at the right time in his mother’s womb, so Paul’s spiritual birth as a Christian came about suddenly at the appearance of the Lord Jesus. Paul was breathing threats of death against Christians, Acts 9:1, when Jesus tore Paul from the womb of death.

Though Paul had done some awful things in his past, as we all have, he realises that it is by the grace of God that he is now a Christian, 1 Corinthians 15:10. If Paul, one who persecuted the church in his sinful days, can be saved, what does that say about everyone else? 1 Timothy 1:12-16.

As a show of his appreciation, Paul worked, laboured, worked hard, and toiled, so that others may receive salvation just as he, 1 Corinthians 15:10 / 1 Corinthians 9:22. Paul’s labours exceeded those of the other apostles as one extremely zealous and filled with love for the souls of men, Romans 1:14-16.

Finally, Paul says whether it was his own self or the other apostles preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you Corinthians had believed this, 1 Corinthians 15:11. That which they believed was the central theme of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus had been crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. The witnesses give their testimonies. Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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.’

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

“But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead

are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.” 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Paul expresses surprise and shock that some among them were actually saying there was no resurrection of the dead. Paul has set out to prove the general resurrection of all mankind by establishing the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the start of 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.

There were false teachers in Corinth, teaching that Jesus had been raised; however, mankind as a whole will not be raised, 1 Corinthians 15:12-13. Those doctrines were the course of Hymenaeus and Philetus, 2 Timothy 2:17-19.

The past tense of ‘preached’, 1 Corinthians 15:14, indicates that this was the message Paul had previously preached to the Corinthians in 51 AD, Acts 17:32. They had heard the message of Christ and his death, burial, and resurrection, yet now they were changing their minds.

Paul gives the consequences if a false teaching on the resurrection is true. If there is no resurrection, then Christ never arose, 1 Corinthians 15:15-16. Christ’s resurrection from the dead is directly connected to all of humanity’s resurrection.

How could it be that Christ was raised from the dead, proclaimed that all of humanity will experience the same thing, and yet it is not true? If these false teachers were correct, i.e., there will be no resurrection of mankind, then all the ‘preaching’ on the resurrection of Christ is futile, 1 Corinthians 15:16-17. The Corinthian’s faith is in vain if there is no resurrection.

The word ‘useless’ in Greek is ‘kenos’, and it means empty, with no purpose, void. Such a state of being placed in their initial obedience to the Gospel message is a matter of uselessness, 1 Corinthians 15:2.

The antecedent to ‘we’, 1 Corinthians 15:15, must be those who both proclaimed the Gospel to the Corinthians and witnessed His resurrected body. These men testified about the resurrection of Christ.

The resurrection of Christ is so closely connected to man’s general resurrection that the entirety of humanity’s resurrection is identified as ‘God that raised up Christ,’ 1 Corinthians 15:15.

If this teaching were not true, Paul proclaims that they all are ‘false witnesses of God,’ 1 Corinthians 15:15. A ‘false witness’ is very similar to a false teacher. The word ‘false’ in Greek is ‘pseudo’, and it means to cheat by lies, to be deceived, or mistaken. The word ‘witness’ in Greek is ‘martures’, and it means to be a witness, to bear witness, give evidence, bear testimony.

Here is one who delivers lying or deceptive testimony about a matter. If there is no such thing as a general resurrection of all the dead, then Paul and the others who claim to have witnessed Christ’s resurrection are liars, and everyone’s faith is futile, 1 Corinthians 15:17.

Whether one is beguiling, deceiving, lying, or mistaken in his opinions, the witness is said to be false if the testimony is not true. That which determines who may be labelled a false witness is true.

Clearly, one sees that it matters not what the consequences of this false testimony are; as far as the label goes, it is the testimony itself that determines whether one is a ‘false witness.’

Paul’s motive was to save souls; however, if the testimony is false when laid aside truth, it mattered not what his motives were for teaching. If the message is false, it is false, and that is all there is to it.

Since Jesus proved that resurrection occurs by His own resurrection, all will be raised. Yet, if one would say that ‘the dead’ in general are not raised, Paul has effectively proved that it is an impossibility for Christ to have been raised from the dead, 1 Corinthians 15:16.

Paul’s logic is that if one has been raised, then all will be raised; if none will be raised, then the One, Jesus, has not been raised. If it is true that Jesus was not raised, then ‘your faith is futile, that is, without purpose, you are still in your sins,’ 1 Corinthians 15:17.

Faith that does not believe in the resurrection is a futile faith because the Christian's hope is in the resurrection of the dead. But that resurrection, however, which will not occur if Christ has not been raised.

If it is that man is not raised, then the entire Gospel message is a lie. The forgiveness of man's sins has ever been contingent upon the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, **Romans 4:23-25**.

To 'fall asleep' is to have died, **1 Corinthians 15:18** / **1 Thessalonians 4:13-16**. The condition of the dead is that they were 'in Christ.' To be 'in Christ' is to be in fellowship with the Lord by abiding in His truths, **1 John 1:3** / **1 John 3:5-6** / **1 John 2:6** / **1 John 2:24** / **1 John 5:20** / **Galatians 3:27**.

Those who have died with the hope of heaven through the forgiveness of their sins have really only 'perished', that's the word 'apollumi', in Greek, which means to kill, to bring to nought, make void, if it is that Christ has not been raised from the dead.

It seems to this writer that the 'apollumi' spoken of here by Paul is a state of being non-existent. Though the Christian's hope is an eternal existence in the presence of God through the Gospel message of the resurrection of the dead, it truly does not exist if Christ has not been raised.

The very Gospel message that was originally preached to the Corinthians involved these teachings. Had 'some' of the brethren forgotten the very message they originally obeyed?

If such a state of non-existence is the consequence of this life, then truly the Christian who conducts himself in restraint of the passions of the flesh has indeed lived and is living a 'pitiable' life, **1 Corinthians 15:19**.

The word 'pitiable' in Greek is 'eleeinos', and it means piteous, sorrow or grief aroused by the misfortune of another, to behold. Christ has been raised from the dead, and the Christian is not a pitiful sight to behold.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'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.'

Paul's point is that it is a sad sight to view a Christian who has lived a faithful life because the dead are not truly raised as they so hope. If the dead are not raised, then why obey the Gospel and live a Christian life of suffering and sorrows?

It reminds us of the question we would ask the 'once saved always saved' persuasion. If once you're saved, you're always saved, then why go to church, give of your means, restrain yourself from anything ungodly, etc.?

"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet." Now, when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all." **1 Corinthians 15:20-28**

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'The Jews celebrated Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month on their sacred calendar. Jesus died on the day Jewish fathers slew the Passover lamb, which was a Friday that year. The Jews offered a sacrifice of firstfruits the day after the Sabbath (Saturday) following the Passover, **Leviticus 23:10-11**, namely, Sunday. This was the day Jesus

arose. Fifty days later, on Pentecost, they presented another offering of new grain that they also called an offering of firstfruits, **Leviticus 23:15-17**. The firstfruits they offered following the Passover were only the first of the crops that they offered later.'

With a bold affirmation, Paul contrasts that Jesus has indeed been raised from the dead and is the 'firstfruits of them that are asleep,' **1 Corinthians 15:20**. The argument continues like this: if Christ has not been raised, neither will anyone else. Since Christ has been raised, He is the 'firstfruits' of all the dead.

The word 'firstfruits', in Greek, is the word 'aparche', and it is defined as the beginning of a sacrifice, the primal offering, of hair cut from the forehead, the firstlings for sacrifice. It may be that the best commentary on the use of the word 'firstfruits' in relation to the resurrection of the dead may be found in **1 Corinthians 16:15**.

It is clear that the first of many Christians made in Achaia were of the house of Stephanas, **1 Corinthians 16:15**. Likewise, the first of many resurrected to die no more was Jesus Christ.

Both the just and the unjust shall be raised, **Acts 24:15**. Those who lived their lives as God desired them to will inherit eternal life, **Matthew 25:31-40 / Revelation 21:1-7**.

Those who lived their lives as they pleased, not giving regard to the authority of Christ, will inherit eternal damnation, **Matthew 25:41-46 / Revelation 21:8**. Both the just and the unjust will live into eternity, one in bliss with God and the other in eternal torments.

Because of Adam's sin, all mankind suffers death, that is, physical death as opposed to spiritual death, **1 Corinthians 15:21-22 / Romans 5:12-21**. The very nature of Adam changed on the day on which he sinned against God, **Genesis 2:17**. He was changed from a living being to a dying being, **Genesis 3:22-24**. 'Adam died at the age of 930', **Genesis 5:5**.

One man, Adam, caused all others of mankind to physically die, **1 Corinthians 15:21**. Likewise, one man, Jesus, will cause all mankind to be resurrected from that dead state, **1 Corinthians 15:22**. While man dies physically due to Adam's sin, all who die will one day live again due to Christ's sacrifice and resurrection, **Romans 5:12-21**.

God is the God of order, **1 Corinthians 14:33 / 1 Corinthians 14:40**. Paul now states the 'order' of the resurrection. Since all will be raised, **Acts 24:15**, there will be order in the resurrection. Christ is the first of all who was resurrected to die no more, **1 Corinthians 15:20**.

Secondly, those who belong to Christ will be raised when Jesus comes again. Those who belong to Christ are Christians, those who have been purchased by the blood of Jesus, **Acts 20:28**. Here are members of the church who have been baptised for the forgiveness of their sins, **Acts 2:38**.

The dead in Christ will rise first, and then those who are alive at His coming will join those who were dead in the resurrected state, **Matthew 25:31-40 / 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**. The spiritually dead will then be resurrected unto eternal damnation, **Matthew 25:41-46 / Revelation 20:11-15**.

After all, have been resurrected and judged, 'then the end will come, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father,' **1 Corinthians 15:24**. The word 'end', in Greek, is 'telos', and it is defined as the fulfilment or completion of anything.

At this point, 'the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up,' **2 Peter 3:10**.

Each resurrected soul will go to their respective eternal habitation. Since Christ's work as a high priest is complete, **Hebrews 7:26-28**, i.e., making intercession for mankind's sins, He now will deliver the kingdom of God back to the heavenly Father, **1 Corinthians 15:24**. All souls, the kingdom of God, will now rest under the authority and protection of heaven, i.e., the kingdom of heaven.

At this point, Jesus will have already 'abolished all rule and all authority and power,' **1 Corinthians 15:24**. All people and powers that oppose the doctrine of Christ and work in league with Satan will be done away with, i.e., abolished in hell forever.

