

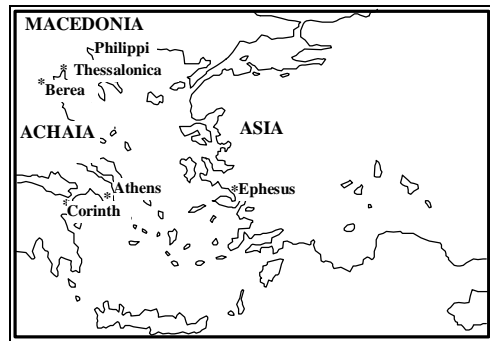
Notes on
1 Corinthians
2001 Edition
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Introduction

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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

The ancient city of Corinth enjoyed an ideal situation as a commercial center. It stood just southwest of the Isthmus of Corinth, the land bridge that connected Northern Greece and Southern Greece, the Peloponnesus. This site made Corinth a crossroads for trade by land, north and south, as well as by sea, east and west. In Paul's day large ships would transfer their cargoes to land vehicles that would cart them from the Corinthian Gulf to the Saronic Gulf, or vice versa. There stevedores would reload them onto other ships. If a ship was small enough, they would drag the whole vessel across the four and a half mile isthmus from one gulf to the other. This did away with the long voyage around the Peloponnesus. Later the Greeks cut a canal linking these two gulfs.²



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

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

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

²Nero began this canal, but it was finally completed in 1893. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 1.

³Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 2.

"The old city had been the most licentious city in Greece, and perhaps the most licentious city in the Empire."⁴

The most notorious shrine was the temple of Aphrodite that stood on top of an approximately 1,900 foot high mountain just south of the city, the Acrocorinthus. Hundreds of female slaves served the men who "worshipped" there.⁵ Other major deities honored in Corinth included Melicertes, the patron of seafarers, and Poseidon, the sea god.

"All of this evidence together suggests that Paul's Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world."⁶

There were several other local sites of importance to the student of 1 Corinthians. These included the *bema* (judgment seat or platform), the place where judges tried important cases including Paul's (Acts 18:12).⁷ Cenchrea, the port of Corinth on the Saronic Gulf of the Aegean Sea, was the town from which Paul set sail for Ephesus during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18). Isthmia was another little town east of Corinth, just north of Cenchrea, that hosted the Isthmian Games every two or three years. These athletic contests were important in the life of the Greeks, and Paul referred to them in this epistle (9:24-27).

Paul had arrived in Corinth first from Athens, which lay to the east. There he preached the gospel and planted a church. There, too, he met Priscilla and Aquila, Jews who had recently left Rome. After local Jewish officials expelled the church from the synagogue, it met in a large house next door that Titius Justus owned. Paul ministered in Corinth for 18 months, probably in 51 and 52 A.D. He left taking Priscilla and Aquila with him to Ephesus. Paul then proceeded on to Syrian Antioch by way of Caesarea.

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

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

⁴Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, p. xii.

⁵The Greek geographer Strabo wrote of 1,000 prostitutes, but this probably referred to the early history of the old city, and it may have been an exaggeration. See *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷See the diagram of central Corinth in Mare, p. 186.

pagan courts, and disorders in their church meetings. These factors led Paul to compose another letter, "1 Corinthians." In it he dealt with the problem of factions, promised to visit them soon, and said he was sending Timothy to Corinth (chs. 1—4). Paul added his responses to the Corinthians' questions to what he had already written. He dealt next with the oral reports (chs. 5—6) and then with the questions that the Corinthian believers had written to him (chs. 7—16). He evidently sent this epistle from Ephesus by trusted messengers in the late winter or early spring of 56 A.D. (cf. 16:8).

It seems that a conflict had developed between the Corinthian church and its founder. There was internal strife in the church, as the epistle makes clear. However the larger problem seems to have been that some in the community were leading the church into a view of things that was contrary to that of Paul. This resulted in a questioning of Paul's authority and his gospel. The key issue between Paul and the Corinthians was what it means to be "spiritual."⁸

"It [1 Corinthians] is not the fullest and clearest statement of Paul's Gospel; for this we must turn to Romans. Nor is it the letter that shows Paul's own heart most clearly, for in this respect it is surpassed by 2 Corinthians, and perhaps by other epistles too. But it has the great value of showing theology at work, theology being used as it was intended to be used, in the criticism and establishing of persons, institutions, practices, and ideas."⁹

Paul's Corinthian Contacts							
<i>Paul's founding visit</i>	His "former letter"	The Corinthians' letter to him	First Corinthians	<i>Paul's "painful visit"</i>	His "severe letter"	Second Corinthians	<i>Paul's anticipated visit</i>

MESSAGE¹⁰

A phrase in 1:2 suggests the theme of this great epistle. That phrase is "the church of God which is at Corinth." Two entities are in view in this phrase and these are the two entities with which the whole epistle deals. They are the church of God and the city of Corinth. The church of God is a community of people who share the life of God, are under the governing will of God, and cooperate in the work of God. The city of Corinth was ignorant of the life of God, governed by self-will, and antagonistic to the purposes of

⁸See Fee, pp. 4-15.

⁹Barrett, p. 26.

¹⁰Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:110-128.

God. These two entities stand in vivid contrast to one another and account for the conflict we find in this epistle.

The church of God in view in this epistle is not the universal church but the local church. These two churches are really not that different from one another. The local church is the micro form of the universal church. Moreover the universal church is the macro form of the local church. What is true of one is true of the other. Whatever we find in a local church exists on a larger scale in the universal church. Whatever we find in one local church exists in many local churches. Remember that the New Testament consistently speaks of the church as people, not buildings. The Apostle Paul addressed these people as believers because that is what they were. Today there may be quite a few unsaved people in a local church's membership. This was not the case in the first century. Believers composed local churches. They shared the life of God because the Holy Spirit indwelt them. They had submitted to God's rule over them to some extent. They were people whom God had commissioned to carry the gospel to every creature. We need to bear these things in mind as we read about the church of God in Corinth.

The city of Corinth is the other entity of primary importance in our grasping the major significance of this epistle. What characterizes the world generally marked Corinth. In the first century when other people described a person as a Corinthian they were implying that lust, lasciviousness, and luxury characterized that one. These were the marks of Corinth. Corinth as a city was ignorant of the true God, entirely self-governing as a Roman colony, and self-centered in her world. These traits marked the lives of individual unbelievers in Corinth as well. The city was going in the opposite direction from the direction God had called the church to go.

The atmosphere of this epistle is Paul's concept of the responsibilities of the church in the city. The apostle articulated this underlying emphasis in 1:9. Fellowship involves both privilege and responsibility. On the one hand, all God's resources are at our disposal. On the other hand, all our resources should be at His disposal as well. The church in any place has a debt to the people who live there to proclaim the gospel to them (Rom. 1:14-16). Paul wrote this whole letter out of an underlying sense of the church's responsibility for the city where it existed.

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

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

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

One of the symptoms of Corinthian cultural influence was intellectual freedom. There was much interest in intellectual speculation in Corinth as there was in its neighbor city of Athens. The phrase "Corinthian words" was a synonym for rhetoric in Paul's day. Corinth glorified human wisdom. The Corinthians discussed and debated all sorts of opinions. Each intellectual leader had his group of disciples. Discussion of every subject under the sun prevailed with great diversity of opinion. Unfortunately this spirit had invaded the church. There was a veneration of human wisdom among the Christians. They had chosen their own Christian leaders whom they followed as disciples (ch. 1). Intellectual restlessness prevailed in the church as well as in the city. The believers sampled Christian teaching as the general populace dabbled in philosophical argumentation. This extended to such fundamental doctrines as the Resurrection (ch. 15).

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

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

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

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

The Corinthians had also forgotten the central importance of the power of the resurrection of Christ. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in Christians to enable us to live morally pure lives. Immorality is not an option for the

believer. One of the most outstanding marks of a Christian should be purity. Because Jesus Christ was pure, we should be pure. Because He was pure, we can be pure.

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

One of the central revelations of this epistle then is that the church fails to fulfill her function in the city (i.e., culture) when the spirit of the city invades her. The church allows the spirit of the city to invade her when she forgets that God wants her to be unique. The church fails when it adopts the ideas and activities of its environment rather than those revealed for it in God's Word. In view of this, Paul constantly appealed to his readers to be what they were in reality. We are not the people we were. We are saints (1:2). We need to remember that and act accordingly. We do not need to catch the spirit of our age. We need to correct the spirit of our age. When the church catches the spirit of its age, it catches a disease and becomes anemic, weak, and sickly. We avoid catching this spirit by staying spiritually healthy and by constantly imbibing the message of the Cross. We do it by exercising the power of the Resurrection and by keeping others rather than self primary.

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

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

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

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

The power of the church is the Resurrection life of Christ (ch. 15). We presently live between two resurrections, the resurrection of Christ and our own resurrection. These resurrections are facts of history. One has already taken place, and the other is yet to come. Between these resurrections the church must fulfill its function in the world. The life that God has given to every believer is life that has power over death. One who overcame death has given it to us. This life is essentially different from what unbelievers

possess. It is eternal divine life. With such life we can face any enemy as we serve God. Even the final enemy, death, cannot hold us. It could not hold Him who gave us His life.

Not only must we appreciate the uniqueness of our life as a church to fulfill our function, but we must also fulfill our function by invading the city. Rather than allowing it to invade us, we must invade it to be successful.

We do this by proclaiming that Jesus is Lord. He is the only Lord. The proof of this is His resurrection.

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

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

The church always fails when it becomes conformed to the maxims, methods, and manners of the city—the world in which it lives. It always succeeds when it stands separate from the city and touches it with its supernatural healing life.

This epistle calls the church in every age to recognize its responsibility to its city. The church is responsible for the intellectual, moral, and social conditions in its city. Unfortunately many churches believe they exist merely to conserve the life of their members. We live in a cultural climate very similar to the one in which the Corinthian Christians lived. It is a culture characterized by intellectual pluralism, situation ethics, and personal selfishness. We face the same challenge the Corinthian believers did. Consequently what this epistle reveals is extremely relevant for us. We have responsibility for how people in our city think, how they behave, and whom they glorify. What they need is the message of the Cross delivered in the power of the Resurrection.

This letter is also a call to separation.

First, we must separate from absolute intellectual freedom and willingly submit our understanding and thinking to the revelation that God has given us in Scripture (chs. 1—4). There is a growing notion that all religions lead to God. Increasingly we hear that it does not matter too much what someone believes because we will all end up in the same place eventually. We need to counter that view with the revelation of the exclusive way of salvation that God has provided for people who are hopelessly lost and dead in their sins.

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

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

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

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

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

Third, the message of the church must ever be the message of the Cross and the Resurrection. It is a message of failure and success, of success out of failure. That is the message of hope the city needs to hear. Consequently we need to "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," because we know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord (15:58).

OUTLINE

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- II. Conditions reported to Paul 1:10—6:20
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- F. The resurrection of believers ch. 15
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Exposition

I. INTRODUCTION 1:1-9

A. SALUTATION 1:1-3

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

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

Sosthenes was probably the same Sosthenes who was the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:17). He was with Paul in Ephesus when Paul penned this epistle. Though Luke did not record his conversion in the Book of Acts, Sosthenes quite clearly became a believer, assuming this was the same man. Probably he was the same man, and Paul referred to him because the Corinthians knew him well.

1:2 Paul frequently referred to all the Christians in a particular locality as the church of God in that place (cf. 11:16). However to the Corinthian church, where party spirit was a problem, this reminder focused on the church's true Lord. There may or may not have been more than one house-church in Corinth at this time. God had set the Corinthians apart to be His holy people by uniting them with Him through faith in His Son. "Sanctified" may be a metaphor for conversion (cf. v. 30; 6:11). They were saints by divine calling. The Corinthians were not saintly in their conduct, as this letter makes clear. Perhaps Paul mentioned their saintly calling to inspire them to be more saintly in their conduct.¹¹

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

"Perhaps the single greatest theological contribution of our letter to the Christian faith is Paul's understanding of the nature of the church, especially in its local expression. If the gospel itself is at stake in the Corinthians' theology and

¹¹See Robert L. Saucy, "'Sinners' Who Are Forgiven or 'Saints' Who Sin?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):400-12, for discussion of the Christian's essential identity. He concluded that we are primarily saints who sin.

behavior, so also is its visible expression in the local community of redeemed people. The net result is more teaching on the church here than in any of Paul's letters."¹²

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

Calling on the name of Christ means to confess faith in Him, to worship and pray to Him (cf. Rom. 10:13-14).

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

B. THANKSGIVING 1:4-9

Paul followed his salutation with an expression of gratitude for his original readers, as he usually did in his epistles. In this case the focus of his thanksgiving was on God's grace in giving the Corinthians such great spiritual gifts (cf. Eph. 1:3-14).

"What is remarkable here is the apostle's ability to thank God for the very things in the church that, because of the abuses, are also causing him grief."¹³

- 1:4 Paul was grateful that God had poured out His unmerited favor and divine enablement on the Corinthian believers through Christ Jesus. He usually referred to the Lord as Christ Jesus rather than as Jesus Christ. This put the emphasis on His divine character as Messiah rather than on His human nature and encouraged his readers to submit to Him as their Lord.
- 1:5 By "speech" (NASB) or "speaking" (NIV; Gr. *logos*) the apostle meant eloquence, the ability to express their "knowledge" (Gr. *gnosis*) fluently and effectively. As we shall see, knowledge and eloquence were two things the Corinthians valued very highly.¹⁴ Paul had to put them in their

¹²Fee, pp. 17-18.

¹³Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁴These appear by their usage in this letter and in 2 Corinthians to have been common buzzwords in Corinth. *Logos* occurs 26 times in 1 and 2 Corinthians compared to 58 times in Paul's other epistles, and *gnosis* appears 16 times in these two epistles but only seven times in all of Paul's other writings.

proper place among the other gifts. Nevertheless they were great gifts, and Paul was thankful that God had given them to the Corinthians.