The word ‘till’ in 1 Corinthians 15:25 is a preposition; it has the force of a conjunction, until, to the time that, things that actually occurred and up to the beginning of which something continued.

This can only mean that Christ is currently reigning as King and will do so until he abolishes death. The word ‘reign’ is a present tense verb in Greek, indicating ongoing action. Jesus will continue to reign until every force of Satan is cast into the lake of fire, Revelation 20:12-15.

‘The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death’, 1 Corinthians 15:26. At this time, man will be released from the curse of Adam, death through sin, and we will die no more. Man will be like Christ, immortal.

The word ‘destroyed’, in Greek, is ‘katargeo’ and is similar to the word ‘perish’ of 1 Corinthians 15:18, in that ‘katargeo’ means to make of no effect. Death will no longer have any power over mankind.

The word ‘subjection’, 1 Corinthians 15:27, is a perfect tense verb indicating past action to the now fixed point in time. God placed all authority in the hands of Jesus after He had redeemed man from sin by the resurrection of his body, Matthew 28:18. The ‘everything’, however, did not include God Himself, 1 Corinthians 15:27.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Even though Jesus triumphed over death in his resurrection, believers still die. Therefore, we must experience resurrection because we are in Christ and because only then will the final enemy, death, be subdued. Only then will God become all in all, i.e., everything that matters, Colossians 3:11.’

When Jesus hands over the kingdom of God to Theos, He, Jesus, shall take his rightful place in the godhead that ‘God may be all in all,’ 1 Corinthians 15:28. Clearly, the Son of God is subject to ‘God’. Theos is equated to the godhead, which is comprised of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

There are grave consequences when one states, ‘there is no resurrection of the dead.’ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then one truly mocks the eternal purpose of God and His Son, Jesus. The eternal plan of God had everything to do with the resurrection of Jesus and mankind.

“Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I face death every day—yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” 1 Corinthians 15:29-32

Paul now turns his attention to the subject of baptism for the dead, 1 Corinthians 15:29-34. One of the fundamental beliefs of the Mormon church is the doctrine of baptism for the dead, vicarious baptisms.

The following are statements of belief by members of the LDS church, taken from H. David Burton. ‘Baptism for the dead is the proxy performance of the ordinance of baptism for one deceased.’

Joseph Smith taught, ‘If we can baptize a man in the name of the Father (and) of the Son and of the Holy Ghost for the remission of sins it is just as much our privilege to act as an agent and be baptized for the remission of sins for and in behalf of our dead kindred who have not heard the gospel or fullness of it’.

The first public affirmation of the ordinance of baptism for the dead in the Church was Joseph Smith’s funeral sermon for Seymour Brunson in Nauvoo in August 1840.

Addressing a widow who had lost a son who had not been baptised, he called the principle ‘glad tidings of great joy,’ in contrast to the prevailing tradition that all unbaptized are damned.

The first baptisms for the dead in modern times were done on the Mississippi River near Nauvoo. Revelations clarifying the doctrine and practice have been given from time to time. This was a New Testament practice, 1 Corinthians 15:29.

In an article by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, we further see their beliefs. ‘There is no death, and there are no dead, unto the Lord — all are alive unto him. ‘God is not the God of the dead, but of the living’, **Matthew 22:32**, our Lord said concerning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had long before died as men count death, but who were alive as the Lord views things in his eternal perspective.

Since the Lord views man’s progress from the pre-existent state to an eventual inheritance in one of the degrees of glory as one continuing course, it is not material, from the eternal perspective, whether the opportunity to accept the gospel of salvation comes in this mortal sphere or in the spirit world hereafter.

Sometime after birth into this life and before the resurrection and judgment, every living soul will hear the gospel message and be judged by their reaction thereto.

The millions who pass to the spirit world without receiving an opportunity during mortality to hear the truths of salvation will receive their chance subsequent to what men call death.

The great principles and procedures whereby the saving truths of the gospel are offered to, accepted by, and made binding upon the departed dead, comprise the doctrine of salvation for the dead.

According to this doctrine, the principles of salvation are taught in the spirit world, leaving the ordinances thereof to be performed in this life on a vicarious-proxy basis.

By accepting the gospel in the spirit world, and because the ordinances of salvation and exaltation are performed vicariously in this world, the worthy dead can become heirs of the fullness of the Father’s kingdom.

Salvation for the dead is the system where those who would have accepted the gospel in this life had they been permitted to hear it, will have the chance to accept it in the spirit world, and will then be entitled to all the blessings which passed them by in mortality”. *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 2, pp. 100-196.

Let us consider these things in light of **1 Corinthians 15:29**, which states, ‘Else what shall they do that are baptised for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptised for them?’ The first rule in the proper exegesis of Scripture is to follow context. What is the context surrounding **1 Corinthians 15:29**?

1. Christ is the first fruits of all the resurrected dead, **1 Corinthians 15:20**.
2. All rules and authority will be put under Christ even death, **1 Corinthians 15:24-27**.
3. The only one not subjected to Christ is God, **1 Corinthians 15:27**.
4. All those who have died will also be raised when Christ comes again, **1 Corinthians 15:20 / John 5:28**.
5. The context is one of order!
6. If this order is false, then why be baptised? This is what Paul is saying.

The word ‘else’, KJV, **1 Corinthians 15:29**, if all that is stated in the preceding is not fact. ‘What shall they do that are baptised for the dead’, ‘hoi baptizomenoi huper ton nekron.’ The Greek phrase is literally translated as ‘what will they do the ones being baptised on behalf of the dead? If actually dead persons are not raised.’

The keyword is ‘for’, in Greek it is ‘huper’, and means on behalf of, for the sake of a person or thing. If we are baptised for the sake of or on behalf of dead people being raised from the dead, and the dead are not really raised, then the question is, ‘Why be baptised’ at all?

Paul is simply writing in a rhetorical form, as he is known for. The thought is, why even be baptised if the resurrection is not true? Will you be baptised to be numbered among the dead who will never rise?

The Greek reads a bit different as to how we express ideas in the English but suffice it to say that Paul can certainly not be speaking of a ‘vicarious baptism’ on the part of one Christian for another due to the fact that he had also said

at Romans 14:12. A ‘vicarious baptism’ takes away personal responsibility, a thought that is foreign to the New Testament Scriptures, Revelation 20:12.

The point is further carried out in 1 Corinthians 15:30-32. If the dead will not raise why risk our lives preaching the message of resurrection? If the dead are not raised, why not just eat, drink and live it up, because when we die, that is all there is to existence! 1 Corinthians 15:32 / Isaiah 22:13.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul quoted Isaiah 22:13 to prove his point, Ecclesiastes 2:24 / Ecclesiastes 9:7-10. If there is no resurrection, we may as well live only for the present.’

However, because of the reality of the resurrection of the dead, Paul preached in hazardous situations and daily risked his own life to preach to others. Paul even fought with a beast at Ephesus because of his teaching of the resurrection of the dead, 1 Corinthians 15:32. It may be that these were literal beasts, such as one being thrown to the lions as was Daniel, 2 Timothy 4:17.

Secondly, it may be that Paul was delivered from beastly men such as Demetrius in Ephesus, Acts 19:23-41. Why go through such heartaches and pain in life if there is no such thing as the resurrection of the body? 1 Corinthians 15:32.

“Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.” Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame.” 1 Corinthians 15:33-34

Paul knew there was more to life than mere death and thereby states, ‘be not deceived,’ 1 Corinthians 15:33. The word ‘deceived’ in Greek is ‘planao’, and it means to lead astray, mislead, or deceive.

The context demands that Paul’s admonitions are pointed at the brethren being deceived and led astray by false teachers who were teaching that there is no resurrection of the dead.

Morris, in his commentary, says the following concerning Paul’s quote in 1 Corinthians 15:33.

‘This quotation, contained in a comedy by Menander titled Thais, but perhaps dating back to Euripides, it had become proverbial. The Greeks generally recognised it as encapsulating a wise thought. Therefore, Paul used it to warn his readers that if they kept company with people who denied the resurrection, their character would eventually suffer.’

Here, it is clear that the false teacher is doing the deceptive work of Satan, though he would never admit to doing such work. Don’t make companions of false teachers who believe and teach doctrines that are opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. These people have the ability to lead people astray.

The word ‘senses’ in Greek is ‘eknepho’, and it means to return to one’s self from drunkenness, to become sober. This passage clearly teaches the intoxicating effects of false teaching. Paul desired that the Corinthians would sober up from the intoxicating effects of the false teaching regarding the resurrection of the dead.

Those who had taken the erring doctrine regarding there being no resurrection were in sin. These sinners were to feel the sting of shame for their departure from truth and return to their original hope, 1 Corinthians 15:34.

BELIEFS ABOUT THE RESURRECTION

1. The Sadduceean View, Acts 23:8.

The Sadducees rejected the belief in a life after death and believed that mental and spiritual life are only manifestations of physical life; therefore, they said, when physical life ceases, all other manifestations of life also cease. This life is everything.

In other words, at death, the individual ceases to exist, and it was this notion that had led some of the Corinthian Christians to embrace the philosophy which said, 'Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die,' 1 **Corinthians 15:32**. Therefore, there is no resurrection, because there is no future!

2. At the other extreme, there were those who did not deny the possibility of the resurrection of the body and therefore the possibility that Christ was raised, but they nevertheless thought that it was 'undesirable'! Why?

Because they regarded the body as the part of man's being that 'holds him back' and prevents him from fulfilling his potential and experiencing the quality of life which is desirable. The body 'shackles' him. It 'leads him along the wrong path'. It is 'the source of sin'.

Some of the early philosophers even refused to allow their portraits to be painted, lest the picture of their physical appearance cause them to be remembered and honoured because of how they looked, and they gave thanks to God because he had not tied their spirit to an immortal body! It limits him in much the same way that a physical disability restricts the movement of a person.

These people even taught that the resurrection of Christ was a spiritual resurrection, and because at their baptism, they were buried with Christ and raised with Him to a new life, the resurrection was past already! **2 Timothy 2:18**. As for the risen Christ, they taught that the physical body of Christ remained in the tomb and eventually returned to the earthly elements of which it was composed, but His Spirit went out and was alive in His people.

And that, they claimed, is what really matters. Bodily resurrection is not important. In fact, they said, to offer people a physical resurrection is a very doubtful blessing indeed!

A form of this idea is still alive today because there are those who deny that there will be a Day of Resurrection and believe that Christ was not raised from the dead.

What they consider to be important is that what remains after death is the goodness that flows from the life of every good person and every great teacher. They say that Jesus is still alive because of His example and His teaching.

And you will find such people who regard themselves as Christians in many of the religious bodies today. One German philosopher, Keim, whose thinking was regarded as very influential, even claimed that the Apostles never actually saw the risen Christ.

What they 'saw' was an impression that was placed on their minds by Christ Himself, who had passed into higher spiritual life. To use the man's own words, he said that these appearances were like telegrams, to assure them that He was alive. And if He had not given these signs of His glorified life, belief in Him as the Messiah would have died on the Cross.

The odd fact is that there is an element of truth in the last part of this idea, because belief in the identity of the Christ, the Messiah, depends on His resurrection.

Paul says as much in **Romans 1:1-4**, where he states that Christ is proved to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead. But the difference between these ideas and what Paul actually taught is irreconcilable.

There is nothing mystical about his statements about the Lord's Resurrection. Belief in a Christ whose influence is alive only through His teaching and example may satisfy a man who has nothing more to help him, but it is not what the Scriptures teach.

THE THEORY OF THE GERMAN KEIM

How does it explain the appearances of Christ in the Upper Room, where He invited Thomas to TOUCH His body, and where they gave Him food to eat? **John 20:24-29**. That was no phantom, Christ! It was not a 'mental image'. And whilst there are elements in the account of the Lord's resurrection that we cannot explain at our current level of knowledge, we must be prepared to consider that one day we shall discover that there are forces and power in God's World that explain the currently inexplicable, and 'we shall know, even as we are also known', **1 Corinthians 13:12**. Paul touches on this thought when he writes about 'a physical body and a spiritual body. He says that 'this mortal shall put on immortality and this corruption that put on incorruption,' **1 Corinthians 15:53-54**. We may say that we don't know how this will or can happen. But that is no reason for saying that it cannot happen! Is this the only thing that we don't understand?

It seems to me that we need to bear in mind that the factor that connects the physical body which we have now, and the spiritual body which we shall eventually receive, is the soul, our true identity, the part of our being which makes us unique, different from every other human being, and the part that will occupy both bodies.

Paul simply refuses to see a problem here. He says, 'We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed! In a moment; in the twinkling of an eye!' **1 Corinthians 15:52**.

Think about this: when the moment comes, and the dead are raised in new bodies, at the same time, the bodies of living believers will also undergo the very same change.

The transformation of the dying physical body into the undying spiritual body will be experienced by both those who 'sleep in Jesus' and those who are still alive on Earth! And it will occur in a moment!

Here is a very important truth. The word 'sleep' is the Greek word 'koimaomai', and it occurs eighteen times in the Greek New Testament; it is never used in connection with the soul of a believer.

The Bible nowhere teaches the doctrine of 'the sleep of the soul'. The word 'sleep' is only ever used to describe the appearance of the body in death. In fact, it is interesting to notice that the word 'cemetery' comes from the Greek word, which means 'a sleeping place'.

When Paul thinks about dying, he says that he 'has a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better', **Philippians 1:23**. Notice **Philippians 1:22**, where he speaks about living 'in the flesh'.

He explains this further when he says 'absent from the body, at home with the Lord', **2 Corinthians 5:8**, and in **2 Corinthians 5:1**, he refers to his body as an 'earthly house', a 'tabernacle' or 'tent', which is the very analogy that Peter uses in **2 Peter 1:13-14**. 'I am in this tent; I must put off my tent'

Incidentally, I think that we overlook the problem that the resurrection of Christ must have caused Paul himself! It is true that, as a Pharisee, he would have no difficulty in accepting the fact of Resurrection, but we should remember that, as an ultra-orthodox Pharisee, he described himself as 'a Pharisee of the Pharisees'; to accept the Crucifixion of the Messiah must surely have been a struggle. After all, he had been brought up to believe that when the Messiah came, He would never die.

The Messiah could not die, but his mind underwent a radical change when he met the Risen Messiah on the Damascus Road. It may be significant that he asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' **Acts 9:5**.

Because it suggests that, up to that moment, he had not believed that the Jesus, whom he would certainly know had been crucified, was the Messiah, and it was the Lord's reply which came as the revelation that changed Paul's thinking.

Looking back on what we saw in our last part of this study, it occurs to me that, if, as the critics assert, the accounts of the Lord's resurrection are untrue, and His body was not raised from the dead, the consequences would be devastating.

It was Fairburn who made a statement to the effect that, if no living Christ emerged from Joseph's tomb, that tomb becomes the grave, not only of a man but also of a religion and all the hopes that have been built upon it. And Paul says as much in this chapter.

He declares what the consequences would be as far as the Apostles themselves were concerned; they were either liars or, at least, greatly self-deceived. As for the believers, their faith would be empty and worthless.

And as for those who have died trusting in Christ, they have died without hope. But then there is something which Paul does not mention, he does not deal with the consequences as they relate to Christ Himself.

1. He repeatedly claimed that, although He was going out to die, He would rise again.

He claimed that He had the power to lay down His life and to take it up again. He informed the Jews that His body was a 'temple' which He would 'after three days,' **John 2:19**. If He did not rise from the dead, His word has failed, just imagine what this would mean!

2. Furthermore, since Jesus claimed that His identity as the Messiah would be proved by His resurrection and His victory over death, if He did not rise, His victory was incomplete, and His claim unproven.

Remember, it was not His death on the cross which proved His Deity. Many good men have died for what they believed. It was His resurrection from the dead which vindicated His claim, as Paul states in **Romans 1:4**.

BELIEF IN THE FUTURE LIFE

We have been brought up in a society that is not surprised when resurrection from the dead is mentioned. People may not believe in it. They may not feel capable of discussing it, but it is not a revolutionary notion to them! They know it as an item of Christian belief. It is 'what the church teaches!'

But, although philosophers throughout the ages had hoped that there might be something after death, they were never sure, and even God's ancient people, who were in a covenant relationship with Him, knew nothing about 'eternal life' because the promise or hope of life after death was not a part of the Covenant enacted at Sinai. What was offered in the Mosaic Covenant was long life in the Promised Land.

But Paul states in **2 Timothy 1:10** that 'Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel'. Notice the phrase, 'brought to light'. It implies that, until the Lord Jesus came, the subject was enshrouded in mist or darkness.

Only Christianity, in the Gospel, clearly and positively, offers to mankind the assurance that a life beyond this life is possible because of the Coming of Jesus Christ.

THE RESURRECTION BODY

"But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies, and there are earthly bodies; but the splendour of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendour of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendour, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendour." **1 Corinthians 15:35-41**

Paul now deals with the objections of these false teachers, **1 Corinthians 15:35-49**. Paul anticipates questions that will arise in the minds of those who have rejected the teaching of the resurrection of the dead. Some may say, how are the dead raised? And with what manner of body do they come? **1 Corinthians 15:35**.

The word ‘manner’, in Greek, is ‘poio’, and it means with what sort of body. Many of the ideas presented in divine revelation seem impossible with men; however, with Christ, all things are possible, **Genesis 18:14 / Jeremiah 32:16-19 / Jeremiah 32:26-27 / Matthew 19:26**.

Man would consider the dying and decaying of the body and conclude that there is no way that such a condition could be restored. The word ‘foolish’, **1 Corinthians 15:36**, in Greek is ‘aphron’, and it means without sense. The Corinthians lacked sense in the area of understanding the resurrection.

These same individuals who planted seeds in the ground watched the seeds rot and germinate. are not asking ‘how,’ and ‘with what manner.’ A seed sown in the ground first dies, then it is quickened, made alive, **1 Corinthians 15:36**. Jesus used this illustration in **John 12:24**.

What appears to be dead is actually awaiting a more glorious body. A man plants a bare seed in the ground in hopes of a full-bloomed plant. Man does not plant a mature plant into the ground with hopes of regeneration, but the seed, **1 Corinthians 15:37**.

By the nature of the created universe, a plant will reproduce after its own kind, **Genesis 1:11-12**. Such a procedure is created by God and pleases God. It is by the work of God that a seed germinates and slowly grows into a plant that produces seed itself.

1 Corinthians 15:35-38 answers the ‘how’ question. The bodily resurrection will occur as a seed that has been planted in the ground. It first appears to die and rot, and then comes to life in the spring.

Likewise, our bodies will die, rot in the earth, and yet at the appointed time God will bring forth the new resurrected body as he miraculously brings forth the new plant from the seed.

The second question that those who would deny the resurrection will ask is, with what type or kind of body will this be? Paul answers the objection by stating that there are four types of flesh, **1 Corinthians 15:39**.

The word ‘flesh’, in Greek, is the word ‘sarx’, which means the flesh or muscles of the body, flesh as opposed to the spirit. God was not limited to only one physical flesh in his creation. a. Flesh of men. b. Flesh of beast. c. Flesh of birds. d. Flesh of fish.

There are also two types of bodies, **1 Corinthians 15:40**. The word ‘heavenly’, in Greek, is ‘epouranios’, and it points to those things in heaven, heavenly. The word ‘epouranios’ is used eighteen times in the New Testament, and every occurrence is translated ‘heavenly’ except here in **1 Corinthians 15:40**, where the Greek word is translated ‘celestial.’ The author of Hebrews appears to give a summation of the meaning of ‘epouranios’ in **Hebrews 12:22-23**. Clearly, the word translated ‘celestial bodies’ is the heavenly beings such as angels, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all summed up in the word ‘spirit.’

Man occupies a fleshly body on this earth that will act as a seed when it dies and then in the resurrection, it shall germinate into a spirit, heavenly, or celestial body like that of God and angels.

The word ‘earthly’, in Greek, is the word ‘epigeios’, and it means existing upon the earth. This is the flesh of man spoken of above. Each of these bodies has its own glory, i.e. the four types of flesh and the two bodies, celestial versus terrestrial. The word ‘glory’, in Greek, is ‘doxa’, and it means the external appearance, glory, splendour, effulgence.

Each of these, i.e., earthly and heavenly, has a different external appearance and different glory, splendour. The word ‘body’, in Greek, is ‘soma’, and it means the body of a man. The celestial body, spirit body, like God and angels, will be an eternal material substance.

As differing fleshs have different external appearances, glory, even so, the entities in the heavens have different appearances. The sun, moon, and stars all differ in external appearance and are the results of God's creation, **1 Corinthians 15:41**. God has given all things their own glory, appearance, and each serves its designed purpose.