- 1:6 The Corinthians' reception of these gifts had corroborated the truthfulness of the gospel. Giving these gifts was one of the ways God validated the gospel message in the early history of the church (cf. Gal. 3:2-5; Heb. 2:3-4).
- 1:7 God had blessed the Corinthians greatly with spiritual gifts. The revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ to His saints at the Rapture would be God's greatest gift to them. The early Christians awaited His return eagerly.¹⁵
- 1:8 By God's sustaining power Christians will stand free of guilt before Him on that day. The day of the Lord Jesus Christ is the Rapture (cf. Phil. 1:6; Col. 2:7; 1 Thess 3:13; 5:23; et al.). It is not the day of the Lord, which is a term both Old and New Testament writers used to refer to the period beginning with the Tribulation and extending through the Millennium.

"The expression 'the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,' identified with 'the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (v. 7), is the period of blessing for the Church beginning with the rapture. This coming day is referred to as 'the day of the Lord Jesus' (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14), 'the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil 1:6), and 'the day of Christ' (Phil. 1:10; 2:16). ('The day of Christ' in 2 Th. 2:2 should be rendered 'the day of the Lord.') 'The day of Christ' in all six references in the N.T. is described as relating to the reward and blessing of the Church at the rapture and in contrast with the expression 'the day of the Lord' (cp. Isa. 2:12, marg.; Joel 1:15, *note*; Rev. 19:19, *note*), which is related to judgment upon unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, and blessing on millennial saints (Zeph. 3:8-20)."¹⁶

The Greek word translated "blameless" (*anegkletos*) means unreprouvable or without accusation (cf. Col. 1:22; 1 Tim. 3:10; Titus 1:6-7). It does not imply that at the judgment seat of Christ there will be complete equality among believers (cf. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). Moreover it does not mean that once God regenerates a person that one never sins again (cf. 1 John 1:6-10). It means every Christian will stand before the Lord guiltless, unimpeachable, because God has imputed the guilt of our sins to the Savior and He has borne them (cf. Rom. 5:1; 8:1).

¹⁵This is another indication that the apostles taught the imminent (i.e., any moment) return of the Lord for His own (cf. 4:5; 15:51-52; 16:22; Phil. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Thess. 3:10-12; Titus 2:13; James 5:7-9; 1 John 2:28; Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 17, 20). See Wayne A. Brindle, "Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:630 (April-June 2001):146-48.

¹⁶Note on 1 Cor. 1:8 in the *New Scofield Reference Bible*.

1:9 Paul's confidence that his readers would one day stand without guilt before the Lord did not rest on the Corinthians' ability to persevere faithfully to the end. It rested on God's ability and promises to preserve them. God had begun the good work of calling them into fellowship with His Son, and He would complete that work (cf. Phil. 1:6; 1 John 1:1-4).

". . . God is the subject of all the actions of the thanksgiving. And in every case that work is mediated by or focused on 'his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.' Thus the christological emphasis that began in the salutation is carried through in an even more emphatic way in this introductory thanksgiving. Everything God has done, and will do, for the Corinthians is done expressly in 'Jesus Christ our Lord.'

"His concern here is to redirect their focus—from themselves to God and Christ and from an over-realized eschatology to a healthy awareness of the glory that is still future."¹⁷

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

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

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

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

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

"Thus three phenomena must be reckoned with in attempting a theology of this Letter: (1) Behavioral issues (= ethical concerns) predominate. . . (2) Even though Paul is clearly after behavioral *change*, his greater concern is with the theological distortions that have allowed, or perhaps even promoted, their behavior. This alone accounts for the unusual nature of so

¹⁷Fee, p. 46. An over-realized eschatology is an understanding of the future that stresses present realities to the exclusion of related future realities. For example, an over-realized view of the resurrection emphasizes the believer's present spiritually resurrected condition to the exclusion of his or her future physical resurrection.

much of the argumentation. . . . (3) In every case but two (11:2-16; chaps. 12—14), Paul's basic theological appeal for right behavior is the work of Christ in their behalf."¹⁸

A. DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH 1:10—4:21

The first major problem was the divisions that were fragmenting the assembly.

". . . this opening issue is the most crucial in the letter, not because their 'quarrels' were the most significant error in the church, but because the nature of this particular strife had as its root cause their false theology, which had exchanged the theology of the cross for a false triumphalism that went beyond, or excluded, the cross."¹⁹

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

The surface manifestation of this serious problem was the party spirit that had developed. Members of the church were appreciating their favorite leaders too much and not appreciating the others enough. This was really a manifestation of self-exaltation. They boasted about their teachers of wisdom to boast about themselves.

1:10 By exhorting his readers in the name of their Lord Jesus Christ, Paul was putting what he was about to say on the highest level of authority. The Corinthians were to regard what he was about to say as coming from the Lord Himself.

"That the true source of the Corinthians' illicit behavior is bad theology—ultimately a misunderstanding of God and his ways—is evident from the beginning, especially with Paul's use of crucifixion language in 1:10—2:16."²⁰

There was already disagreement among members of the congregation, but there was not yet division in the sense of a church split. Paul urged his original readers to unite in their thinking. The Greek word *katartizo*, translated "made complete," describes the mending of nets in Mark 1:19. He wanted them to take the same view of things, to have the same mind (cf. Phil. 2:2), and to experience unanimity in their judgment of what they needed to do.

¹⁸Gordon D. Fee, "Toward a Theology of 1 Corinthians," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, pp. 38-39.

¹⁹Idem, *The First . . .*, p. 50. Triumphalism is the belief that Christians are triumphing now over sin and its consequences to the exclusion of persecution, suffering, and some human limitations. It is sometimes, and it was in Corinth, an evidence of an over-realized eschatology, which is that we have already entered into certain blessings of salvation that really lie ahead of us in the eschaton. Prosperity theology is one popular form of triumphalism.

²⁰Idem, "Toward a . . .," p. 41.

"The gospel that effects eschatological salvation also brings about a radical change in the way people live. This is the burden of this letter and the theological presupposition behind every imperative. Therefore, although apocalyptic-cosmological language is also found, salvation is expressed primarily in ethical-moral language.²¹

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

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

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

There is no scriptural record that Peter ever visited Corinth, though he may have. Cephas is the Hellenized form of the Aramaic *kepa*, meaning "rock" (cf. John 1:42). Since Peter was the leading apostle to the Jews, it is understandable that many of the early Christians, especially the Jewish believers, would have venerated him. A fourth group apparently professed loyalty to no human leader but boasted of their allegiance to Christ alone. They appear to have regarded themselves as the most spiritual element in the church. They had devised their own brand of spiritual elitism that made them no better than the others.

1:13 This last group was using Christ as the name of a party within the church. This cut Him off from the other members of the church. Such an idea was unthinkable, and by stating it Paul showed its absurdity.

Next Paul addressed his own supporters. How foolish it was to elevate him over Christ since Christ did what was most important. Note the central importance of the Cross in Paul's thinking. His followers had not submitted to baptism in water to identify with Paul but with the Savior. This reference shows how highly Paul regarded water baptism. It is God's specified way for the believer to identify publicly with his or her Lord (Matt. 28:19; cf. Acts 8:16; 19:5; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). It implies turning over allegiance to the one named in the rite.

²¹Ibid., p. 47.

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

"Gaius Titius Justus would be a complete Roman name (*praenomen, nomen gentile, cognomen*)."²²

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

1:15 Paul deliberately did not baptize 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.

1:16 The members of Stephanus' family were the first converts in the Roman province of Achaia (16:15). It was unimportant to Paul whom he personally baptized. This is clear because he temporarily forgot that he had baptized these people. As he continued to write, the Lord brought them to mind.

1:17 Obviously baptizing is part of the Great Commission that all Christians are responsible to carry out (Matt. 28:19). Paul's point was that preaching the gospel is more important than baptizing. He used a figure of speech, litotes, for emphasis.²³ He would hardly have said this if baptism was necessary for salvation.

"Cleverness of speech" (NASB) and "words of human wisdom" (NIV) greatly impressed the Greeks.

"The Greeks were intoxicated with fine words; and to them the Christian preacher with his blunt message seemed a crude and uncultured figure, to be laughed at and ridiculed rather than to be listened to and respected."²⁴

²²F. F. Bruce, ed., *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 34.

²³In litotes a writer makes a negative statement to emphasize the positive alternative. For example, "No small storm" (Acts 27:20), means a very large storm.

²⁴William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, p. 22.

One of the features of Paul, Apollos, Peter, and Christ that made them attractive to various segments of the Corinthian church was evidently their individual oratorical styles. Later Paul pointed out that the Corinthian Christians were viewing things through carnal eyes, namely seeing things as unsaved people do (3:1-4). Paul did not emphasize or place confidence in the method of his preaching but the message of the Cross. He did not want to draw attention away from the gospel message to his style of delivering that message.

"Paul represents himself as a preacher, not as an orator. Preaching is the proclamation of the cross; it is the cross that is the source of its power."²⁵

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

"With this observation Paul is fully launched on his epistle. As in Romans (cf. i. 16 ff.), mention of the Gospel sets his thought and language in motion."²⁶

The crux of the Corinthians' party spirit lay in their viewing things as unbelievers did, specifically Christian preachers and teachers. They failed to see the important issues at stake in ministry and instead paid too much attention to external superficial matters. This was a serious condition, so Paul invested many words in the following section to deal with it (1:18—4:21).

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

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

"There are . . . three particularly important expository passages in 1 Corinthians. They may be regarded as the letter's principal theological discourses and as such deserve special attention.

"These three key discourses deal, respectively, with the wisdom of the cross (1:18—2:16), the nature of Christian community (12:4—13:13), and the resurrection of the dead (chap. 15). In each instance Paul's reflections on the topic are deliberate and focused, and lead him to develop a more or less extended and coherent argument. Moreover, each of these passages

²⁵Barrett, p. 49.

²⁶Ibid.

occurs at an important point within the overall structure of the letter. The discourse on wisdom, situated prominently at the beginning of the letter, supports the apostle's urgent appeals for unity (1:10—4:21). It can be argued that the discourse on Christian community undergirds, directly or indirectly, all of the counsels and instructions in chaps. 8 through 14. And the discourse on resurrection, a response to those who claim that 'there is no resurrection of the dead' (15:12), is located prominently at the end of the letter."²⁷

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

"The apostle's thesis is registered first in 1:18 and then twice restated (in 1:21 and 1:23-24)."²⁸

Superficial displays of oratory that to them appeared to be demonstrations of wisdom impressed the Corinthian Christians excessively. Paul pointed out that the wisdom of God, the gospel of Christ, had power that mere worldly wisdom lacked.

The folly of a crucified Messiah 1:18-25

"This paragraph is crucial not only to the present argument (1:10—4:21) but to the entire letter as well. Indeed, it is one of the truly great moments in the apostle Paul. Here he argues, with OT support, that what God had always intended and had foretold in the prophets, he has now accomplished through the crucifixion: He has brought an end to human self-sufficiency as it is evidenced through human wisdom and devices."²⁹

1:18 The message (*logos*) of the Cross, in contrast to the speech (*logos*) of human wisdom (v. 17), has the Cross as its central theme. When people hear it, it produces opposite effects in those who are on the way to perdition and in those on the way to glory. Paul contrasted foolishness and weakness with wisdom and power (cf. Rom. 1:16).

"What would you think if a woman came to work wearing earrings stamped with an image of the mushroom cloud of the atomic bomb dropped over Hiroshima?

"What would you think of a church building adorned with a fresco of the massed graves at Auschwitz? . . .

²⁷Victor Paul Furnish, "Theology in 1 Corinthians," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 63.

²⁸Ibid., p. 65.

²⁹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 68.

"The same sort of shocking horror was associated with *cross* and *crucifixion* in the first century."³⁰

1:19 Paul's quotation of Isaiah 29:14 shows that it has always been God's method to show the folly of merely human wisdom.

1:20 The first three questions in this verse recall similar questions that Isaiah voiced when the Assyrians' plans to destroy Jerusalem fell through (Isa. 33:18; cf. Job 12:17; Isa. 19:12). Paul's references to the age (Gr. *aion*) and the world (*kosmos*) clarify that he was speaking of purely natural wisdom in contrast to the wisdom that God has revealed. God's wisdom centers on the Cross.

"In first-century Corinth, 'wisdom' was not understood to be practical skill in living under the fear of the Lord (as it frequently is in Proverbs), nor was it perceived to be some combination of intuition, insight, and people smarts (as it frequently is today in the West). Rather, wisdom was a public philosophy, a well-articulated world-view that made sense of life and ordered the choices, values, and priorities of those who adopted it. The 'wise man,' then, was someone who adopted and defended one of the many competing public world-views. Those who were 'wise' in this sense might have been Epicureans or Stoics or Sophists or Platonists, but they had this in common: they claimed to be able to 'make sense' out of life and death and the universe."³¹

1:21 Human reasoning does not enable people to get to know God nor does it deliver them from their sins. These benefits come only through the "foolishness" (in the eyes of the natural man) of the message preached (Gr. *kerygma*), namely the gospel. The true estimation of things, therefore, is that human reasoning is folly.

Paul was not saying that all the wisdom that unbelievers have produced is worthless. However in comparison with what the wisdom that God has revealed about Himself can accomplish human wisdom is of little value.

"Not every human knowledge about any given topic—physics or medicine, for instance—is under debate in our text (at least not primarily). Paul has something more specific in mind . . . Paul aims specifically at the human

³⁰D. A. Carson, *The Cross & Christian Ministry*, p. 12.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

wisdom *about God* as 'wisdom of the world,' at 'theo-logy'
as 'wisdom of the world.'"³²

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

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

". . . the 'Jews' and 'Greeks' here illustrate the basic idolatries of humanity. God must function as the all-powerful or the all-wise, but always in terms of our best interests—power in our behalf, wisdom like ours! For both the ultimate idolatry is that of insisting that God conform to our own prior views as to how 'the God who makes sense' ought to do things."³³

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

Paul used the terms "Greeks" (v. 22) and "Gentiles" (v. 23) interchangeably.