“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.” **1 Corinthians 15:42-49**

As the flesh of men, beasts, birds, fish, terrestrial, celestial, sun, moon, and stars all differ in external appearance, even so will the resurrected body. The glory or external appearance of man's resurrected body will be different from when it was terrestrial, earthly.

Man dies and is 'sown' into the ground at burial, **1 Corinthians 15:42**. The state of death for man is termed 'perishable' or 'corruption', KJV, which is the Greek word 'phthora', which means mortality, death, the decay of matter. Clearly, the illustration of the seed being sown in corruption is being alluded to here.

1. Man dies, he decays as a seed and comes forth as a new plant, **1 Corinthians 15:42**.

Man will therefore be resurrected as 'imperishable', that is, the Greek word 'aphtharsia', which means incorruptibility, unending existence.

2. The resurrected dead body of mankind will be sown in 'dishonour', that is, the Greek word 'atimia' and raised in 'glory', which is the Greek word 'doxa', **1 Corinthians 15:43**.

The word 'atimia' means dishonour, disgrace. It is likely that the word 'doxa' is used here to indicate the 'splendour' of the resurrected body as opposed to or in contrast to the dishonour of the rotting and decaying dead body. Such a body will never die again and is thereby of greater glory.

3. The physical dead body is buried in the ground in 'weakness', that's the Greek word 'astheneia', and it will be raised in 'power', that is the Greek word 'dunamis', **1 Corinthians 15:43**. The Greek word 'astheneia' means want of strength, weakness, feebleness, or sickness. 'Dunamis' means power, might, strength, ability to do a thing. Again, another contrast is given between the dead, decaying body in the earth at death and the resurrected body. The resurrected body will be one of unending existence, splendour, magnificent richness or glory, pomp, grandeur, and now defined as a state of great strength, might and power.

4. Paul says that the physical dead body is sown as a 'natural body', that is, the word 'psuchikos' in Greek and 'raised a spiritual body', that is, the word 'pneumatikos' in Greek, **1 Corinthians 15:44**.

The Greek word 'psuchikos' is defined as of the soul or life, spiritual, concerned with life only, the natural man. The Greek word 'pneumatikos' means non-carnal, i.e. humanly, 'ethereal' as opposed to gross, or 'daemoniacally' a spirit.

This contrast indicates the limited nature of the physical body as opposed to the immortal state of the resurrected body, being spiritual. It seems to me that the word 'spiritual' is a summation of all the attributes of the resurrected body enumerated above, i.e., everlasting beauty and strength, imperishable, glorious, and power, all of which equate to a 'spirit' body.

Now Paul draws the conclusion in **1 Corinthians 15:44**. If a natural body, one that is subject to decay, feeble, subject to sickness, was created by God, even so God will make that same body spiritual, immortal, magnificent, and filled

with strength. This statement reminds us of what Paul said regarding the comparison of Christ's resurrection with that of mankind's resurrection.

The two are so closely related that the obvious conclusion is that you cannot have one without the other. Likewise, Paul now states that if there is a physical body, there is of necessity a spiritual body, i.e., you cannot have one without the other. If the physical body exists, our natural conclusion should be that a spiritual and eternal body exists. God indeed has the power to do so, **Jeremiah 32:17**.

Paul makes a comparison of the beginnings of man's flesh to the end of Man's flesh, **1 Corinthians 15:45-47**, a quote taken from **Genesis 2:7**. The first man, Adam, was earthly and made this way by God, **Genesis 2:7**.

The second man, the Christ, is a life-giving spirit, one that gives the physical body an eternal body, for all mankind, just and unjust, **John 5:28-29**. Like Adam, we all presently have a fleshy body with an eternal soul, and like Christ, we shall all one day occupy a spiritual body fit for eternity.

Here is the order in God's creation. All mankind exists in the natural, physical and corruptible state first and then, as a seed planted in the ground germinates, we are resurrected to newness of life. Just as Adam lived in the natural state first, even so, we live in the natural state first, **1 Corinthians 15:46**.

Adam was formed of the dust of the ground, and we are all of Adam in this physical state, **Genesis 2:7**. Jesus, however, is not created of dust as man. Jesus is God, **John 1:1-2**, and as God, He is the creator, **Colossians 1:16**. As Creator, He is the one through whom all men will be made alive, **1 Corinthians 15:21-23**.

Paul now answers the second question, i.e., what shall the resurrected body be like, **1 Corinthians 15:49 / 1 Corinthians 15:35**. Since Jesus is the 'firstfruits' of us all in the resurrected state, the word of God clearly states that we shall be as He is. As we presently 'bear the image' of Adam, so we will bear the image of Jesus, the 'heavenly', **1 Corinthians 15:49**.

The word image is 'eikon' in Greek, and it means a likeness, image, portrait, or an image in a mirror. An image, figure, likeness, the image of the Son of God, into which true Christians are transformed, is likeness not only to the heavenly body, **1 Corinthians 15:49 / Philippians 3:21**, but also to the most holy and blessed state of mind, which Christ possesses, **Romans 8:29 / 2 Corinthians 3:18**.

Paul says we are going to be just like Jesus. The above passages further clarify this in that we will be immortal, filled with power and splendour, **1 Corinthians 15:42-43**.

One interesting thought is that when Jesus appeared to those mentioned in **1 Corinthians 15:4-10**, in the resurrected state, he had a human body form and they recognised who he was, **John 20:14-28**.

Our conclusion can only be that we will have a similar body to that which we have now, yet it will be magnificent, mighty, and eternal, i.e., celestial, spiritual, or heavenly.

"I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." **1 Corinthians 15:50-57**

Paul now answers the question of 'when.' When will all this take place? **1 Corinthians 15:50-58**. The word 'inherit', **1 Corinthians 15:50**, in Greek is 'kleronomeo', and it means to receive a share of an inheritance, to inherit a portion of property, to be an inheritor or heir.

Clearly, flesh, blood, and corruption, the physical man of Adam, do not belong in heaven. Heaven is an eternal and immortal abode, and thereby corruptible flesh has no place there.

1 Corinthians 15:39 spoke of the various fleshs that were ‘terrestrial’, of the earth and corruptible. These fleshy have no place in eternity. The celestial body, heavenly, is fit for eternity.

The Scriptures often speak of the ‘kingdom of God’ as the church, Mark 1:15 / Mark 9:1 / Luke 10:9-11. Here, however, the ‘kingdom of God’ is revealed to be the heavenly abode of the righteous, 1 Corinthians 15:50.

We may define the church in the here and now as those terrestrial bodies undefiled by sin through the blood of Christ who, if they continue in faith, will comprise the church, the kingdom of God, in heaven with a celestial body.

The word ‘listen’ 1 Corinthians 15:51, or ‘behold’, KJV, is Greek ‘idou’, and it means lo! Behold! See there! There! Take it! Paul expresses his desire for the Corinthians to hear, understand, and hope.

Those who taught that there was to be no resurrection were zapping the hope out of people. He tells them ‘a mystery’, it was a mystery, and now he reveals the hidden things of the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15:51.

We all shall not sleep, that is, die, but we shall all be changed, 1 Corinthians 15:51. The antecedent to the plural pronoun ‘we’ includes Paul and all of humanity.

The fact that Paul includes himself in the ‘we’ indicates that he did not know when this would occur, but he knew by revelation what would occur at that time.

There will be some of humanity that do not see death, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. When this change from an earthly to a heavenly body shall occur, no man knows, Matthew 24:36-44; however, the trumpet of God shall sound and mark the time, 1 Corinthians 15:52 / 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

At that point, a ‘change’, that’s the Greek word ‘allasso’, will occur in mankind’s bodies, both dead and living. The Greek word ‘allasso’ is to make other than it is, to change, alter.

To ‘change’ the customs or laws given by Moses would be to change the Jews’ way of life, Acts 6:14. Likewise, when man shall experience the change that shall occur when resurrected, he will be different from what he was in the mortal state, 1 Corinthians 15:52.

Man will move from the earthly state to the heavenly. He will be fitted for eternity with beauty and might. This change shall occur instantaneously, i.e., ‘in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye,’ 1 Corinthians 15:52. Paul tells us that when as best as he is able, ‘for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed,’ 1 Corinthians 15:52.

Robertson and Plummer, in their commentary, say the following.

‘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.’

The word ‘imperishable’, in Greek, is ‘aphtharsia’, which means incorruptible, immortal, imperishable, undying, enduring. The body that was subject to corruption and decay will be fitted for eternal existence on that day.

The word ‘perishable’ 1 Corinthians 15:53, in Greek is ‘phthora’, which means mortality, death, the decay of matter. The word ‘must’, 1 Corinthians 15:53, in Greek is ‘dei’, which indicates binding necessity, 1 Timothy 3:2. This will surely occur because the Scriptures cannot be broken, John 10:35.

The current and future state of man is illustrated in two ways. First, man will go from a perishable state, death and decay, to an unperishable state, unending existence. Secondly, man is said to go from a mortal state to an immortal state.

When this transformation occurs in the resurrection, Paul states that Isaiah’s prophecy will have been fulfilled, 1 Corinthians 15:53 / Isaiah 25:8. Victory swallows death, and it will be no more, Revelation 20:14.

Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 15:55, Paul quotes from Hosea 13:14, where the prophet foretold of a resurrection of the dead so that at the point in which it occurs, one would exclaim, 'Where, O death, is your sting.'

Death stings as a scorpion while man is in the earthly state, Romans 6:23; however, once the transformation of resurrection occurs, death and Hades will be cast into hell and will never more exist, Revelation 20:14-15. If the scorpion is gone, so is its sting!

Because man sins, he dies physically and spiritually just as the first man, Adam, Genesis 2:17 / 1 Corinthians 15:21-22. The death sting is due to sin, and the power of that sting of death is the law, 1 Corinthians 15:56. The law defines sin as transgression, 1 John 3:4. If there were no law, then no sin would exist, Romans 4:15.

If no law or sin existed, there would be no death. Law does exist, however, and thereby sin exists, and so does death.

The power of sin has been destroyed by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, 1 Corinthians 15:57 / Romans 8:1-2.

Mankind is set free from the law and sin through the blood of Jesus Christ, Romans 7:1-26. When man now sins, he can ask for forgiveness if he has been made to be in Christ, 1 John 1:8-10 / Galatians 3:27. This is the 'victory through our Lord Jesus Christ', 1 Corinthians 15:57.