"It is hard for those in the christianized West, where the cross for almost nineteen centuries has been the primary symbol of the faith, to appreciate how utterly mad the message of a God who got himself crucified by his enemies must have seemed to the first-century Greek or Roman. But it is precisely the depth of this scandal and folly that we *must* appreciate if we are to understand both why the Corinthians were moving away from it toward wisdom and why it was well over a century before the cross appears among Christians as a symbol of their faith."³⁴

³²Peter Lampe, "Theological Wisdom and the 'Word About the Cross:' The Rhetorical Scheme in I Corinthians 1—4," *Interpretation* 44:2 (April 1990):120.

³³Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 74.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 76.

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

"This is Paul's most brilliant epigrammatic description of the world in which the Gospel is preached, and of the Gospel itself."³⁵

1:25 The "foolishness" of God, the gospel of the Cross, is wiser than human wisdom, and the "weakness" of God, in the eyes of unbelievers, is stronger than human strength.

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

³⁵Barrett, p. 54.

periphery is in danger of displacing the center, we are not far removed from idolatry."³⁶

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

"One can scarcely conceive a more important—and more difficult—passage for the church today than this one. It is difficult, for the very reason it was in Corinth. We simply cannot abide the scandal of God's doing things his way, without our help. And to do it by means of such weakness and folly! But we have often succeeded in blunting the scandal by symbol, or creed, or propositions. God will not be so easily tamed, and, freed from its shackles, the preaching of the cross alone has the power to set people free."³⁷

The folly of the Corinthian believers 1:26-31

Paul turned from the content of the gospel to the Corinthian believers to strengthen his argument that the gospel he preached contradicted human expectations. God had chosen "nobodies" rather than the "beautiful people" of Corinth. They themselves were evidence that God's "foolishness" confounds the wise. Jeremiah 9:23-24, with its emphasis on boasting in one proper thing or another improper thing, lies behind this pericope.

1:26 This verse reflects that there were few in the Corinthian assembly who came from the higher intellectual and influential levels of their society. This characteristic has marked most local churches throughout history.

1:27-28 The Old Testament is full of illustrations of God choosing less than promising material for His instruments. His method did not change with the coming of Christ nor has it changed since then.

"Things that are not" are things that are nothing. They are non-entities in the eyes of the world. The "things that are" are those things and individuals that the world values highly. Paul did not mean that God cannot or will not save the affluent, but the glory of the gospel is that God's mercy extends to those whom the affluent tend to write off.

1:29 God has chosen this method so the glory might be His and His alone. How wrong then to glorify His messengers! Glorifying here has the idea of putting one's full confidence in some inappropriate object to secure ourselves.

³⁶Carson, p. 26.

³⁷Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 77-78.

- 1:30 God is the source of the believer's life in Christ (cf. v. 2). Righteousness, sanctification, and redemption are metaphors of salvation, the result of the wisdom we find in Christ (cf. 6:11). Righteousness focuses on our right standing in the sight of God, sanctification on His making us more holy, and redemption on our liberation from sin.
- 1:31 This loose quotation from Jeremiah 9:24 summarizes Paul's point. Instead of emphasizing the Lord's servants and what they have done we should focus on what the Lord Himself has done in providing wisdom and power in Christ.

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

"The issue of election is particularly strong in 1 Corinthians. Paul opens the letter by affirming not only his call ('called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God') but also that of the Corinthians ('called to be saints,' 1:2). This conviction reappears in the final verse of the thanksgiving, functioning there as part of the ultimate ground for Paul's confidence (1:9): 'God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.' When the issue surfaces again a few verses later with renewed rhetorical emphasis (1:24, 26-30), it becomes clear that the concept of election or call no longer merely undergirds Paul's argument; it has instead become the focus of this argument. The Corinthians, it seems, have not grasped what election means."³⁸

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

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

"The matters of *literary context* and *the continuity of the argument* are all important in understanding I Corinthians 2. Otherwise, much of the chapter reads like pure gnosticism, and Paul is made the advocate of a private religion reserved for the spiritual elite (2:6-16)."³⁹

- 2:1 The apostle's preaching in Corinth was "not in excellence of rhetorical display or of philosophical subtlety."⁴⁰

³⁸Jouette M. Bassler, "Paul's Theology: Whence and Whither?" in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 15.

³⁹Charles B. Cousar, "Expository Articles: I Corinthians 2:1-13," *Interpretation* 44:2 (April 1990):169.

⁴⁰J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St Paul*, p. 170.

Some early texts have "mystery" (Gr. *mysterion*) instead of "testimony" (*martyrion*). The difference is not significant. The gospel was both the message God had previously not revealed that the apostles made known and the message to which they bore witness.

2:2 As far as his preaching went, Paul only spoke about Christ crucified. This was his regular practice (Gal. 3:1). He left all other knowledge aside.

"According to Acts xviii. 1 Paul moved on to Corinth from Athens, and it is often supposed that after an attempt to marry the Gospel to Greek philosophy in his Areopagus speech (Acts xvii. 22-31), which was attended with indifferent success (Acts xvii. 32 ff.), he determined to change his tactics and preach nothing but the cross.⁴¹ For this imaginative picture there is no evidence whatever."⁴²

". . . 1 Corinthians is more than a practical letter aimed at telling the readers what to do and what not to do. The letter in fact primarily seeks to influence the minds, dispositions, intuitions of the audience in line with the message Paul had initially preached in the community (2:2), to confront readers with the critical nature of God's saving action in the crucified Christ in such a fashion that it becomes the glasses to refocus their vision of God, their own community, and the future. The advancing of such an epistemology gives the letter a theological purpose that unifies its otherwise unconnected structure."⁴³

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

"What Paul avoided was artificial communication that won plaudits for the speaker but distracted from the message. Lazy preachers have no right to appeal to 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 to justify indolence in the study and careless delivery in the pulpit. These verses do not prohibit diligent preparation, passion, clear articulation, and persuasive presentation. Rather, they warn against any method that leads people to say, 'What a marvelous preacher!' rather than, 'What a marvelous Savior!'"⁴⁴

⁴¹E.g., Barclay, p. 26.

⁴²Barrett, p. 63.

⁴³Charles B. Cousar, "The Theological Task of 1 Corinthians," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 102.

⁴⁴Carson, p. 35.

2:3 The reason Paul felt weak, fearful, and trembling was probably his sense of personal inadequacy in the face of the spiritual needs he faced when he entered Corinth (cf. Acts 18:9-10).

"If this was epilepsy, or malarial fever (Ramsay), it might well be the recurrent trouble which he calls a 'thorn for the flesh' (2 Cor. xii. 7)."⁴⁵

2:4 Paul did not design his content ("message," *logos*) and or his delivery ("preaching," *kerygma*) to impress his hearers with his eloquence or wisdom. Rather he emphasized the simple message he announced. Conviction came as a result of the Holy Spirit's power, not the "wisdom" of the preacher. We should not interpret this verse as deprecating persuasion but as a warning that conviction does not come as a result of persuasive arguments. It comes as the Holy Spirit opens blind eyes when we herald the gospel. The warning is against self-reliance in the preacher.

"Mere human *sophia* may dazzle and overwhelm and seem to be unanswerable, but . . . it does not penetrate to those depths of the soul which are the seat of the decisions of a lifetime."⁴⁶

"It is possible for arguments to be logically irrefutable, yet totally unconvincing."⁴⁷

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

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

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

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

Paul constructed his argument in this section with three contrasts that overlap slightly. The first contrast is between those who receive God's wisdom and those who do not (vv.

⁴⁵Robertson and Plummer, p. 31.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 33.

⁴⁷Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 52.

6-10a), and the second one is the Spirit of God and the spirit of the world (vv. 10b-13). The third contrast is the "natural" person and the "spiritual" person (vv. 14-16).⁴⁸

"Paul is not here rebuilding what he has just torn down. He is retooling their understanding of the Spirit and spirituality, in order that they might perceive the truth of what he has been arguing to this point.

"While it is true that much of the *language* of this paragraph is not common to Paul, the explanation of this phenomenon is, as before, to be found in his using *their* language but filling it with his own content and thus refuting them. The theology, however, is his own, and it differs radically from theirs. . . . Paul's concern throughout is to get the Corinthians to understand who they are—in terms of the cross—and to stop acting as non-Spirit people."⁴⁹

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

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

"All Christians are 'mature' in the sense that they have come to terms with the message of the cross, while all others, by definition, have not."⁵⁰

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

The deep things of God require a type of wisdom that is different from secular wisdom. Presently those who control the climate of public opinion dominate secular wisdom. These rulers are those individuals who set the standard of what people who disregard God's revelation consider as true (cf. 1:20, 26), particularly those who were responsible for Jesus' crucifixion (v. 8). However these people are on the way out because the popular perception of what is true changes and because Christ will end their rule eventually (15:24-25; Col. 2:15).

⁴⁸Carson, pp. 46, 52, 56.

⁴⁹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 100.

⁵⁰Carson, p. 47.

2:7 The wisdom Paul proclaimed was wisdom that God had not revealed previously. It was not a revelation in addition to the gospel. The message about Christ crucified embodies the wisdom of God. This message was unknown before Christ came. The message of the Cross is a further unfolding of God's plan and purpose beyond what He had revealed and what people had known previously.

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

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

2:8 The rulers of this age are probably the intellectual trend-setters Paul mentioned above (v. 7). Those responsible for the death of Christ were members of this group (cf. Acts 3:17-18; 4:25-28). If they had understood the central place that Jesus Christ occupied in God's plan, they would not have crucified Him thus assuring their own doom (cf. Luke 23:34).

"The key [to this section of Paul's argument] is verse 8. The rulers of this age (whether understood as political and religious figures or as apocalyptic powers) demonstrated their ignorance of divine wisdom when they crucified the Lord of glory. The very mention of the crucifixion shows the argument very much in continuity with the preceding section and reminds us that the wisdom of God, which is incomprehensible to the world, is nothing other than the word of the cross (1:23-24)."⁵¹

The phrase "Lord of glory" implies the divine fullness. It also ties in with the saints' glory (v. 7). It is through union with Him that we will experience glory.

2:9 The source of this quotation is evidently Isaiah 64:4 and 65:17. It summarizes Paul's point well. There are many things we can know only by revelation. The more God reveals the more clearly we see that He has designed His plans for humanity for our blessing.

"Paul's thought is that there is no method of apprehension open to man (eyes, ears, or understanding) which can give him any idea of the wonderful things that God has made ready for *them that love him* (cf. Rom. viii. 28)."⁵²

⁵¹Cousar, "Expository Articles . . .", p. 171.

⁵²Morris, p. 57.

2:10 The wonderful mysteries God has prepared for those who love Him are not knowable only by a select group of Christians. Any and every believer can understand and appreciate them because the indwelling Holy Spirit can enlighten us. The mystery religions of Greece promised deeper insights and new knowledge to their devotees. However any Christian can apprehend the very best that God has revealed because we all possess the spiritual organ of perception, namely the Holy Spirit. "Searches" (Gr. *ereuna*) means continually examines.

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

"They considered Paul's preaching to be 'milk'; on the contrary, he implies, redemption through the cross comes from the profound depths of God's own wisdom, which his Spirit, given to those who love him, has searched out and revealed to us."⁵³

2:11 It is necessary for someone to be a human being to understand things having to do with human life. Likewise it is necessary for someone to have the indwelling Spirit of God to understand the things of God.

2:12 "We" is emphatic in the Greek text. All believers have received the Holy Spirit (12:13; Rom. 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.

". . . as a man's own spirit best understands his inner thoughts, so the Spirit of God alone can grasp divine truths (verse 11), and alone can interpret to those within whom he dwells 'the things that are freely given to us by God' (RV)."⁵⁴

2:13 Paul and the other apostles spoke the truths that the Holy Spirit had helped them understand (cf. vv. 6-7). They did not choose their words because of what people generally regarded as the best ones to persuade. They did not rely on the rhetorical forms that the orators used either. The Holy Spirit guided them in their communication of divine truth as well as in their perception of it. Spiritual thoughts or truths are concepts the Holy Spirit

⁵³Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 110, 111.

⁵⁴Bruce, p. 40.

enables us to understand. Spiritual words are those He guides us to use in expressing these thoughts. The Spirit enables us to speak in language appropriate to the message rather than with human wisdom. In short, the Holy Spirit plays an indispensable role both in our understanding and in our communicating God's revelation.

2:14 The natural man is any person who does not possess the Holy Spirit, namely unbelievers.⁵⁵ Every human being is a natural man until he or she trusts Christ and receives the Spirit. Paul called this person a natural (Gr. *psychikos*) man because he or she is only natural. He has no supernatural Person indwelling him, and his viewpoints and ideas are only what is natural. He cannot accept all that God has revealed because he does not possess the indwelling Spirit of God.

The natural person can, of course, understand the gospel and experience salvation but only because the Holy Spirit illuminates his or her understanding. Paul did not mean that an unbeliever is incapable of understanding Scripture. However an unbeliever rejects and does not *accept* all that God wants him or her to have. One of these things is eternal life through faith in His Son. It is as though God is speaking in a language that the unbeliever does not understand. He or she needs an interpreter. That is a ministry that only the Holy Spirit can perform.⁵⁶

"It will help us to think clearly about this issue if we recognize that 1 Corinthians 2 is not concerned with the mechanics of how people understand their Bibles generally, or with the quality of a particular scholar's exegesis of some specific Hebrew text. . . . His focus is the fundamental message of the crucified Messiah. And this, he insists, is fundamentally incomprehensible to the mind without the Spirit."⁵⁷

2:15 In contrast to the natural man stands the spiritual (Gr. *pneumatikos*) man. He or she is a natural man who now has the Holy Spirit dwelling within. Consequently he or she is a different person and has a different outlook.