"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain." 1 Corinthians 15:58

Paul gives the concluding admonition based on the fact that there will be a day when man is resurrected from the dead and given an immortal, magnificent, and mighty celestial body.

The words 'stand firm', in Greek, are 'hedraios', and it means to be sitting, steady, steadfast. Closely related is the word 'unmovable', 'ametakinetos', i.e., immovable, firm. The child of God is to stay firm in the faith and 'abound in the work of the Lord', come what may in life, because there is indeed a day of resurrection.

What is the work of the Lord? The work of the Lord is participating in the work of the church, edification of members, teaching the lost, providing care for needy saints, and exercising discipline when necessary.

The work of the Lord is meeting your individual spiritual responsibilities. Such responsibilities are helping the needy, studying the word of God, preaching to the lost, and edifying your fellow brethren. Such 'labour' will not be done in 'vain', useless, because there will be a day we are resurrected from the dead.

We cannot get depressed, despondent, discouraged, downtrodden, and give up on our hope. Neither can we eternally afford to let a false teacher remove our hope through his lies.

THE FACTS

We will be raised from the dead, no matter what the condition of our souls. If the just and unjust are raised with a celestial body, we may draw some natural conclusions. The ungodly will have this immortal, magnificent, and strong eternal body that will suffer forever in hell.

The godly will have a celestial body in heaven with the Lord for all eternity. Paul is encouraging every man and woman of all time to never lose hope but to continue to press forward in faith. The day of the Lord is coming.

SUMMARY



Jesus said there will be a day of resurrection for all, whether they are Christians or not. Only Christians will go to live in heaven forever, whilst those who aren't Christians will live forever in hell, John 5:28-29. The apostle Paul also said the same thing, Acts 24:15.

Some brethren in Corinth were teaching that there would be no resurrection of the dead, 1 Corinthians 15:12. These teachers apparently believed Jesus had not yet been raised; they rejected the general resurrection of mankind. Paul proves the general resurrection of the dead by proving Jesus' resurrection, who is the 'firstfruits of them that are asleep,' 1 Corinthians 15:20.

Paul reasons that if Christ was raised, then so must all mankind be raised as well, 1 Corinthians 15:20-23. The consequences of no resurrection would be disastrous.

1. If there was not to be a general resurrection of the dead, then it stands to reason that Christ never was raised, 1 Corinthians 15:13.
2. The apostle's preaching is void of reason, 1 Corinthians 15:14, and they are found as 'false witnesses,' 1 Corinthians 15:15.
3. The faith of the Corinthians is useless, 1 Corinthians 15:14.
4. All are still in their sins, 1 Corinthians 15:17.
5. Those who have died have perished, never to be alive again, 1 Corinthians 15:18.
6. The Christian, therefore, has no real hope, 1 Corinthians 15:19, and we may as well 'eat and drink, for tomorrow we die', 1 Corinthians 15:32.

The dead, however, will be raised as was Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15 gives answers to three questions.

1. How will the dead be raised?

Paul first compares the terrestrial body of corruption and dishonour to a seed that is planted in the ground. The seed decays and appears to be dead; however, in due time, the seed produces a new plant, 1 Corinthians 15:35-38. Likewise, the dead body will be resurrected.

2. What type of body will the resurrected have?

The apostle Paul gives seven descriptive ideas as to what the resurrected body will be like.

- a. The terrestrial body will be raised incorruptible, eternal, 1 Corinthians 15:43.
- b. The resurrected body will be raised in 'glory', i.e., the external appearance of splendour.
- c. Paul explains that the resurrected body will be 'raised in power', i.e., power and might.

- d. The resurrected body will not be natural but rather ‘spiritual’; this word appears to sum up all six descriptive ideas of the resurrected body.
- e. The resurrected body shall ‘bear the image of the heavenly’, i.e., the resurrected body will be like and similar to the Lord’s body, angels, and heavenly things, **Matthew 22:30 / Philippians 3:20-21 / 1 John 3:2**.
- f. Paul further defines the resurrected body by saying that ‘flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of God,’ **1 Corinthians 15:50**.
- g. The resurrected body will be totally different from the natural physical bodies that we now occupy. Paul thereby terms it a ‘change’ in relation to what we are among the living on earth.

Considering the fact that Christ was recognised by those who saw Him in the resurrected state as a person having bodily form, we gain greater insight into what this resurrected body will be like, **Matthew 28:9 / Luke 24:36-42 / John 20:19-29**.

3. When will the resurrection occur?

Paul did not know when the resurrection would occur, and neither has anyone else in the history of man, **Matthew 24:36-44**. Rather than answering the question of when, Paul gives details as to what will transpire when the resurrection does happen.

- a. Total victory over Satan and death will be achieved by Christ, **1 Corinthians 15:24-28**.
- b. The trumpet of the Lord shall sound, **1 Corinthians 15:52 / 1 Thessalonians 4:16**, and all the dead shall rise, **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**.
- c. Mankind will be changed to a state of immortality in the blink of an eye, **1 Corinthians 15:51-53**.

WHAT WILL OUR NEW BODIES BE LIKE?

One of the most intriguing events, when Christ returns, and probably one of the most speculative, is wondering what kind of bodies we will have in the afterlife. There are many theories concerning our bodies about which we could argue all day; some give good food for thought, whilst others aren’t even worth discussing, but whatever our bodies will be like, they won’t be prone to disease, old age, disabilities, etc.

It’s not the purpose of this study to lay out exactly what our bodies will be like, but I do want us to stop and think for a moment about a couple of possibilities.

NEW BODIES AT THE RESURRECTION

There’s no doubting that when Christ returns, we are promised that we will be reunited with our bodies, **Romans 8:23**. I don’t think anyone would argue with that, but the real question is, what will these new bodies of ours be like?

THE CURRENT AND FUTURE STATE OF MAN IS ILLUSTRATED IN TWO WAYS

1. Man will go from a perishable state, death and decay, to an imperishable state, unending existence.
2. Man is said to go from a mortal state to an immortal state.

When this transformation occurs in the resurrection, Paul states that Isaiah's prophecy will have been fulfilled. Isaiah said, 'Death is swallowed up in victory,' **Isaiah 25:8**.

Victory swallows death, and it will be no more, **Revelation 20:14**. Furthermore, Paul quotes from **Hosea 13:14** saying, 'O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?'

The prophet foretold of a resurrection of the dead so that at the point in which it occurs, one would exclaim, 'Where is thy sting o' death?' Death stings like a scorpion while man is in the terrestrial state; however, once the transformation of resurrection occurs, death and Hades will be cast into hell and will no longer exist. If the scorpion is gone, so is its sting!

Because man sins, he dies physically and spiritually just as the first man, Adam, **Genesis 2:17 / 1 Corinthians 15:21-22**. The death sting is due to sin, and the power of that sting of death is the law. Law defines sin as transgression, **1 John 3:4**. If there were no law, then no sin would exist, **Romans 4:15**.

If no law or sin existed, there would be no death. Law does exist, however, and thereby sin exists, and so does death. The power of sin has been destroyed by the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.

Mankind is set free from the law and sin through the blood of Jesus Christ, **Romans 7:1-25**. When man now sins, he can ask for forgiveness if he is in Christ, **Galatians 3:27**. This is the 'victory through our Lord Jesus Christ'.

OUR RESURRECTED BODIES WILL BE LIKE CHRIST'S

The apostle Paul gives a little clue as to what is involved in this change; he tells us that our bodies will be glorious like Christ's glorious body, **Philippians 3:20-21**. At the resurrection is when we're going to get our total salvation. The total salvation Jesus won for us on the cross, we haven't received yet, because God doesn't just want to save our souls; He wants to save our bodies. The bodies we have now are lowly bodies; in other words, they are still subject to sin, death, decay and disease.

But God's got a plan that Jesus Christ is going to come back, and He's got the power that puts everything under His control, and He's going to change our bodies, our lowly bodies, to be like His glorious body. The apostle John also speaks about this change, **1 John 3:2**.

These verses tell us that those who die, having trusted Christ as their Saviour, will be given bodies like that of the Lord Jesus Christ. It will be a body that isn't subject to disease and death any longer.

It will be in all points perfect, as the Lord Jesus Christ's body is also perfect. We further know from **2 Corinthians 5:8** that a Christian, immediately upon their death, goes into the presence of the Lord.

WHAT WAS JESUS' GLORIFIED BODY LIKE? JESUS' BODY WAS PHYSICAL

Jesus wasn't a spirit walking around after His resurrection; He had a body, much like what we will have. The Gospels tell us a great deal about what Christ's glorious body was like and what He did whilst He was still here.

A passage that gives a clear description of Christ's resurrected body is found in **Luke 24**, as He appeared to the disciples. In **Luke 24:39**, Jesus draws attention to His completely physical and yet glorified body.

With clear words, Jesus instructed His disciples to view His hands and His feet, and even to touch Him, and to see that He had a real physical body and not a spiritual body that couldn't be touched.

With these words, given in the context by Christ Himself, He rids the world of the false view of the nature of Christ's resurrected body as being some mystical 'spiritual resurrection.'

It should be noted that the fact that Jesus said flesh and bones rather than 'flesh and blood' doesn't necessarily indicate that His body had no blood. The life principle in a resurrected body may not be in its blood but in the spirit of God.

In Luke's Gospel, he tells us that the risen Jesus walks unrecognised with two of His disciples. It was only after they arrived at the village of Emmaus, and Jesus broke the bread at the dinner table, that they finally recognised him. The story continues with Jesus appearing to a group of disciples, **Luke 24:40-43**.

Then there is the scene with Peter and the other disciples after a long day of fishing. They see the risen Lord calling them from the shore. When they arrive, they find that He has cooked a breakfast of bread and fish for them and invites them to 'Come, have breakfast,' **John 21:1-14**.

WHAT ABOUT JESUS' ENCOUNTER WITH MARY JUST AFTER HIS RESURRECTION?

Jesus hadn't ascended back to the Father in His new resurrected body at this point. Jesus is telling Mary not to cling to Him because there is work to be done, **John 20:17**, she needs to tell others what has happened, and so there's a sense of urgency.

She wanted to hold on and not let go of Him, but Jesus wouldn't allow her. This has nothing to do with the spiritual state of His body, after all, a little later, Thomas was invited to touch Jesus, **John 20:27**. Jesus had His new glorified, resurrected body, His new everlasting body, but it was still physical. Isn't that what the resurrection is all about?

RECONCILIATION WITH OUR BODIES!