One of the things the spiritual person is able to do is appraise or make judgments (Gr. *anakrino*) regarding all things. In other words, the spiritual man looks at everything somewhat differently than the natural man because he has spiritual perception. This affects his values and decisions. For this very reason he is a puzzle to the natural man. The profane person cannot understand holiness, but the holy person can understand the depths

⁵⁵See Barrett, p. 77.

⁵⁶See Robert A. Pyne, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Conversion," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:598 (April-June 1993):204-5.

⁵⁷Carson, p. 64.

of evil. Even carnal fellow believers cannot fully understand the spiritual person. That is all right because the spiritual person's judge is ultimately God, not other people.⁵⁸

This verse is not saying believers are responsible only to God but that the Christian is answerable to God alone ultimately (cf. 4:3-4). Paul recognized the value of church discipline (5:3-8), constructive criticism (11:17-18), and self-judgment (11:31) as having immediate value.

2:16 To summarize his thought Paul again cited Isaiah (40:13; cf. Rom. 11:34). That prophet marveled at the mind of God. Who can fully understand what God understands? Certainly no one can. On the other hand, believers can understand to a much greater degree than unbelievers can because we have the Spirit of God in us. Since we have Him, we have the mind of Christ. That is, we view life to some extent as Jesus did because we understand things from God's perspective at least partially.

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

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

The basic theological point of tension between Paul and the Corinthians in this epistle was over what it means to be *pneumatikos*, a Spirit person. Because of their experience of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) they considered themselves to be "as the angels" and in need only of shedding their bodies. The sources of this distorted view were popular philosophy tainted with Hellenistic dualism.⁵⁹ The result was a "spirituality" and "higher wisdom" that had little connection with ethical behavior.⁶⁰

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

"Paul's concern needs to be resurrected throughout the church. The gift of the Spirit does not lead to special status among believers; rather, it leads to special status vis-à-vis the world. But it should do so always in terms of

⁵⁸See Charles C. Ryrie, "What Is Spirituality?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126:503 (July-September 1969):204-13, or idem, *Balancing the Christian Life*, pp. 12-23.

⁵⁹Hellenistic dualism viewed anything material as evil and anything non-material or "spiritual" as good.

⁶⁰Fee, "Toward a . . .," pp. 37-38.

the centrality of the message of our crucified/risen Savior. The Spirit should identify God's people in such a way that their values and worldview are radically different from the wisdom of this age."⁶¹

4. The spiritual yet carnal condition 3:1-4

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

3:1 Here Paul introduced a third category of humanity, namely the "fleshly" (Gr. *sarkinos*) or "worldly" (NIV) man. The Corinthians were spiritual rather than natural because they possessed the Holy Spirit. Notwithstanding Paul said he could not speak to them as spiritual men. He explained the reason in verse 3. Instead he had to address them as fleshly people, even as babes in Christ. The fleshly believer then is an immature Christian. Immaturity is not blameworthy if one is very young. However if a person has been a Christian for some time and is still immature, his or her condition is blameworthy (cf. 2:6). Such was the condition of the Corinthians.

3:2 When Paul had been with them they were new converts, so he gave them the milk of the Word, the ABCs of the faith (cf. 1 Pet. 2:2). Now when they should have been able to take in more advanced teaching they were not able to do so (cf. Heb. 5:11-14). Their party spirit was one evidence of spiritual immaturity, lack of growth. Their fundamental need was not a change of diet but a change of perspective.

Paul's use of the vocative ("brothers [and sisters]") and second person plural pronouns in verses 1 and 2 indicates that he was addressing the whole church, not just a faction within it (cf. 1:10). The actions of many in the congregation had defiled the whole body.⁶²

3:3 The reason Paul did not feel he should give them more advanced instruction was that their flesh (Gr. *sarkikos*) still dominated them. As believers they were making provision for the flesh to fulfill its desires rather than following the leading of the Holy Spirit. They were not only immature believers but also carnal Christians. The carnal believer is the fourth type of person Paul mentioned in 2:14—3:4.⁶³

⁶¹Idem, *The First . . .*, p. 120.

⁶²Ibid., p. 123.

⁶³See Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Spiritual Man," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:498 (April-June 1968):139-46, for fuller exposition of the four-man view. Lewis S. Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, pp. 3-14, saw only three kinds of people here: the natural man, the carnal man, and the spiritual man. John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works*, p. 126, saw only two, "the unsaved person and the Christian."

Paul let the Corinthians diagnose themselves. Are not jealousy and strife the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20)? Did these qualities not indicate that they were conducting themselves as unbelievers, as people who do not even possess the Holy Spirit?⁶⁴

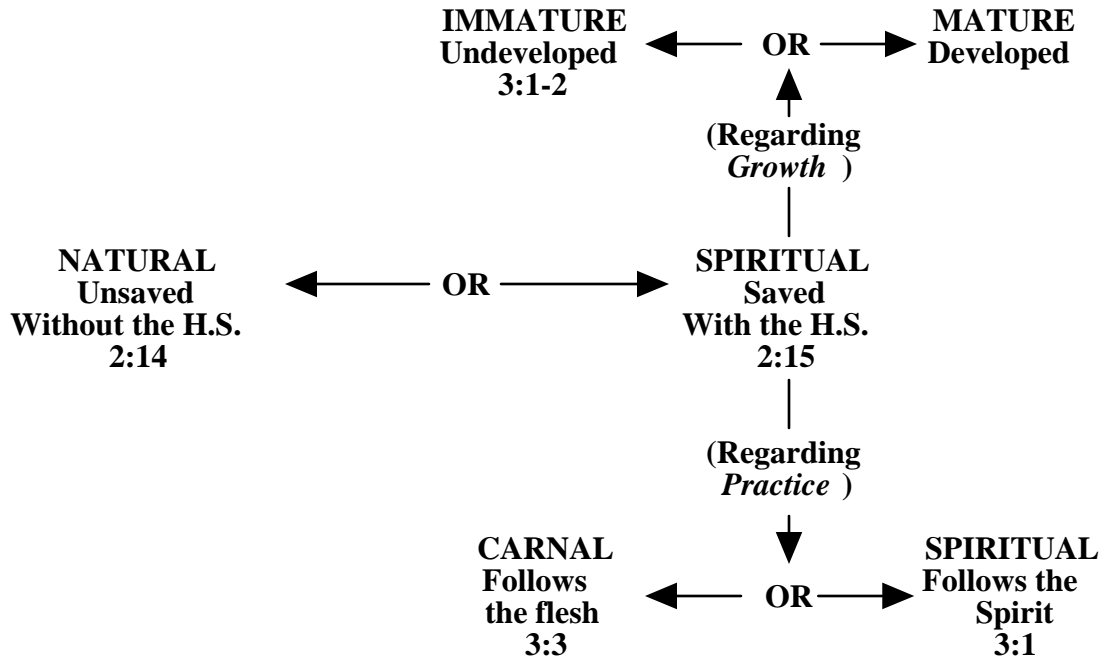
"Being human is not a bad thing in itself, any more than being *sarkinoi* is (v. 1). What is intolerable is to have received the Spirit, which makes one more than merely human, and to continue to live as though one were nothing more."⁶⁵

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

This section of verses makes it very clear that it is possible for genuine Christians to behave as and to appear to be unbelievers. 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.

⁶⁴For an excellent discussion of carnal believers, see Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 311-31.

⁶⁵Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 127.



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

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

"At issue is their radically misguided perception of the nature of the church and its leadership, in this case especially the role of the teachers."⁶⁶

Fellow workers under God 3:5-9

"Besides evidencing a misapprehension of the gospel itself, the Corinthians' slogans bespeak a totally inadequate perception of the church and its ministry."⁶⁷

3:5 Paul, Apollos, and, of course, Cephas were only servants of Christ each serving in his own way and sphere of opportunity under the Master's direction.

3:6-8 Obviously God deserved more credit for the church in Corinth than either its planter or its nurturer. Next to Him the others were nothing. Human laborers are all equal in that they are human laborers with human limitations. Nevertheless the Lord will reward each one at the judgment seat of Christ because of his or her work. Note that it is our labor that will be the basis of our reward, not the fruit of our labor.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 128.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 129.

3:9 Paul and Apollos were fellow workers *for* God. Elsewhere Paul spoke of believers as fellow workers *with* God (2 Cor. 6:1), but that was not his point here. The Corinthians were the field in view in the preceding illustration (vv. 6-8). Paul now compared them to a building. He proceeded to develop this illustration in the following verses (vv. 10-17). This verse is transitional.

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

"Everything is God's—the church, its ministry, Paul, Apollos—everything. Therefore, it is absolutely not permissible to say 'I belong to Paul,' since the only legitimate 'slogan' is 'we all belong to God.'"⁶⁸

"A sermon on our text [3:1-9] would focus on the attitudes of preachers and congregations about one another as they relate to the gospel of the cross. Peruse this brief sermon sketch:

"I belong to Paul.' 'I belong to Apollos.' Familiar cries in a world of hi-tech religion. See huge Sunday crowds squint under the glare of spotlights as 'their' preachers dazzle millions of electronic viewers with wisdom and rhetorical charm. Overhear the Christian public admire TV evangelists and big-time clergy: 'Oh, I like to listen to ____.' 'Well, he's O.K. but I like ____ better.' You fill in the blanks. Yes, everyone has their favorite preacher nowadays. In spite of all the notorious hucksters, 'preacher religion' is in. The result? An increasingly fragmented church. 'I belong to Paul and you don't.' It is enough to make Corinth look tame by comparison."⁶⁹

Builders of God's temple 3:10-15

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

"By laying the foundation he did—Jesus Christ and him crucified—he was the truly 'wise' master-builder in contrast to the 'wise' in Corinth, who are building the church of

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 134.

⁶⁹C. Thomas Rhyne, "Expository Articles: I Corinthians 3:1-9," *Interpretation* 44:2 (April 1990):177.

totally incongenial materials and are therefore in danger of attempting to lay another foundation as well."⁷⁰

- 3:11 Christ Himself is the foundation of the church (Matt. 16:18; cf. Isa. 28:16; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:6). Basing a church on the work of any other person, even Peter, is improper. Paul laid the foundation for the church in Corinth when he preached Christ and Him crucified there. The apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church in a secondary sense only (Eph. 2:20).⁷¹
- 3:12-13 Even though the quality of the foundation was the best, the condition of the building also depended on what others built on top of the foundation. In Paul's day contractors built buildings of durable and or combustible materials, as they do today. In the building of the Corinthian church durable materials were those activities that sprang from reliance on Christ and Him crucified, the foundation. These works contributed to the permanent spiritual strengthening of the believers. The combustible materials were activities that arose out of human "wisdom" in all its forms. These made no lasting contribution though they may have served some temporary need. Examples of the former include instruction in the Word of God, training in evangelism, and the refutation of error. Illustrations of the latter would be the teaching of popular ideas not rooted in Scripture, social work that excluded the gospel message, and the use of time and money for simply temporal purposes. However, Paul's main concern in this metaphor was those doing the building rather than the building itself.

"The six materials in 1 Cor 3:12 are arranged to denote a descending scale by moving from a unit of three good qualities to a unit of three bad ones. The verse uses pictures to represent what Paul calls 'work' in vv 13 and 14. Paul's main point is to encourage building with quality materials that will meet with God's approval and receive eternal reward. Interpreters sometimes restrict the meaning of the symbols either to doctrine, to people, to activity, or to character. The [proper] conclusion is that Paul in the symbols combines several things that lead to Christ's good pleasure and a believer's reward. These are sound doctrine, activity, motives and character in Christian service."⁷²

God will expose the work of each of God's servants on "the day." 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 (cf.

⁷⁰Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 138.

⁷¹See Barrett, pp. 87-88.

⁷²James E. Rosscup, "A New Look at 1 Corinthians 3:12—'Gold, Silver, Precious Stones,'" *Master's Seminary Journal* 1:1 (Spring 1990):33.

Luke 19:11-27; 1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8; Rev. 22:12; et al.).⁷³ Then the fire of God's judgment will test the quality of each person's work and his workmanship, but not his person. The durability or transience of those works will then become apparent.

3:14-15 If the servant of the Lord has made a lasting contribution to the building of the church by emphasizing the gospel, he or she will receive a reward. If someone has not because he or she has pursued human "wisdom," that person will not, though he or she will retain his or her salvation. Paul likened the unfaithful servant to a man pulled to safety through the flames of his burning house (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27). The context identifies those who suffer loss as being Christians who seek to build the church with materials that fail to withstand God's assessment. They do not refer to all carnal Christians (vv. 1-4), though carnal Christians may fail to make lasting contributions to the church.⁷⁴

The rewards in view seem to be opportunities to glorify God by serving Him (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27). The Christian will have greater or lesser opportunities to do so during the Millennium and forever in proportion to his or her faithfulness on earth now.⁷⁵ The New Testament writers spoke of these rewards symbolically as crowns elsewhere (cf. 9:25; Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10; 3:11). It is perfectly proper to serve Christ to gain a crown. We will one day lay it at the feet of our Savior. It is a symbol of a life of faithful service that we performed out of gratitude for His grace to us (cf. Rev. 4:4, 10).⁷⁶

The testing in view here provides no support for the unbiblical doctrine of purgatory. It is the believer's works that God subjects to the fires of testing, not the believer personally. God applies the fire to determine the quality of the works, not to purify the believer.

"[The] whole subject of rewards for the believer is one, I am afraid, rarely thought of by the ordinary Christian, or even the average student of the Scriptures. But it is both a

⁷³See Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*, pp. 31-37; Arlen L. Chitwood, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, p. 10.

⁷⁴Cf. Carson, pp. 79-80. John Proctor, "Fire in God's House: Influence of Malachi 3 in the NT," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:1 (March 1993):9-14, suggested that Malachi 3:2-3 may have been in Paul's mind when he wrote verse 15. However, Malachi predicted a future cleansing of Israel whereas Paul spoke of a future testing of Christians.

⁷⁵See Wall, pp. 112-21, for an explanation of the negative judgment at the *bema*.

⁷⁶If the idea of serving God for a reward makes you uncomfortable, may I suggest that you read again the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5—7)? There Jesus repeatedly appealed to His hearers to follow His teaching with the prospect of receiving an eternal reward for doing so. For a helpful introduction to the study of the Christian's rewards, see Wall, or Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*.

joyous and solemn theme and should serve as a potent incentive for holiness of life."⁷⁷

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

"Though not the only motivating factor, I am convinced that the doctrine of the judgment seat (*bema*) is meant to be one of the major scriptural motivations for godly living."⁷⁸

"It is unfortunately possible for people to attempt to build the church out of every imaginable human system predicated on merely worldly wisdom, be it philosophy, 'pop' psychology, managerial techniques, relational 'good feelings,' or what have you. But at the final judgment, all such building (and perhaps countless other forms, where systems have become more important than the gospel itself) will be shown for what it is: something merely human, with no character of Christ or his gospel in it."⁷⁹

A warning against destroying the church 3:16-17

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

3:16 The Corinthian church was a temple that God's Spirit indwelt. Paul was not speaking here of individual believers being temples of God, though we are (6:19), nor of the church universal as the temple of God, though it is (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5). He meant the collective body of believers that made up the local church as is clear from his use of the plural "you" in the Greek text and the singular "temple." The local congregation was not just any building (v. 9) but a sanctuary (Gr. *naos*) that God inhabited. The presence of the Spirit alone marked them off as God's sanctuary in Corinth.

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

⁷⁷Wilbur Smith, "Inheritance and Reward in Heaven," *Eternity*, March 1977, p. 79.

⁷⁸Wall, pp. 19, 21.

⁷⁹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 145.

3:17 If any servant of the Lord tears down the church instead of building it up, God will tear him or her down (Acts 9:1-4). He usually does this by sending temporal discipline in one form or another (cf. 5:5). The Greek word translated "destroys" (*phtheiro*) also means "defiles." It is a very serious thing to destroy or defile a holy temple, and that is what the local church is. In the ancient world destroying a temple was a capital offense. The church is holy in that God has set it aside to glorify Himself even though it is not always as holy in its conduct as it is in its calling.⁸⁰

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

". . . this is one of the few texts in the NT where we are exposed both to an understanding of the nature of the local church (God's temple indwelt by his Spirit) and where the warning of v. 17 makes it clear how important the local church is to God himself."⁸¹

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

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

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

3:19-20 Again Paul used Old Testament quotations to give added authority to his thought (cf. 1:19, 31; 2:9, 16). Here he referred to Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11. The best wisdom the natural man can produce is foolishness compared with the wisdom God has revealed in His Word. Unbelieving humanity cannot avoid God's judgment through its own rationalizing. The reasoning of the wise of this world is useless regarding the most important issues of life. In 1:18-25 Paul had said that the wisdom of God, namely Christ crucified, is foolishness to the world. Here he made the same point in reverse: the wisdom of the world is foolishness in God's sight.

⁸⁰Brian S. Rosner, "Temple and Holiness in 1 Corinthians 5," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42 (1991):137-45, argued convincingly that verses 16 and 17 anticipate the discussion of church discipline in 5:1-13.

⁸¹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 149.

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

3:22 All of God's servants were God's gifts to them. The world (Gr. *kosmos*, universe) belongs to the Christian in the sense that we will inherit it and reign over it with Christ one day. Life and all it holds contains much blessing for us. Even death is a good gift because it will usher us into the presence of our Savior. This list is similar to the one in Romans 8:38-39 and, as there, is a way of saying "everything." The figure of speech is a merism.⁸²

"The five things . . . represent the fundamental tyrannies of human life, the things that enslave us, the things that hold us in bondage."⁸³

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

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

"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."⁸⁴

7. The Corinthians' relationship with Paul 4:1-21

The apostle now returned to the subject of himself and the other teachers of the Corinthians as servants of God. He did so to say more about what it means to be a servant of God. In this section he clarified the essential features of an acceptable servant of God. He did this so his readers would appreciate them all more and so they would follow Paul's example as a servant themselves. However, Paul stressed his authority too since the factions in the church that favored Apollos, Peter, or Christ really opposed Paul.

⁸²In a merism two objects that are poles apart stand for everything between them.

⁸³Carson, p. 86.

⁸⁴Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 155.

"Throughout 1 Corinthians 1—4 Paul is primarily concerned to address the factionalism that was tearing the church apart with squabbles, jealousy, and one-upmanship. But because not a little of this quarreling arose from the habit of different groups in the church associating themselves with various well-known Christian leaders ('I follow Paul,' . . .), Paul found it necessary to address several Corinthian misconceptions regarding the nature of genuine Christian leadership. These believers were adopting too many models from their surrounding world."⁸⁵

"What Paul is trying to do above all else is to get the Corinthians to enter his orbit, to see things from his eschatological perspective. Therefore, it is not simply a matter of his being right and their being wrong on certain specific issues. It has to do with one's whole existence, one's whole way of looking at life, since 'you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.'"⁸⁶

Judging God's servants 4:1-5

"The first paragraph (vv. 1-5) leads the way by making an application of the servant model and showing how that relates to their treatment of him [Paul]. He changes images from farm to household and insists that he is *God's* servant, not theirs; and they are not allowed to judge another's servant. While on the theme of judgment, he gently broadens the perspective to remind them again of the future judgment that all must experience."⁸⁷

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

A steward ("those entrusted with," NIV) was a servant whom his master entrusted with the administration of his business or property. His job was to devote his time, talents, and energy to executing his master's interests, not his own. The figure stresses both the apostles' humble position as belonging to Christ and their trusted yet accountable position under God. The mysteries of God refer to the truths of the Christian faith.

⁸⁵Carson, p. 93.

⁸⁶Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 157.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 156.

- 4:2 The most important quality in a steward is that he manage his master's affairs so the desires of his lord materialize (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 16:1-13; 19:11-27; 1 Pet. 4:10). He must be faithful to his master's trust. For Paul this meant remaining faithful to the gospel as he had received it and preached it (cf. 15:1-11). God's requirement is not eloquence, wisdom, initiative, or success.
- 4:3 It mattered little to Paul how well the Corinthians or anyone else thought he was carrying out his stewardship, how popular or unpopular he was. His personal evaluations of his own performance were irrelevant too. What did matter to him was God's estimation of his service. Paul did not give much time and attention to introspection, though he sought to live with a good conscience before God. Rather he concentrated on doing the job God had put before him to the best of his ability since he was accountable (cf. 3:13).
- 4:4 As far as Paul knew he was serving God faithfully. However, he realized that his conscience might not be as sensitive as it should be.⁸⁸ Only his Master had the insight as well as the authority to judge him.
- 4:5 Since only one Person has enough insight and is authoritative enough to pass final judgment, it is unwise for us to try to do so. Of course, we must make judgments from time to time, but we should always do so with the knowledge that our understanding is imperfect. The place God will judge our lives is the judgment seat of Christ. If Paul's references to his judgment by God in his epistles are any measure of how he regarded that event, he took it very seriously and thought about it often (cf. 2 Cor. 1:14; 5:10; Phil. 2:16; 1 Thess. 2:19-20; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8; et al.).

"Paul lives in expectation of the imminent coming again of Christ."⁸⁹

The things hidden in the darkness probably include the unconscious motives of God's servants. Evidently God will find something in every faithful Christian's life for which to praise him or her on that day. Paul did not just say each servant would receive what he or she deserves but that each would receive some praise. Of course, the more faithful among us will receive more praise than the less faithful.

"He [Paul] says nothing here about those who will receive not praise but blame; he is still thinking in terms of the

⁸⁸See Roy B. Zuck, "The Doctrine of Conscience," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126:504 (October-December 1969):329-40.

⁸⁹*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "erchomai," by Johannes Schneider, 2:674.

Corinthian situation, in which some have praise for Paul, some for Apollos, some for Cephas."⁹⁰

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

Taking pride in the wrong things 4:6-13

"With rhetoric full of sarcasm and irony he [Paul] goes for the jugular. His own apostleship, which he portrays in bold relief, contrasting his own 'shame' with their perceived 'high station,' is alone consonant with a theology of the cross."⁹¹

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

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

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

4:8 His readers were behaving as though they had already received their commendation at the judgment seat of Christ. This is an indication of their over-realized eschatology. They should have been conducting themselves as under-rowing stewards and paying attention to serving God faithfully (v. 1). Ironically Paul wished the time for rewards had arrived so he could enjoy reigning with his readers. Unfortunately suffering must precede glory.

⁹⁰Barrett, p. 104.

⁹¹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 156.

"The irony is devastating: How they perceive themselves, masterfully overstated in vv. 8 and 10, is undoubtedly the way they think *he* ought to be. But the way he actually is, set forth in the rhetoric of vv. 11-13, is the way *they* all ought to be."⁹²

4:9 Paul may have had the Roman games in mind here, specifically the battles between condemned criminals and wild beasts in the amphitheaters.⁹³ Another view is that Paul was thinking of the Roman triumph, a figure that he developed more fully elsewhere (2 Cor. 2:14). At the end of that procession came the captives of war who would die in the arena.⁹⁴ In either case, Paul seems to have been thinking of the apostles as the ultimately humiliated group. They were the leaders, and their sufferings for the cause of Christ were common knowledge. How inappropriate it was then for the Corinthians to be living as kings rather than joining in suffering with their teachers.

"The Corinthians in their blatant pride were like the conquering general displaying the trophies of his prowess; the apostles were like the little group of captives, men doomed to die. To the Corinthians the Christian life meant flaunting their pride and their privileges and reckoning up their achievement; to Paul it meant a humble service, ready to die for Christ."⁹⁵

Paul evidently meant good angels since he used "principalities and powers" to refer to what we call bad angels.

4:10 These contrasts between the apostles and the Corinthians clarify the differences in their conditions. Natural men thought the apostles were fools, but they were willing to suffer this judgment for Christ's sake. The Corinthians and others, on the other hand, regarded themselves as prudent in their behavior as Christians. To the naturally wise the apostles looked weak, but the Corinthians appeared strong. They looked distinguished while the apostles seemed to be dishonorable.

4:11-13 Paul proceeded to detail the dishonor that befalls those who bear the message of the cross. The Greeks despised people who did manual labor, as Paul had done in Corinth (cf. 9:4-18; Acts 18:3, 5; 2 Cor. 11:9; 12:13-17); they regarded it as the work of slaves.⁹⁶ To the world it is foolish to bless those who curse us, but that is what Paul did following the teaching

⁹²Ibid., p. 165.

⁹³Bruce, p. 50.

⁹⁴Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 174-75.

⁹⁵Barclay, p. 45.

⁹⁶Morris, p. 81.

and example of Jesus (cf. Luke 6:28; 23:34). All of these descriptions of the apostles emphasize the depths to which they were willing to stoop to proclaim the gospel (cf. Phil. 2). They did so even though people who viewed things naturally called them fools.

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

A final appeal and exhortation 4:14-21

Paul concluded this first major section of the epistle (1:10—4:21) by reasserting his apostolic authority, which had led to his correcting the Corinthians' shameful conduct and carnal theology. He changed the metaphor again and now appealed to them as a father to his children. He ended by warning them that if they did not respond to his gentle approach he would have to be more severe.

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

"The *paidagogos* was the personal attendant who accompanied the boy, took him to school and home again, heard him recite his 'lines', taught him good manners and generally looked after him; he was entitled to respect and normally received it, but there was no comparison between his relation to the boy and that of the boy's father."⁹⁷

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

". . . Paul's actual ethical instruction as it appears in his Epistles rarely uses the language of Jesus as it is recorded in the Gospels; but on every page it reflects his example and his teaching . . ."⁹⁸

⁹⁷Bruce, p. 51.

⁹⁸Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 187. For example, Paul never used the word "disciple" in his epistles. Instead he appealed to his readers as his children or his brethren. The metaphor of father and children to refer to a teacher and his disciples was also common in Judaism.

4:17

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

Paul's way of life here refers to the ethical principles that he taught and practiced.

". . . the Christian leader today not only must teach the gospel, but also must teach how the gospel works out in daily life and conduct. And that union must be modeled as well as explained.

"The need is evident even at a confessional seminary like the one at which I teach. Increasingly, we have students who come from thoroughly pagan or secular backgrounds, who have been converted in their late teens or twenties, and who come to us in their thirties. Not uncommonly, they spring from dysfunctional families, and they carry a fair bit of baggage. More dramatically yet, a surprising number of them cannot easily make connections between the truths of the gospel and how to live.

"A couple of years ago a student who was about to graduate was called in by one of our faculty members who had learned the student was planning to return to computer science and abandon plans to enter vocational ministry. The student was pleasant, with a solid B+ to his credit. But as the faculty member probed, it became obvious that this student had not put it all together. He could define propitiation but did not know what it was like to feel forgiven. He could defend the priority of grace in salvation but still felt as if he could never be good enough to be a minister. He could define holiness but found himself practicing firm self-discipline rather than pursuing holiness. His life and his theological grasp had not come together.

"Mercifully, this particular faculty member was spiritually insightful. He took the student back to the cross and worked outward from that point. The student began to weep

and weep as he glimpsed the love of God for him. Today he is in the ministry."⁹⁹

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

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

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

Paul knew that all the pretension to superior wisdom in the church was a result to viewing things from a worldly perspective; there was no reality behind it.

4:20 The apostle returned to his earlier contrast between words and real power (2:1-5). Real power is the power of the Holy Spirit working through humble messengers. The kingdom of God here does not refer to the future millennial kingdom but to God's present rule over His people in the church, as the context clarifies.