We know from **1 Corinthians 15:35-44** and **Romans 8:23** that we will be reconciled with our bodies at the resurrection, but they will be new, in terms of glorious.

JESUS' BODY WAS SPIRITUAL

There's no escaping the fact that Jesus' resurrected body did things that the un-resurrected body couldn't do. Notice in **John 20:19-20** that the door was locked, but Jesus came and stood amongst them. How did He get through a locked door? Notice again what happened a week later, **John 20:26**. How did He get through a locked door?

JESUS' ASCENSION

One of the biggest proofs that our new resurrected bodies are different from our old ones is seen in the ascension of Jesus, [Luke 24:50-51](#) / [Mark 16:19](#) / [Acts 1:9](#). What a sight this must have been for everyone present; it's not every day to see someone going up in the air like this.

Seems to me if our new resurrected bodies are going to be like Christ's glorified body, then they are going to be capable of doing things they couldn't do before, and just like Jesus resurrected body, they are going to be physical as well as spiritual.

WHEN WILL WE RECEIVE OUR NEW GLORIFIED BODIES?

Paul told us earlier when we will receive these new bodies, 'for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed,' [1 Corinthians 15:52](#). When Christ returns, it will happen then, [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17](#).

CONCLUSION

This isn't an easy question to try to answer, as we're trying to describe something which is way beyond our comprehension. The reason for this study is to offer some things to think about, not as a fact, because when all the speculations are said and done, does it really matter?

Will our new redeemed bodies be spiritual? Yes, no one will argue with that. Will our new redeemed bodies be physical? yes! no! possibly! Who knows! Who cares! We do know that death will be no more, incurable diseases and old age will be no more. The important thing is where our redeemed bodies spend eternity, [2 Peter 3:9](#).

CHAPTER 16

INTRODUCTION

Paul has effectively dealt with the errors of the brethren in Corinth. He has concluded his words of admonition to these brethren with a detailed discussion on the resurrection of all mankind. Such words are designed to infuse hope and excitement in the saint.

[1 Corinthians 16](#) adds no new area of Corinthian error. This final chapter very typically approaches the brethren with words of encouragement and gives the location and date of this epistle, [1 Corinthians 16:8-9](#).

THE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS

“Now about the collection for the Lord’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come, no collections will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.”

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

Paul left Antioch of Pisidia during the year 53 AD and headed west to Galatia on what is referred to as the third tour of Gospel preaching, Acts 18:23. He then travelled to Ephesus, Acts 19:1.

Three months were spent reasoning with the Jews in the synagogue and making disciples, Acts 19:8. Paul spent two additional years ‘reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus’ in Ephesus, which would bring the date to 55 AD, Acts 19:9-10.

At some point during Paul’s stay in Ephesus, he gained intelligence that the brethren in Jerusalem were in financial need. Paul began spreading the word of their needs, 1 Corinthians 16:1, first to the Galatian brethren, 1 Corinthians 16:1, then to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, and finally to all Macedonia and Achaia, Romans 15:26-27.

The New Scofield commentary says the following.

‘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.’

These verses illustrate to us how funds were collected in the New Testament church.

- a. A common treasury existed, 1 Corinthians 16:2 / 2 Corinthians 11:8 / Philippians 4:14-16 / 1 Timothy 5:1-16.
- b. The funds were collected on the first day of the week, 1 Corinthians 16:2. Though this is the first mention of a first-day-of-the-week collection, we have no record of its beginning or its ending.
- c. Each was to give as he had ‘prospered’, 1 Corinthians 16:2, and ‘purposed’ because ‘God loves a cheerful giver’, 2 Corinthians 9:7.

Today, we continue to lay aside in store as we have prospered on the first day of the week. The funds are moved to a common treasury, and the work of the church is supported by these funds.

This was practised in the very beginning by the church, Acts 2:42. The word fellowship in Acts 2:42 is the ‘koinonia’ in Greek and within it implies the idea of giving and sharing.

The ‘collection’ would be the funds collected for the needy saints. These funds would be sent by the hands of those of the individual church that they were collected, 1 Corinthians 15:3, and hand-delivered to the needy saints in Jerusalem, 1 Corinthians 16:4.

Here is an apostolic example of needy saints being helped by the church. One thing that must be noted is that the current distress in Judea was not limited to the saints of God, but rather all were feeling the sting, Romans 15:25-27.

Paul is willing to accompany these brethren to Judea if the need arises.

Why was there a need for these funds?

1. There was a famine in Jerusalem, Acts 11:27-28.
2. People overstayed in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost because of the Gospel and what was happening, Acts 2:44-47 / Acts 5:1-11.

Fee, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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.’

PAUL'S INTENTION TO GO TO MACEDONIA

“After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia. Perhaps I will stay with you for a while, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.” 1 Corinthians 16:5-9

Paul intended to come to Achaia and Macedonia to collect funds from the gentile churches for the needy saints in Judea, [1 Corinthians 16:5](#). Around the year 57 to 58 AD, after three years in Ephesus, Paul travelled north to Troas and awaited the arrival of Titus, [2 Corinthians 2:12-13](#).

Not finding Titus, Paul travelled across the Aegean Sea and then to Philippi. It is very likely that Paul finds Titus here and then pens the second epistle to the Corinthian brethren, [2 Corinthians 7:5-8](#), in 58 AD, only two years after the first letter, [2 Corinthians 9:2](#).

Heading southward through Macedonia, Paul eventually comes to Corinth and remains for three months, [Acts 20:13](#). It is most probable that Paul penned the letter to the Romans at this time, [Romans 15:25](#) / [Romans 16:1](#).

It seems as if Paul is not sure as to whether he would be accompanying the representatives of the gentile churches to Judea or not at the writing of this letter in Ephesus, [1 Corinthians 16:6-7](#). His itinerary becomes clearer once arriving in Corinth in 58 to 59 AD.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul did spend the winter in Corinth, but it was the winter after the one when he expected to be there, the winter of 57-58 rather than 56-57, [Acts 20:2-3](#) / [Romans 16:1](#) / [Romans 16:23](#). He sensed the need to spend a good long visit in Corinth, and in view of the problems in the church that he mentioned in this letter we can understand why.’

According to his writing to the Romans, he knew then that he would be travelling back to Judea before seeing the Roman brethren, [Romans 15:22-29](#). Each church may have had its own representative to carry the collected relief back to Judea, and Paul accompanied them on the trip, [Acts 20:4](#).

This verse gives us the current location of Paul as he writes 1 Corinthians and helps with dating the epistle. Paul had come to Ephesus on his third tour of preaching around 55 AD, [1 Corinthians 16:8](#) / [Acts 19:1-41](#).

The Passover feast, [1 Corinthians 16:8](#), occurred on the 14th day of the first month, [Leviticus 23:5](#). Between the Passover and Pentecost, 50 days after Passover, was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, [Leviticus 23:6](#).

The mention of Pentecost does not imply that Paul was keeping the Mosaic feast, but rather it was used as a benchmark of time. The statement reveals how near Paul was to visiting the brethren in Corinth and was sure to be encouraging to some.

A great door of opportunity to preach the Gospel was Paul's good hindrance from coming to the Corinthians sooner, [1 Corinthians 16:9](#) / [2 Corinthians 2:12](#) / [Colossians 4:3](#). A multitude of Asian brethren were obeying the gospel, and Paul wanted to remain as long as necessary, [Acts 19:10](#) / [Acts 19:26](#).

While Paul was preaching, he ran into troubles, adversaries, [1 Corinthians 16:9](#). Paul's encounter with Demetrius over his preaching against idolatry is one such case of adversaries he dealt with while in Ephesus, [Acts 19:23-41](#). There were times, while in Ephesus, that Paul feared for his life due to the intense persecution of adversaries, [2 Corinthians 1:8](#). It may be that Paul refers to his being thrown to the wild beast in Ephesus as Roman civil punishment, [1 Corinthians 15:32](#).

“When Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. No one, then, should treat him with contempt. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers.” 1 Corinthians 16:10-11

Paul had sent Timothy ahead of him to Corinth, 1 Corinthians 16:10 / 1 Corinthians 4:17. Erastus accompanied Timothy on this trip, Acts 19:22. At some point, Titus had been sent to Corinth as well and brought back a report to Paul, which prompted the second epistle to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 7:5-16.

At the introduction of 2 Corinthians 1:1, Timothy is apparently now with Paul in Macedonia, possibly Philippi. From these clues, it seems likely that Timothy never made it to Corinth, but Titus did.

Paul commands that ‘if’ Timothy makes it, he ‘be with you without fear’ and secondly no one is to ‘despise’ him, 1 Corinthians 16:10. The word ‘despise’, in Greek, is ‘exoutheneo’, and it means to treat with contempt and scorn, disregard.

Why would Paul write such a command in relation to Timothy? Paul’s writing to Timothy may give us a clue. Later, Paul would tell Timothy to ‘let no man despise thy youth’, 1 Timothy 4:12. As we take our minds back to the beginnings of this epistle and the reason for its writing, one may easily determine why Paul wrote this statement about Timothy.

1. Timothy was obviously very young. Such youth would be the reason for some not to give a serious ear to him.
2. The Corinthian brethren were guilty of many things and had false teachers among them.

Paul knew that these brethren had the capacity to abuse the young man and thereby gave his commendation, 1 Corinthians 16:11. Those of conviction would need to stand with this young man and not leave him to fight any doctrinal battles alone, 1 Timothy 4:12.

“Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity.” 1 Corinthians 16:12

The phrase, ‘unwilling to go’ indicates that the Corinthians had made it known to Paul that they would like to have Apollos come back to Corinth to visit them, 1 Corinthians 8:1.

Apollos had earlier been in Ephesus around 54 AD, Acts 18:24-19:1. Apollos may have been the one who hand-delivered the letters from the Corinthians to Paul, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:11 / 1 Corinthians 7:1.

It is likely that Paul intended for Apollos and ‘the brothers’ to hand-deliver the first epistle to the Corinthians; however, Apollos was not willing to do so at that time, 1 Corinthians 16:12.

Who ‘the brothers’ were that delivered the first epistle to the Corinthians is unknown. It is possible that ‘the brothers’ included Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, 1 Corinthians 16:17-18, as well as Titus, 2 Corinthians 7:7-15. When Paul received and read the Corinthian letters, he would have urged Apollos to return to Corinth; however, he had further work to do elsewhere.

FINAL EXHORTATIONS AND SALUTATIONS

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love.” 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

The word ‘guard’, 1 Corinthians 16:13, in Greek is ‘gregoreuo’, and it means to be awake, vigilant. The Corinthians, as well as all Christians, should be aware of their surroundings, 1 Corinthians 15:34.