4:21 The Corinthians' response to this epistle would determine whether the apostle would return to them as a disciplining or as a delighted father. A spirit of gentleness also marked the Lord Jesus (Matt. 11:29), though it stood in stark contrast to the spirit of arrogance in Corinth.

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

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

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

"Christian leadership means encouraging—and if necessary, enforcing—the way of the cross among the people of God (4:14-21)."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹Carson, p. 111.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 94, 103, 108.

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

"Paul's view of the Christian ministry as revealed in this section (1 Cor. 3—4) may now be summed up. The ministry is a divine provision which is responsible to Christ. It is a part of the Church given to the rest of the Church to be employed in its service. It comprises a multiplicity of gifts and functions, but is united by the unity of God and the unity of the Church. It serves the Church by itself first living out the life of suffering and sacrifice exhibited by the Lord on earth, thereby setting an example for the Church as a whole to follow."¹⁰¹

"Even though at times Paul seems to be weaving in and out of several topics, the concern throughout is singular: to stop a current fascination with 'wisdom' on the part of the Corinthians that has allowed them not only to 'boast,' but to stand over against Paul and his gospel. With a variety of turns to the argument he sets forth his gospel over against their 'wisdom' and tries to reshape their understanding of ministry and church. . . .

"The changes of tone in this passage reveal some of the real tensions that continue to exist in Christian ministry. How to be prophetic without being harsh or implying that one is above the sins of others. How to get people to change their behavior to conform to the gospel when they think too highly of themselves. There is no easy answer, as this passage reveals. But one called to minister in the church must ever strive to do it; calling people to repentance is part of the task."¹⁰²

Perhaps Paul originally intended to end this epistle here.¹⁰³ This opinion rests on the fact that the first four chapters could stand alone. This view points out the unity of this section of the letter. However it is impossible to prove or to disprove this hypothesis.

"It becomes evident in chaps. 5 through 14 as specific problems in the Corinthian community are considered and as pastoral directions are given that at the same time something else is going on. With statements here and there, the epistemology presented in 1:18—2:16 is kept before the readers. They are nudged into viewing themselves and their congregational life in

¹⁰¹Ronald Y. K. Fung, "The Nature of the Ministry according to Paul," *Evangelical Quarterly* 54 (1982):132.

¹⁰²Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 193-94.

¹⁰³Bruce, pp. 52-53.

new and different ways, consistent with the message of the crucified Messiah."¹⁰⁴

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

The second characteristic in the Corinthian church reported to Paul that he addressed concerned a lack of discipline (cf. Gal. 5:22-23). This section of the epistle has strong connections with the first major section. The lack of discipline in the church (chs. 5—6) reflected a crisis of authority in the church (1:10—4:21). The Corinthians were arrogant and valued a worldly concept of power. This carnal attitude had produced the three problems that Paul proceeded to deal with next: incest, litigation, and prostitution in the church.

1. Incest in the church ch. 5

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

"What is at stake is not simply a low view of sin; rather, it is the church itself: Will it follow Paul's gospel with its ethical implications? or will it continue in its present 'spirituality,' one that tolerates such sin and thereby destroys God's temple in Corinth (3:16-17)? Thus Paul uses this concrete example both to assert his authority and to speak to the larger issue of sexual immorality."¹⁰⁵

"The unusual feature of 5:1-13 is the manner in which the community is addressed first and more extensively than the man involved in an incestuous relationship. The congregation is distinguished by its arrogance and boasting and its failure to mourn. At the heart of Paul's rebuke is an urgent plea for a new, communal self-understanding (5:6-8). Mixing the cultic images of unleavened bread and the Passover lamb, the text pushes the Corinthians to think of themselves differently—as an unleavened community that demonstrates honesty and dependability, as a community for whom the paschal lamb has been sacrificed. The crucified Messiah lies at the heart of the new perspective, critically needed by the readers."¹⁰⁶

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

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

¹⁰⁴Cousar, "The Theological . . .," p. 101.

¹⁰⁵Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁶Cousar, "The Theological . . .," p. 98.

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

"The woman was clearly not the mother of the offender, and probably (although the use of *porneia* rather than *moicheia* does not prove this) she was not, at the time, the wife of the offender's father. She may have been divorced, for divorce was very common, or her husband may have been dead."¹⁰⁷

The verb translated "to have," when used in sexual or marital contexts, is a euphemism for a continuing relationship in contrast to a "one night stand" (cf. 7:2). This man and this woman were "living together." Since the man is the object of Paul's censure, it seems that the woman was not in the church.

"The word *porneia* ('sexual immorality') in the Greek world simply meant 'prostitution,' in the sense of going to the prostitutes and paying for sexual pleasure. The Greeks were ambivalent on that matter, depending on whether one went openly to the brothels or was more discreet and went with a paramour. But the word had been picked up in Hellenistic Judaism, always pejoratively, to cover all extramarital sexual sins and aberrations, including homosexuality. It could also refer to any of these sins specifically, as it does here. In the NT the word is thus used to refer to that particular blight on Greco-Roman culture, which was almost universally countenanced, except among the Stoics. That is why *porneia* appears so often as the first item in the NT vice lists, not because Christians were sexually 'hung up,' nor because they considered this the primary sin, the 'scarlet letter,' as it were. It is the result of its prevalence in the culture, and the difficulty the early church experienced with its Gentile converts breaking with their former ways, which they did not consider immoral."¹⁰⁸

The leaders of Israel and the early churches regarded fornication of all kinds as sin to avoid (Lev. 18:8; Deut. 22:30; 27:20; Acts 15:20, 29;

¹⁰⁷Robertson and Plummer, p. 96. Cf. Barclay, p. 49.

¹⁰⁸Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 199-200.

21:25).¹⁰⁹ As depraved as Greek culture was, even the pagans looked down on incest.

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

". . . Paul is not here dealing with 'church discipline' as such; rather, out of his Jewish heritage he is expressing what should be the *normal* consequences of being the people of God, who are called to be his holy people (1:2). It is this lack of a sense of sin, and therefore of any ethical consequences to their life in the Spirit, that marks the Corinthian brand of spirituality as radically different from that which flows out of the gospel of Christ crucified. And it is precisely this failure to recognize the depth of their corporate sinfulness due to their arrogance that causes Paul to take such strong action as is described in the next sentence (vv. 3-5)."¹¹⁰

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

5:4 The apostle wanted the believers to view his ruling as the will of the Lord. He assured them that God would back it up with His power as they enforced the discipline. The phrase "in the name of the Lord Jesus" probably modifies "I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (v. 5).¹¹¹ In passing the following judgment Paul was acting in Jesus' name, with His authority.

¹⁰⁹If the guilty man's father was still alive and married to the woman, adultery would also have been involved. Most interpreters have concluded that this was a case of incest rather than incest and adultery. If Paul had been living under the Mosaic Law, he should have prescribed the death penalty for both the guilty man and the woman (Lev. 18:8, 29), but he lived under the New Covenant and advocated a different penalty (v. 5).

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 203. See also Barrett, p. 122.

¹¹¹See Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 206-8, for supporting argumentation.

5:5 Paul had determined to deliver the man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. Probably Paul meant that he had delivered the man to Satan, with God's permission of course, for his premature death.¹¹² This was the result of Peter's dealings with Ananias and Sapphira, though the text does not say he delivered them to Satan for the destruction of their flesh. God was bringing premature death on other Corinthians for their improper conduct during the Lord's Supper (11:30; cf. 1 John 5:16). We have no record that this man died prematurely, though he may have. Premature death might be his judgment (the "worst case scenario") if he did not repent.

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

A variation of this view is that the delivery to Satan would eventuate in a wasting physical illness but not death.¹¹³ However the term "the destruction of the flesh" seems to imply death rather than simply disease.

A third interpretation understands the term "flesh" metaphorically as referring to the destruction of the man's sinful nature.¹¹⁴ The destruction of the flesh in this case refers to the mortification of the lusts of the flesh. However it seems unusual that Paul would deliver the man to Satan for this purpose. Satan would not normally put the lusts of the flesh to death but stir them up in the man. It is hard to see how handing a person over to Satan would purify him.

Still another view takes the flesh and spirit as referring to the sinful and godly character of the church rather than the individual.¹¹⁵ Paul may have

¹¹²Advocates of this view include H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 97; S. M. Gilmour, "Pastoral Care in the New Testament Church," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963-64):395; J. C. Hurd, Jr., *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, p.137, p. 286, n. 5; G. W. H. Lampe, "Church Discipline and the Interpretation of the Epistles to the Corinthians," in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, pp. 349, 353; Morris, pp. 88-89; and Bruce, pp. 54-55.

¹¹³Advocates include William Barclay, *By What Authority?* p. 118; M. Dods, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 118; H. Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 90; H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, p. 471; W. G. H. Simon, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: Introduction and Commentary*, p. 78; and M. E. Thrall, *The First and Second Letters of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 40.

¹¹⁴See F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 123; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 217; J. J. Lias, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 67; and G. Campbell Morgan, *The Corinthian Letters of Paul*, p. 83;

¹¹⁵B. Campbell, "Flesh and Spirit in 1 Cor 5:5: An Exercise in Rhetorical Criticism of the NT," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:3 (September 1993):341. Campbell saw his view as similar to those of K. P. Donfried, "Justification and Last Judgment in Paul," *Interpretation* 30 (April 1976):150-51;

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

Another interpretation is that Paul was speaking of the man's excommunication from the church.¹¹⁶ This does not seem to be in harmony with the phrase "for the destruction of the flesh."

Paul may have meant both excommunication and premature death since his analogy concerning the Passover (vv. 6-8) stresses separating what is sinful from what it pollutes.

Is this a form of church discipline that we can and should practice today? There are no other Scripture passages in which the Lord instructed church leaders to turn sinners over to Satan. Consequently I believe this was one way in which the apostles in particular exercised their authority in the early church for the establishment of the church (cf. Acts 5). People may commit sins that lead to their premature deaths today. However, there is no indication in Scripture that what Paul did here is normative for church leaders in cases of church discipline. There are, of course, other biblical examples of excommunication as church discipline.

The last part of the verse gives the purpose of Paul's discipline. "Spirit" contrasts with "flesh." "Flesh" evidently refers to the body so "spirit" probably refers to the immaterial part of the man. The "day of the Lord Jesus" refers to the return of Christ at the Rapture and the judgment of believers connected with it (cf. 1:8). From what did his punishment save the incestuous man? It did not save him eternally since faith in Christ does that, nor did it save him from physical death since that appears to have been his punishment. Probably it saved him from a worse verdict when Christ would evaluate his stewardship of his life at the judgment seat. Evidently Paul regarded it better for this sinning Christian, as well as best for the church, that he die prematurely, assuming that he would not repent, than that he go on living. Perhaps Paul had reason to believe he would not turn from his sin but only worsen.

Some have interpreted Paul's allusion to "such a one" in 2 Corinthians 2:6-7 as referring to this incestuous man. The text does not warrant that

H. von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries*, pp. 134-135, n. 50; and the early church father Tertullian.

¹¹⁶Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 208-15; Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 50.

definite a connection. "Such a one" is simply a way of referring to someone, anyone, without using his or her name.¹¹⁷

The analogy of the Passover 5:6-8

Paul argued for the man's removal from the church with this analogy. It was primarily for the sake of the church that they should remove him, not for the man's sake.

5:6 It was not good for the Corinthians to feel proud of their permissiveness (cf. v. 2). Sin spreads in the church as yeast does in bread (cf. Gal. 5:9; Mark 8:15). Eventually the whole moral fabric of the congregation would suffer if the believers did not expunge this sin.

5:7 In Jewish life it was customary to throw away all the leaven (yeast) in the house when the family prepared for the Passover celebration (Exod. 12:15; 13:6-7). They did this so the bread they made for Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread that followed would be completely free of leaven. This may have been for hygienic reasons as well as because of the symbolism of the act. This is what the Corinthians needed to do as a church so they could worship God acceptably. In one sense they were already free of leaven; their trust in Christ had removed their sins. However in another sense they possessed leaven since they had tolerated sin in their midst. Paul described the same situation earlier in this epistle when he said the Corinthians were saints (1:2) even though they were not behaving as saints. God had sanctified them in their position, but they were in need of progressive sanctification. They needed to become what they were. This is Paul's basic exhortation.

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

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

"Ethics for Paul is ultimately a *theological* issue pure and simple. Everything has to do with God and with what God is about in Christ and the Spirit. Thus (1) the *purpose* (or basis) of Christian ethics is the glory of God (10:31); (2) the *pattern* for such ethics is Christ (11:1); (3) the *principle* is love, precisely because it alone reflects God's character (8:2-3; 13:1-8); and (4) the *power* is the Spirit (6:11, 19)."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷Bruce, p. 54.

¹¹⁸Fee, "Toward a . . .," pp. 51, 53.

The mention of the removal of leaven before the Passover led Paul to develop his analogy further. Christ, the final Passover Lamb, had already died. Therefore it was all the more important that the believers clean out the remaining leaven immediately.

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

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

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

- 5:9 Paul had written this congregation a previous letter that is no longer extant.¹¹⁹ In it he urged the Corinthians to avoid associating with fornicators. The same Greek word, *pornois*, occurs here as in verse 1. In view of this instruction the Corinthians' toleration of the incestuous brother in the church was especially serious.
- 5:10 However, Paul hastened to clarify that in writing what he had he did not mean a believer should never associate with fornicators outside the church. He did not mean either that they should avoid contact with unbelievers who were sinful in their attitudes and actions toward people and God. Even our holy Lord Jesus Christ ate with publicans and sinners. Such isolationism would require that they stop living in the real world and exist in a Christian ghetto insulated from all contact with unbelievers. This approach to life is both unrealistic and unfaithful to God who has called us to be salt and light in the world (Matt. 5:13-16; 28:19-20). Many Christians today struggle with an unbiblical view of separation that tends more toward isolationism than sanctification.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:14 Paul used the same phrase (Gr. *sunanamignusthai*, lit. mix up together), translated "to associate with" (v. 9), with regard to busybodies in the church. There not associating was to be the last resort of

¹¹⁹See my comments on this letter in the introduction section of these notes.

faithful believers in their social dealings with their disobedient brethren (cf. 1 Thess. 4:11-12; 5:14). They were not to treat them as enemies, however, but as brothers. Probably Paul had the same type of disciplinary behavior in view here. Some interpreters view this as excluding the offender from the community of believers gathered for worship.¹²⁰ I tend to think it means not socializing with such a person.

5:11 Paul now clarified that he had meant that the Corinthian Christians should not associate with such a person if he or she professed to be a believer. The Greek phrase *tis adelphos onomazomenos* literally means one who bears the name brother. The translation "so-called brother" (NASB) implies that the sinner was only a professing Christian. Only God and that person knew for sure whether he or she was a genuine Christian or not.¹²¹ In particular they were to exclude such a person from table fellowship with the other Christians in the church.

In the early history of the church eating together was a large part of the fellowship that the Christians enjoyed with one another (cf. Acts 2:46-47; 6:1; et al.). To exclude a Christian from this circle of fellowship would have made a much stronger statement to him than it normally does today in American church life.

"The Apostle is not thinking of Holy Communion, in which case the *mede* ["not even"] would be quite out of place: he is thinking of social meals; 'Do not invite him to your house or accept his invitations.'"¹²²

This exclusion was a strong form of discipline that Paul designed to confront the offender with his or her behavior and encourage him or her to repent. Some modern congregations have adopted the policy of excluding such offenders from participation in the Lord's Supper. However this form of discipline does not carry much impact when a congregation observes the Lord's Supper only monthly or quarterly. Modern church leaders need to give careful thought to what form of discipline would have the same impact and effect on such a person in their particular society.

Paul's list of sins here seems to be suggestive rather than comprehensive (cf. 6:9-10). It includes fornicators, the greedy, idolaters, people who abuse others verbally, drunkards and perhaps others addicted to enslaving substances, and swindlers. The failure of many church leaders to discipline

¹²⁰E.g., Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 226.

¹²¹F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, p. 210, regarded this person as not a genuine believer. Robert N. Wilkin presented evidence that the man in view was a genuine Christian in "The So-Called So-Called Brother," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 6:10 (October 1991):2-3. The important point is that this person's behavior threw into question whether he was a genuine Christian or not.

¹²²Robertson and Plummer, p. 107.

professing Christians who practice these things today is a sad commentary on the carnality of the modern church.

- 5:12 Paul's authority as an apostle did not extend to judging and prescribing discipline on unbelievers for their sins. He did, of course, assess the condition of unbelievers (e.g., Rom. 1; et al.), but that is not what is in view here. His ministry and the ministry of other Christians in judging and disciplining sin took place only within church life. Judging means more than criticizing. It involves disciplining, too, as the context shows.
- 5:13 Judging and disciplining unbelievers is the Lord's work. Obviously this does not mean that Christians should remain aloof when justice needs maintaining in the world. God has delegated human government to people as His vice-regents (e.g., Gen. 9:5-6). As human beings Christians should bear their fair share of the weight of responsibility in these matters. The point here is that the Corinthians and all Christians should exercise discipline in church life to an extent beyond what is our responsibility in civil life.

Paul did not explain the objective in view in church discipline in this passage. Elsewhere we learn that it is always the restoration of the offender to fellowship with God and His people (2 Cor. 2:5-11). It is also the purity of the church.¹²³

Chapter 5 deals with the subject of immoral conduct by professing Christians.¹²⁴ The first part (vv. 1-8) contains directions for dealing with a particular case of fornication that existed in the church. The Corinthian Christians were taking a much too permissive attitude toward sin. The second part (vv. 9-13) clarifies our duty in all instances of immoral conduct inside and outside the church.

2. Litigation in the church 6:1-11

The apostle continued to deal with the general subject of discipline in the church that he began in 5:1. He proceeded to point out some other glaring instances of inconsistency that had their roots in the Corinthians' lax view of sin. Rather than looking to unsaved judges to solve their internal conflicts, they should have exercised discipline among themselves in these cases.

¹²³For general studies of church discipline, see J. Carl Laney, "The Biblical Practice of Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:572 (October-December 1986):353-64; and Ted G. Kitchens, "Perimeters of Corrective Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):201-13. On the subject of lawsuits against local churches and church leaders who practice church discipline, see Jay A. Quine, "Court Involvement in Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:593 (January-March 1992):60-73, and 594 (April-June 1992):223-36.

¹²⁴See Timothy D. Howell, "The Church and the AIDS Crisis," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:593 (January-March 1992):74-82.

"In this section Paul is dealing with a problem which specially affected the Greeks. The Jews did not ordinarily go to law in the public law-courts at all; they settled things before the elders of the village or the elders of the Synagogue; to them justice was far more a thing to be settled in a family spirit than in a legal spirit. . . . The Greeks were in fact famous, or notorious, for their love of going to law."¹²⁵

". . . the congregation's root problem lies in its lack of theological depth. It shames itself by not understanding itself as an eschatological community ('Do you not know that we are to judge angels?') and as a community redeemed by Christ."¹²⁶

"Paul has not finished with the theme of church discipline in regard to sexual life; see vi. 12 and chapter vii; but in v. 12 f. he had spoken of judgement [sic], and this brings to his mind another feature of Corinthian life of which he had heard . . ."¹²⁷

The shame on the church 6:1-6

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

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

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

"The phrase translated 'has a dispute' is a technical term for a lawsuit, or legal action; and the verb *krino* ('judge') in the middle voice can carry the sense of 'going to law,' or 'bringing something for judgment,' as it does here."¹²⁸

"He does not mean that Christian courts ought to be instituted, but that Christian disputants should submit to Christian arbitration."¹²⁹

¹²⁵Barclay, *The Letters* . . . , pp. 55, 56.

¹²⁶Cousar, "The Theological . . .," pp. 98-99.

¹²⁷Barrett, p. 134.

¹²⁸Fee, *The First* . . . , p. 231.

¹²⁹Robertson and Plummer, p. 111.

6:2 The earlier revelation that the saints will have a part in judging unbelievers in the future may be Daniel 7:18, 22, and 27. This judgment will evidently take place just after the Lord returns to earth at His second coming to set up His millennial kingdom. We will be with Him then (1 Thess. 4:17).

Since the Lord will delegate the authority to judge unbelievers to Christians in the future, Paul concluded that we are competent to settle disputes among ourselves now. In the light of future eschatological judgment, any decisions that believers must make in church courts now are relatively trifling.¹³⁰ Obviously some cases involving Christians arguing with one another are more difficult to sort out than some of those involving unbelievers. Paul's point was that Christians are generally competent to settle disputes between people. After all, we have the help and wisdom of the indwelling Holy Spirit available to us.

Earlier Paul wrote that the Corinthians were judging him (cf. 4:3-5, 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.

6:3 Evidently God had not revealed the fact that believers will play a role in judging angels earlier in Scripture. He apparently revealed that for the first time here through Paul (cf. Jude 6).

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

The second part of the verse is capable of two interpretations. Paul may have been speaking ironically, as the next verse may imply (cf. 4:8). If so, he may have meant that the Corinthians should select the least qualified people in the church to settle these disputes. His meaning in this case was that any Christian was capable of settling disputes among his brethren. He did not mean that the Corinthians should really choose as judges the most feeble-minded Christians in the church. The statement is ironical. This is the interpretation of the NIV.¹³¹

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

¹³⁰The marginal reading in the NASB "try the trivial cases" probably gives the better sense than "constitute the smallest courts." See *ibid.*, pp. 233-34.

¹³¹See also Robertson and Plummer, p. 113.

arbitrate. The obvious answer would be no. They would choose the best qualified brethren. This interpretation understands Paul as advocating the choice of the best qualified in the church forthrightly rather ironically. This seems to me to be a better interpretation.¹³²

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

6:5-6 What was to the Corinthians' shame? It was that by going into secular courts to settle their church problems they seemed to be saying that there was no one in their church wise enough to settle these matters. Certainly they could count on the Holy Spirit to give them the wisdom they needed to do this (cf. John 14:26; 16:13).

"A church has come to a pretty pass when its members believe that they are more likely to get justice from *unbelievers* than from their own brothers."¹³³

Clearly this church did not understand its identity as an eschatological community nor did it demonstrate much concern about its witness to the world.

"Every Jewish community throughout the Roman Empire and beyond its frontiers had its own *bet-din*, its own competent machinery for the administration of civil justice within its own membership; the least that could be expected of a Christian church was that it should make similar arrangements if necessary, and not wash its dirty linen in public."¹³⁴

This passage does not deal with how Christians should respond when pagans defraud or sue us. We should participate in public litigation only as a last resort.

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

The apostle now addressed the two men involved in the lawsuit but wrote with the whole church in view.

6:7 By hauling one another into court the Corinthians were intent on winning damages for themselves. Evidently a business or property dispute was the

¹³²See also Barrett, p. 137.

¹³³Ibid., p. 138.

¹³⁴Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 59.

root of this case (cf. v. 10). Paul reminded them that they had already lost before the judge gave his verdict. The shame of people who professed to love one another and put the welfare of others before their own suing each other was a defeat in itself. This defeat was far more serious than any damages they may have had to pay. It would be better to suffer the wrong or the cheating than to fight back in such an unchristian way (Matt. 5:39-40; 1 Pet. 2:19-24).

"It is possible that this use of *meth heauton* ["with your own selves"] for *met allelon* ["with one another"] is deliberate, in order to show that in bringing a suit against a fellow-Christian they were bringing a suit against themselves, so close was the relationship."¹³⁵

Christians should be willing to give to one another rather than trying to get from one another. In other words, there should be no going to court with one another at all. Nevertheless if the Corinthians insisted on going to court, it should be a court of believers in the church, not unbelievers outside the church.

6:8 An even more shocking condition was that some of the Christians in Corinth were more than the victims of wrong and fraud. They were the perpetrators of these things (cf. Matt. 5:39-41).

6:9-10 Who are the "unrighteous" (NASB) or "wicked" (NIV) in view? Paul previously used this word (Gr. *adikos*) of the unsaved in verse 1 (cf. v. 6 where he called them unbelievers). However he also used it of the Corinthian Christians in verse 8: "you yourselves wrong [*adikeo*]." Christians as well as unbelievers have been guilty of unrighteous conduct, even all the offenses listed in these verses.¹³⁶ Therefore what Paul said about the unrighteous in this verse seems to apply to anyone who is unrighteous in his or her behavior whether saved or unsaved. It does not apply just to the unrighteous in their standing before God, namely unbelievers.¹³⁷

What will be true of the unrighteous? They will "not inherit the kingdom of God." Elsewhere Paul used this expression to describe the consequences of the behavior of unbelievers when he compared it to the

¹³⁵Robertson and Plummer, p. 116.

¹³⁶David E. Malick showed that Paul was condemning all homosexual relationships, not just "abuses" in homosexual behavior, in "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:600 (October-December 1993):479-92.

¹³⁷MacArthur took the reference as describing only unbelievers, pp. 127-29. See also J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 283.

behavior of believers (cf. Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5).¹³⁸ That appears to be its meaning here too. Paul was contrasting what the Corinthians did before their conversion with their conduct after conversion (v. 11). He did not mean that Christians are incapable of practicing these sins, but they typically characterize unbelievers.

Paul warned his readers about being deceived on this subject (v. 9). Probably many of them failed to see that how Christians choose to live here and now will affect our eternal reward. Many Christians today fail to see this too. The fact that we are eternally secure should not lead us to conclude that it does not matter how we live now even though we will all end up in heaven.¹³⁹

The meanings of most of these sins are clear, but a few require some comment. "Effeminate" (NASB) or "male prostitutes" (NIV; Gr. *malakoi*) refers to the passive role in a homosexual union whereas "homosexuals" refers to the active role.¹⁴⁰

"We can scarcely realize how riddled the ancient world was with it [homosexuality]. Even so great a man as Socrates practised [sic] it; Plato's dialogue *The Symposium* is always said to be one of the greatest works on love in the world, but its subject is not natural but unnatural love. Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors practised unnatural vice."¹⁴¹

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

"The universality of wine drinking was of course due to the inadequate water-supplies. But normally the Greeks were sober people, for their drink was three parts of wine mixed with two of water."¹⁴²

"The order of the ten kinds of offenders is unstudied. He enumerates sins which were prevalent at Corinth just as they occur to him."¹⁴³

¹³⁸Inheriting the kingdom and entering the kingdom are synonyms in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 19:16; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18).

¹³⁹See Wall.

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

¹⁴¹Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 60.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁴³Robertson and Plummer, p. 119.

6:11 Some of the Corinthian Christians had been fornicators and had practiced the other sins Paul cited before they trusted in Christ. However the blood of Christ had cleansed them, and God had set them apart to a life of holiness. The Lord had declared them righteous through union with Christ by faith (cf. 1:30) and through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit who indwelt them. He had made them saints. Consequently they needed to live like saints.

"The quite unconscious Trinitarianism of the concluding words should be noted: *the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit, our God*. Trinitarian theology, at least in its New Testament form, did not arise out of speculation, but out of the fact that when Christians spoke of what God had done for them and in them they often found themselves obliged to use threefold language of this kind."¹⁴⁴

This verse does not support the idea that once a person has experienced eternal salvation he will live a life free of gross sin. Normally this is the consequence of conversion thanks to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. However believers can grieve and quench the Holy Spirit's ministry in their lives. In this letter we have seen that not only were some of the Corinthian saints fornicators before their conversion, but one of them had continued in or returned to that sin (5:1).

Paul's point in this whole section (vv. 1-11) was that genuine Christians should not continue in or return to the sinful practices that mark unbelievers. 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.