1. False teachers, factions, and false practices were making inroads into the body of Christ, and thereby Paul tells them to ‘watch’, 1 Thessalonians 5:6.

Christians today need to open their eyes to church problems rather than putting them out of sight and out of mind.

2. Paul admonishes them to ‘stand fast in the faith,’ 1 Corinthians 16:13.

The words ‘stand fast’, in Greek, is ‘steko’, and it means to make a stand, set. The exact word is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:15. Rather than retreating in time of conflict, Paul admonishes the brethren to take a stand in the faith, Gospel truths, Colossians 2:5.

3. Paul admonishes the brethren to ‘be courageous’, 1 Corinthians 16:13.

This English phrase is represented by one word in Greek, ‘andrizomai’. ‘Andrizomai’ is to make a man of, to come to manhood, behave like a man. This is the only use of the Greek word in the New Testament.

Following the context of watching for enemies of truth, standing fast against them, and now the Christian is to take such a stand in a courageous, manly way. The workers of error are not weak but persistent, boisterous, and at times they are in the majority.

To stand against error takes a spirit of manliness, i.e., strength, conviction, resilience, and a willing spirit to defend the truth with courage, knowing that God is with you.

4. Paul encourages the Corinthians to be ‘strong,’ 1 Corinthians 16:13.

Let fears of the workers of Satan flee the Christian. Each Christian is to be filled with strength for the battle at hand. The picture is almost complete. The Christian is to be armed to the teeth with the Gospel message being driven forward by the hope of eternal salvation.

Ephesians 6:10-19 is a perfect commentary of 1 Corinthians 16:13. The victory belongs to those who put their trust in the Lord, 1 Corinthians 15:57-58 / 1 John 4:4 / 1 John 5:4.

Love completes our picture of Christian duty and responsibility in the face of sin in the church, 1 Corinthians 16:14. The aforementioned battle of faction and disunity in the church can only be battled correctly if love is the motivation. Just as Paul demanded love to be the motivation behind spiritual gifts, even so, he now explains that love must be the motive for every act of defending the truth. We are to care for the physical and spiritual well-being of brethren because we love their souls and for no other reason, 1 John 3:16 / 1 John 4:10-17.

Now we find that even in the battle against the ungodly influences of faction, disunity, and sin in general, the Christian’s every move is to be motivated by love. If there be any other motivations, such as envy, strife, or jealousy, it is not the work nor battle of the Lord’s.

“You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord’s people. I urge you, brothers and sisters, to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labours at it. I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.” 1 Corinthians 16:15-18

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Corinthians had a special problem with submission to authority, as we have seen. Many in the church wanted to do their own thing. 1 Corinthians 16:16-18 would have encouraged them to appreciate some less flashy servants of the Lord.’

Stephanas was mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:16, as having been baptised by Paul. Stephanas and his house were the ‘first converts of Achaia,’ 1 Corinthians 16:15. The KJV uses the word ‘firstfruits,’

Just as Jesus is the firstfruits of all mankind who will be resurrected to die no more, 1 Corinthians 15:20, even so Stephanas and his house were the first to obey the Gospel in this area, i.e., Achaia.

Stephanas and his house had ‘devoted themselves to minister unto the saints,’ 1 Corinthians 16:15. The word ‘devoted’, in Greek, is ‘tasso’, and it means to draw up in order of battle, to be appointed to a service.

This self-appointment of devotion indicates the willingness and zeal on the part of Stephanas and his house to pursue souls in the great battle with Satan by preaching the Gospel. Stephanas' work would be 'unto the saints', i.e., edifying and building them up to withstand Satan and his tools of worldliness.

Those who so devote themselves to preaching the Gospel are to be 'submitted' to, 1 Corinthians 16:16, just as the wife is subject to the husband, Ephesians 5:22, all are subject to civil government, Romans 13:1, the servant is to the master, Titus 2:9, and all Christians to each other, Ephesians 5:21.

Such submission is in the area of helping the work and the worker in any way that is needed, so that the Gospel message may be delivered to the lost, saints edified and that effective warfare may be waged against false teachers and their sympathisers. Apparently, as Paul is in Ephesus, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus come to Paul bringing him news of Corinth, 1 Corinthians 16:17.

It appears that these three men, along with Titus and possibly Apollos, comprise 'the brethren' Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 16:12, i.e., those who brought the two letters from Corinth to Paul, one from the house of Chloe, 1 Corinthians 1:11, and the letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7:1.

The 'refreshment', 1 Corinthians 16:18, that Paul received from these three could not have been in the activities of the church as a whole, since there were many active errors. There are, as I see it, three things that may have refreshed Paul's soul in relation to the Corinthians.

1. Paul was refreshed by simply hearing from the brethren he so loved, even though there were troubles.
2. Not all the Corinthian brethren were caught up in all these troubles. Many would have been doing all they could to unite the brethren in truth.
3. Paul may have been refreshed by the fact that the Corinthians were obviously concerned about their spiritual direction. Such concern was poured out in the two letters Paul received, and thereby, there was hope for all.

"The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. All the brothers and sisters here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss." 1 Corinthians 16:19-20

Note that Paul was not repulsed by the Corinthians, even though many were in sin. He was confident that their love of God, His truths, and promises of eternity would outweigh their love of this world. Here is a passage that helps us understand the relationship between churches in the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 16:19.

Churches were locally organised and autonomous; however, they had fellowship and communicated together in truth. The word 'churches' of Asia, 1 Corinthians 16:19, is a plural noun, i.e., more than one church, the seven churches of Asia revealed in the book of Revelation, Revelation 2-3.

Paul had established an active relationship with a multitude of churches in Asia, Acts 19:26. If these churches were to 'salute' the church in Corinth, there must have been communication between each other, i.e., a knowledge of each other.

The word 'salute', KJV, is the Greek word 'aspazomai', and it means to welcome, kindly bid welcome, or greet. New Testament churches were not isolationist, but rather they communicated with each other in truth. Here is fellowship defined in the realm of the erring.

Other churches were allowed by Paul to 'greet' or 'salute' the brethren in Corinth, even though they were guilty of a multitude of sins. No such greeting may be extended toward those who continue in said sins, 2 John 9-11.

1. Apparently, the fornicator of 1 Corinthians 5 was in a different situation than the brethren as a whole at Corinth. Though brethren were defrauding one another in the civil courts, 1 Corinthians 6:7, lacking love, 1 Corinthians 12:13, teaching false doctrines on the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15:12, and a multitude of other sins, they were apparently viewed in a different light than the unrepentant fornicator of 1 Corinthians 5.

If this is not so, how could Paul extend a ‘salutation’, [1 Corinthians 16:21](#), along with ‘all the brethren’, [1 Corinthians 16:20](#), to an unrepenting church? What was different from the sin of [1 Corinthians 5](#) and the others mentioned in this book? The difference must have been in their accepting the sinner as a whole congregation with tolerance rather than exposing his sins, [1 Corinthians 5:2](#).

2. It may be said that [1 Corinthians 5](#) would apply to every sinner mentioned in 1 Corinthians if there were no repentance.

I would conclude then that the fifth chapter serves as a benchmark chapter against all those who would persist in their sins without repentance and prayer for forgiveness.

They must not be ignored due to the fact that their souls are in jeopardy. Paul would not contradict the teachings of another apostle in this area, [2 John 9-11](#).

The two are clearly saying the same thing. Patience and longsuffering, i.e., the teaching of truth, must be applied to the erring before one is delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, [1 Corinthians 5:5](#). We must conclude then that Paul was sending salutations to the brethren as a whole.

They had transgressed in many areas; however, with proper teaching and attitude toward truth, they would exercise the discipline against the fornicator of [1 Corinthians 5](#), and root out all the other errors mentioned in this epistle if the need arises.

Included in those who saluted the Corinthian brethren were Aquila and Priscilla of Ephesus, [1 Corinthians 16:19](#). Paul first met these two faithful Christians in Corinth, [Acts 18:1-2](#) / [Acts 18:18-21](#) / [Romans 16:5](#).

THE HOLY KISS

How many times is the Holy Kiss mentioned in the scriptures? Besides this reference in [1 Corinthians 16:20](#), we find it also mentioned in [Romans 16:16](#) and [2 Corinthians 13:12](#). In these verses, the same words are used.

We also have it mentioned as a holy kiss in [1 Thessalonians 5:26](#), and described as a kiss of love in [1 Peter 5:14](#). And so, it is mentioned five times. But what is it that these verses teach?

1. We must remember that throughout Bible times, this was the customary, familiar mode of greeting.

We find it as early as [Genesis 27:27](#), when Isaac greeted Jacob. It was the manner in which family members greeted each other when they were either meeting or parting.

And we have an example of the degree of importance they attached to observing this custom, when we see how deeply offended they must have felt when he complained bitterly that Jacob and his family had slipped away secretly, without allowing him to bid his daughters and grand-daughters farewell, [Genesis 31:28](#).

2. Outside of the family relationship, it was the way in which men greeted men and women greeted women.

In [1 Samuel 10:1](#), the prophet Samuel kissed the young king Saul. [1 Samuel 20:41](#), when David had to flee from King Saul, he and Jonathan kissed in parting. This incident is sometimes used by homosexuals to justify their unnatural behaviour, but they use it because they are in grave ignorance of the familiar, long-established social customs of that time.

David kissed the aged Barzillai, who had helped him when he was a fugitive, being hunted by Absalom, [2 Samuel 19:39](#). This incident is also sometimes used by homosexuals to support their perversion, but they make such a claim because they are ignorant of the ancient Eastern social custom of that time. [Ruth 1:9](#) records that Ruth kissed her two daughters-in-law farewell after the deaths of her two sons.

3. But this ancient, familiar custom could hold hidden dangers, as we see in the account of the treachery of Joab, David's uncle, 2 Samuel 20:9.

Joab regarded Amasa as a rival for the then post of commander of David's army, and so, when the two met, Joab extended his right hand, apparently in friendship, and, according to ancient custom, he took hold of Amasa's beard, as though he was about to kiss him. But, with his left hand, he thrust a sword into Amasa. The deception worked because Joab was left-handed, and Amasa was caught by his treachery.

4. The kiss was also a familiar mode of greeting in New Testament times. Consider the following.

The father's greeting of the returning Prodigal, Luke 15:20. The kiss with which Judas betrayed Jesus, Matthew 26:48-49. The shame of the appalling action of Judas is revealed in the reproachful response of Jesus Himself, Luke 22:48.

After the establishment of the Church, the kiss was still used when friends were parting. When Paul met with the Elders of the Ephesian church who had come to meet him, knowing that this was to be their last meeting with him, they 'fell on his neck and kissed him', Acts 20:37.

5. Furthermore, this was the expected mode of greeting in the days of Jesus.

It was the traditional act of courtesy and welcome which expressed respect. Jesus rebuked Simon, the Pharisee, for failing to offer Him the kiss of welcome when he accepted the invitation to visit Simon's house, Luke 7:44-45. It must have been a particularly ungracious invitation!

6. In those days, it was not the custom to shake hands in greeting or parting. It would have been better for Amasa if they had!

Instead, the use of the kiss followed rules which had been set by custom. Family members and Friends would kiss on the cheek, or both cheeks, as in certain countries, even today, France, Russia, and Italy, e.g.

Young people would kiss the hand of an older person, whilst the older person would kiss the young person/s head or forehead. It is important to notice that whilst men greeted men, and women greeted women with a kiss, it was not the practice for men and women to greet each other in this way.

Obviously, the kiss as a token of love between men and women was also practised, as is shown in 'The Song of Songs', which is an Eastern love song, Song of Songs 1:2 / Song of Songs 8:1, but the kiss of greeting was something quite different and distinct, and free from any romantic associations.

7. The Holy kiss and the church.

History records that the early church continued to use this mode of greeting, as Paul's letter makes plain, so we understand that he is not introducing a new revelation or imposing a new practice on the church.

Justin Martyr, who was born about 100 A.D., and lived during the 2nd Century, when describing the Church's worship, wrote, 'Prayers being ended, we salute one another with a kiss, and then the bread and wine are brought to the president.' It is interesting to notice his use of the term 'president'. He merely describes the brother, usually an elder, who 'presided' at the Lord's Table.

The older congregations in the UK adopted that term and used it when they referred to the brother who 'presided' at the Lord's Table on the Lord's Day worship. Also worth noting is that.

1. The kiss was given during the service.

2. It is before the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

3. It was intended to show that those who met at the Lord's Table met in harmony and love.

So, this is what we have seen so far. The kiss was an Eastern mode of greeting of very great antiquity. It is found throughout Old Testament times and in the days of the Lord Jesus Himself.

Christians used it among themselves after the Church was established. In his letters, Paul commended it to the churches as the usual greeting of members of the Family, and he stresses the word 'holy', although he does not describe the kiss as something that has been expressly commanded by God. That is, he does not describe it as 'the holy kiss' in a way that would imply that it was a distinct ceremony or ritual.

My personal view is that if Paul were writing today, he would probably say, 'Greet each other with a warm handshake!' Let me stress his use of the word 'holy' because it indicates something pure and free from defilement.

There is nothing suggestive or promiscuous about the kiss of fellowship. It is 'hagios', holy, separated from sin and therefore consecrated to God. It is godlike in character.

Another early writer, Cyril of Jerusalem, who lived about 350 A.D., wrote, 'Do not think that this kiss is like the kiss given to each other by mutual friends in the marketplace.'

Historically, this mode of greeting continued for several centuries, as the last quotation reveals. There is evidence to show that it remained in the Western Church, that is, the church in the western part of the world, until about the 13th Century, and it remains in the Eastern Church up to the present time and is especially widely practised by congregations at so-called 'Easter-time' when it is described as 'the kiss of love'.

Why did it die out as a regular practice in Western Christianity? There may be several reasons.

1. There is the simple fact that the kiss, as a form of greeting, belongs to the East rather than to the West.

Here, as every woman knows, it is more usual to shake hands, and when you examine 'hand-shaking' closely, you see that it is a very significant gesture. There was a long period in our history when men wore sidearms.

They carried swords, and the practice of extending the right hand in greeting showed that the hand was empty; it carried no weapon, and this implied a friendly greeting.

Remember that the sword was usually carried on the man's left side, and was used in his right hand, the hand he extended in greeting. In those days, also, men would embrace each other in greeting and would kiss the hands of ladies.

2. Another plain fact is that the kiss of greeting fell out of use because it was clearly liable to abuse and could degenerate into something dangerous and harmful.

3. The enemies of the Church were always ready to seize on anything that might be construed as immoral or suggestive behaviour.

From Roman times, Christians were falsely accused of all kinds of excesses in their worship. The Lord's Supper was actually said to be a time when Christians 'ate human flesh and drank blood' by people who were not interested in learning what the Lord's Supper really is!

It is not difficult to see that those who spread such reports were capable of putting the wildest interpretation on the Christian's kiss of fellowship. It was to disprove and dispel such stories that the kiss was probably discontinued.

4. No doubt, also, the growth of the church and the size to which congregations grew would make it difficult to continue the practice.

There is no doubt that, although the number of Christians grew rapidly, they did not form the very large congregations that are seen in some places today. So long as the congregation remains within a manageable size, it is not difficult to maintain the intimate sense of ‘family’.

But the sad reality is that, here in the West, where size and number are regarded as desirable, it is not unusual to learn of congregations that are so large that the Shepherds do not know their sheep! And the sheep do not know each other!

Growth is fine, but we need to ensure that the close bond of family is not lost. I am not arguing either for or against very large congregations. I am merely pointing out that it is possible for a congregation to become so large that it loses its character as a family in which the members know and care for each other.

However, if the practice of greeting with the Holy Kiss has died out, the brotherly love created by the love of Christ Himself should never die. But, even if today we do not ‘greet one another with a holy kiss’, there should be other tokens of brotherhood. I believe that when we meet as a church, we should make an effort to greet as many of our brethren as possible.

I say, ‘make an effort’, because in most congregations, when the church meets for worship on the Lord’s Day, there are some members who never make a move to greet their brothers and sisters.

If you wish to greet them, you will find it necessary to go to them, because they will never make the effort to come to you. And it is not unusual for these brethren to complain that they ‘feel neglected’ in the church, or that they feel ‘left out’.

Well, just as it takes two to kiss, it takes two to be friendly. Fellowship is not a one-way street. As congregations, we need to make a greater effort to show ourselves interested in people.

When visitors and strangers attend our services, what do we do? Do we sit or stand around speaking to our special friends? Or do we realise that, as members of the Lord’s Body, it is both our responsibility and privilege to extend a welcoming hand to someone who may be finding it both unfamiliar and strange to be in our Service?

I am thankful that there are many friendly people in our congregations, but if it were to be left to others, visitors may well form a poor opinion of us! Be friendly! Make an effort.

It is not necessary to become involved in a theological discussion, much less an argument with visitors. Just remember that if at some time, someone had not made an effort to speak to you, you probably would not be in the church today.

The way in which brethren greeted each other in the early church was with a literal kiss, [Acts 20:36-38](#). Paul terms it a ‘holy kiss’ because it was distinguished from a kiss one might give as a display of affection toward a mate or one’s own children.

Paul uses the word ‘salute’ KJV, [1 Corinthians 16:10](#), and as we noted, it means to greet, welcome, or wish well. The context of the chapter indicates that this is not a general act of affection to those of the world but rather a symbol that illustrates one’s standing with God and fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Christian could not possibly greet, welcome into their fellowship, or wish one well who was lost in sin. If God does not receive one, how can we, [1 John 1:5-7](#)?

“I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed! Come, Lord! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.” 1 Corinthians 16:21-24

Note that Paul wrote this in his own hand, [1 Corinthians 16:21](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul customarily dictated his letters, and a secretary wrote them down, Romans 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, Galatians 6:11 / Colossians 4:18 / 2 Thessalonians 3:17. All of what follows is probably what he added.’

Interestingly, Paul does not use the Greek word ‘agape’ for love, but ‘phileo’ here, 1 Corinthians 16:22. The Greek word ‘phileo’ means to love, regard with affection, to treat affectionately or kindly, to welcome a guest.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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.’

Paul makes a clear statement regarding the one who has no affection toward Jesus Christ. Such a one is cursed to eternal damnation unless he changes. The ‘holy kiss’ of mutual brotherly affection and fellowship could not be extended to such a one because he or she does not share in that common affection for God.

Paul knows that the Corinthians will experience the grace of God through their obedience, 1 Corinthians 16:23 / Romans 5:1-4. He started by speaking about grace, 1 Corinthians 1:3, and ends by speaking about grace. The love of Paul was the love of souls, no matter where their residence may be, 1 Corinthians 16:24 / 2 Corinthians 11:28.

SUMMARY

1. Paul gives instructions regarding a collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.
2. He gives his projected itinerary.

Paul’s desire is to apparently supervise the final collection and send this money, with local church representatives, to Jerusalem and then head toward Rome, 1 Corinthians 16:6.

The reading of Romans 15:25-27, which was written approximately one year later than 1 Corinthians, indicates that Paul would have to go back to Jerusalem with the collected funds.

The encouragement is primarily found in 1 Corinthians 16:13-14. This fivefold admonition summarises the position Paul advocates for the faithful Christians at Corinth in light of all the current problems.

1. These brethren are commanded to ‘guard’ or be attentive to the errors around them and not to be deceived or misled by any, 1 Corinthians 15:33.
2. They are to ‘stand fast’ or take a stand against the error around them rather than being tolerant or even taking part in it, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.
3. Paul admonishes the brethren to be manly, i.e., courageous in this stand against error, 1 Corinthians 6:2-3.
4. The faithful Corinthians are to be ‘strong.’

The faithful Corinthians were to let the sword of God’s word be wielded in strength, 1 Corinthians 4:14-17.

5. Paul commands that all these efforts against error must be conducted with a spirit of ‘love.’

Love takes into consideration the betterment of man’s physical and spiritual well-being, 1 John 3:16-17 / 1 John 4:10-17. When those who are in error see your genuine concern for their souls, it may be that they will at least try to study with you about your differences.

Paul concludes the letter with admonitions of fellowship and greetings. One cannot help but note the tender affection that the early saints had for each other as we read this final chapter.

The churches of Jesus Christ in this first century obviously communicated with each other. They knew of each other's troubles, 1 Corinthians 16:1-18, and their faithfulness or lack thereof, 1 Corinthians 16:19.

This communication was not a universal organisation, yet a union together in truth. All faithful saints are united in truth and organised locally. For this, Paul could say, 'ALL the brethren salute (greet) you. Salute one another with a holy kiss,' 1 Corinthians 16:20.