3. Prostitution in the church 6:12-20

The apostle proceeded to point out the sanctity of the believer's body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. He wanted to help his readers realize the seriousness of the sins that marked them to some extent as a church.

"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.'"¹⁴⁵

"Apparently some men within the Christian community are going to prostitutes and are arguing for the right to do so. Being people of the

¹⁴⁴Barrett, p. 143.

¹⁴⁵Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 62.

Spirit, they imply, has moved them to a higher plane, the realm of the spirit, where they are unaffected by behavior that has merely to do with the body. So Paul proceeds from the affirmation of v. 11 to an attack on this theological justification.

"As before, the gospel itself is at stake, not simply the resolution of an ethical question. The Corinthian pneumatics' understanding of spirituality has allowed them both a false view of freedom ('everything is permissible') and of the body ('God will destroy it'), from which basis they have argued that going to prostitutes is permissible because the body doesn't matter."¹⁴⁶

This is one of the more important passages in the New Testament on the human body.

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

Paul began by arguing against his recipients' distortion of Christian freedom and their misunderstanding of the nature of the body.

6:12 Paul was and is famous as the apostle of Christian liberty. He saw early in his Christian life and clearly that the Christian is not under the Mosaic Law. His Epistle to the Galatians is an exposition of this theme. He preached this freedom wherever he went. Unfortunately he was always subject to misinterpretation. Some of his hearers concluded that he advocated no restraints whatsoever in Christian living.¹⁴⁷ Perhaps those in Corinth who were practicing sexual immorality and suing their brethren in pagan courts appealed to Paul to support their actions, though they took liberty farther than Paul did.¹⁴⁸

"Everything is permissible for me' is almost certainly a Corinthian theological slogan."¹⁴⁹

"It could have been argued in Corinth . . . that the right course was for a husband to keep his wife 'pure', and, if

¹⁴⁶Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 250-51.

¹⁴⁷Similarly the Protestant reformers fell under the same criticism by their Roman Catholic opponents. The Catholics said that the reformers were teaching that since Christians are saved by grace they could live sinful lives. Unfortunately John Calvin's successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza (1519-1605), overreacted and argued that a true Christian *cannot* commit gross sin. This assertion led to the conclusion that the basis of assurance of salvation is the presence of fruit in the life rather than the promise of God (e.g., John 6:47; et al.). This view, that a true Christian will not commit gross sin, has become popular in reformed theology, but it goes further than Scripture does. Scripture never makes this claim but constantly warns Christians against abusing their liberty in Christ and turning it into a license to sin. See Dillow, pp. 245-69.

¹⁴⁸See Robert N. Wilkin, "Are All Things Lawful for Believers?" *Grace Evangelical Society Newsletter* 4:7 (July 1989):2.

¹⁴⁹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 251. Cf. 10:23.

necessary, find occasional sexual satisfaction in a harlot."¹⁵⁰

In this verse the apostle restated his general maxim but qualified it (cf. 10:23). Legality is not the only test the Christian should apply to his or her behavior. Is the practice also profitable (helpful, admirable, beneficial, expedient, good)? Furthermore even though I have authority over some practice, might it gain control over me? The Christian should always be able to submit to the Lord's control. We should give the Lord, not anyone or anything else, control of our bodies.

"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."¹⁵¹

"We have no longer any right to do what in itself is innocent, when our doing it will have a bad effect on others. . . . We have no longer any right to do what in itself is innocent, when experience has proved that our doing it has a bad effect on ourselves"¹⁵²

6:13-14 The first part of this verse is similar to the two parts of the previous verse. It contains a statement that is true, but a qualifier follows. Food is not a matter of spiritual significance for the Christian, except that gluttony is a sin. As far as what we eat goes, we may eat anything in the will of God (Mark 7:19). He has not forbidden any foods for spiritual reasons, though there may be physical reasons we may choose not to eat certain things. Both food and the stomach are temporal. Paul referred to food here not because it was an issue but to set up the issue of the body and sexual immorality. As food is for the stomach, so the body is for the Lord.

"Not only are meats made for the belly, but the belly, which is essential to physical existence, is made for meats, and cannot exist without them."¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰Barrett, p. 145.

¹⁵¹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 252.

¹⁵²Robertson and Plummer, p. 122.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 123.

Paul constructed his argument like this.

Proposition 1:

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

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

Proposition 2:

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

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

One might conclude, and some in Corinth were evidently doing so, that since sex was also physical and temporal it was also irrelevant spiritually.¹⁵⁴ However this is a false deduction. The body is part of what the Lord saved and sanctified. Therefore it is for Him, and we should use it for His glory, not for fornication. Furthermore the Lord has a noble purpose and destiny for our bodies. He is for them in that sense.

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

"The body of the believer is *for* the Lord because through Christ's resurrection God has set in motion the reality of our own resurrection. This means that the believer's physical body is to be understood as 'joined' to Christ's own 'body' that was raised from the dead."¹⁵⁵

Arguments against participating in prostitution 6:15-17

Building on the preceding theological base, Paul argued against participating in fornication with prostitutes. The Corinthians had not understood the nature of sexual intercourse or the nature of Christian conversion.

6:15 Another rhetorical question affirmed the truth. As we are members of Christ's body, so our bodies are members of Him. This is not just clever word play. Our physical bodies are just as much a part of Christ—united with Him in a genuine spiritual union—as we are part of the mystical body of Christ, the church. Paul was not speaking here of the believer's union with Christ by becoming members of His mystical body, the church

¹⁵⁴Barrett, p. 147.

¹⁵⁵Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 258.

(12:12-26). He was metaphorically speaking of our individual union with Christ's physical body.

When a Christian has sexual relations with a prostitute, he or she takes what belongs to God and gives it to someone else. This is stealing from God. When a Christian marries, this does not happen because God has ordained and approves of marriage (cf. 7:14). He permits us to share our bodies with our lawful mates. Taking a member of Christ and uniting it to a harlot also involves the Lord in that immoral act. Paul's revulsion at the thought of this comes through graphically in his characteristic *me genoito* (lit. "May it not happen!").

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

6:17 In contrast to the union that takes place when two people have sex, the person who trusts Christ unites with Him in an even stronger and more pervasive oneness. This is an even stronger spiritual union. Consequently it is a very serious thing to give to a prostitute what God has so strongly united to Christ.

The argument again contains a chiasm.

A	Your bodies are members of Christ's body.
B	So they must not be members of a prostitute's body.
B'	Joined to a prostitute your members become one body with her.
A'	Joined to Christ your members become one spirit with Him.

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

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

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

Fornication is also a specially serious sin because it involves placing the body, which is the Lord's (vv. 19-20), under the control of another illegitimate partner (cf. 7:4).¹⁵⁶ No other sin has this result. All other sins are outside or apart from the body in this sense.

"Does God then forbid the restoration of fallen leaders? No. Does He leave open the possibility? Yes. Does that possibility look promising? Yes and no. If both the life and reputation of the fallen elder can be rehabilitated, his prospects for restoration are promising. However, rehabilitating his reputation, not to mention his life, will be particularly difficult, for squandering one's reputation is 'a snare of the devil' (1 Tim. 3:7), and he does not yield up his prey easily."¹⁵⁷

6:19 Another rhetorical question makes a strong important statement. Previously Paul taught his readers that the Corinthian church was a temple (*naos*; 3:16). The believer's body is also one. The Holy Spirit is really indwelling each of these temples (Rom. 8:9). He is a gift to us from God (cf. 1 Thess. 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.

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

"The reason to glorify God in the body and not engage in sexual immorality is rooted in a new way of understanding the self."¹⁵⁸

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

¹⁵⁶Ibid., p. 262.

¹⁵⁷Jay E. Smith, "Can Fallen Leaders Be Restored to Leadership?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:604 (October-December 1994):480.

¹⁵⁸Cousar, "The Theological . . .," p. 99.

exact opposite: The presence of the Spirit in their present bodily existence is God's affirmation of the body."¹⁵⁹

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

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

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

The remainder of the body of this epistle deals with questions the Corinthians had put to Paul in a letter. Paul introduced each of these with the phrase *peri de* ("now concerning," 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12).

"Rather than a friendly exchange, in which the new believers in Corinth are asking spiritual advice of their mentor in the Lord, their letter was probably a response to Paul's Previous Letter mentioned in 5:9, in which they were taking exception to his position on point after point. In light of their own theology of spirit, with heavy emphasis on 'wisdom' and 'knowledge,' they have answered Paul with a kind of 'Why can't we?' attitude, in which they are looking for his response."¹⁶⁰

A. MARRIAGE AND RELATED MATTERS CH. 7

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

"The transition from chapter 6 to chapter 7 illustrates the necessity Paul was under of waging a campaign on two fronts. In chapter 6 he dealt with libertines who argued that everything was permissible, and in particular that sexual licence [sic] was a matter of ethical indifference. In chapter 7 he deals with ascetics who, partly perhaps in reaction against the libertines, argued that sexual relations of every kind were to be deprecated, that Christians who were married should henceforth live as though they were unmarried, and those who were unmarried should remain so, even if they were already engaged to be married."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 264.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 266-67.

¹⁶¹Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 66.

". . . the controlling motif of Paul's answer is: 'Do not seek a change in status.' This occurs in every subsection (vv. 2, 8, 10, 11, 12-16, 26-27, 37, 40) and is the singular theme of the paragraph that ties the . . . sections together (vv. 17-24)—although in each case an exception is allowed."¹⁶²

"Two other features about the nature of the argument need to be noted: First, along with 11:2-16, this is one of the least combative sections of the letter. Indeed, after the argumentation of 1:10—6:20, this section is altogether placid. Furthermore, also along with 11:2-16, this is one of the least 'authority-conscious' sections in all of his letters. Phrases like 'I say this by way of concession, not of command' (v. 6), 'it is good for them' (vv. 8, 26), 'I have no command, but I give my opinion' (v. 25; cf. 40) are not your standard Paul. Second, in a way quite unlike anything else in all his letters, the argument alternates between men and women (12 times in all). And in every case there is complete mutuality between the two sexes."¹⁶³

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

Paul proceeded to give guidelines to the married or formerly married. The statement "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (v. 1) may well have been a Corinthian slogan.¹⁶⁴ Paul responded to that view in all that follows in this section.

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

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

7:1 Again Paul began what he had to say by citing a general truth. Then he proceeded to qualify it (cf. 6:12-13). The use of the Greek word *anthropos* (man generically, people) rather than *aner* (man as distinguished from woman) indicates that the statement pertains to human beings generally. To "touch a woman" (NASB) is a euphemism for sexual intercourse.¹⁶⁵ Evidently the Corinthians' question was something like this. Isn't it preferable for a Christian man to abstain from sexual relations with a woman? This would reflect the "spiritual" viewpoint of the Corinthians that held a negative attitude toward the material world and the body (cf. 6:13; 15:12).

¹⁶²Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 268.

¹⁶³Ibid., pp. 269-70.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 270. This hypothesis, which seems valid to me in light of the passage, results in a different interpretation of the text than has been traditional. The traditional view takes the entire section as explaining Paul's position on marriage in general in response to the Corinthians' question about its advisability (e.g., Godet, Lightfoot, Grosheide, Morris, Mare).

¹⁶⁵Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 275.

"Some difficulty is alleviated if these words are regarded as a quotation from the Corinthian letter, and this is a hypothesis that may very probably be accepted [cf. 6:12-13] . . ." ¹⁶⁶

Another view is that "touch a woman" is a euphemism for marrying.¹⁶⁷ However this meaning is difficult to prove, and I do not prefer it. If this is what he meant, Paul's advice was to abstain from marrying. Paul wrote later that because of the present distress his readers would do well to remain in their present marital state (v. 26). Nevertheless throughout the passage Paul viewed marriage as God-ordained and perfectly proper for Christians.

7:2 This verse probably begins Paul's extended qualification of the Corinthians' view of marriage. He proceeded to urge them strongly that the type of abstinence that they were arguing for within marriage was totally wrong. Notice the three sets of balanced pairs in this verse and in the two that follow. In this verse Paul urged married couples to have sexual relations with one another because of the prevalence of temptations to satisfy sexual desire inappropriately.

The view of verse 1 that understands Paul to be saying that it is better to avoid marrying sees Paul making a concession to that statement here. Those who hold this view believe that Paul was saying that it is better to marry since many single people cannot live in the single state without eventually committing "immoralities" (fornication, Gr. *porneias*). This is obviously not the only reason to marry (cf. Gen. 2:18-24), but it appears to have been an important consideration in Corinth where temptations to fornicate abounded. As noted above, I do not favor this interpretation.

"This [i.e., "each . . . each"] forbids polygamy, which was advocated by some Jewish teachers."¹⁶⁸

7:3 In view of the temptation to commit fornication, each partner in marriage needs to fulfill his or her sexual duty to the spouse. Part of the responsibility of marriage is to meet the various needs of the partner (Gen. 2:18) including sexual needs.

7:4 Moreover in marriage each partner relinquishes certain personal rights, including the exclusive right to his or her own body, to which he or she gives the mate a claim. Neither person has *complete* authority over his or her own body in marriage. Note that Paul was careful to give both husband

¹⁶⁶Barrett, p. 154.

¹⁶⁷Morris, p. 105.

¹⁶⁸Robertson and Plummer, p. 133.

and wife equal rights in these verses. He did not regard the man as having sexual rights or needs that the woman does not have or vice versa.

7:5 Evidently the Corinthians had concluded that since they were "spiritual" they did not need to continue to have sexual relations as husband and wife. Another less probable situation, I think, is that there were some married Christians in the church who were overreacting to the immorality in Corinth by abstaining from sexual relations with their mates. For whatever reason Paul viewed this as depriving one another of their normal sexual needs and urged them to stop doing it. Husbands and wives should commit themselves to honoring the spirit of mutual ownership that these verses describe.

There are legitimate reasons for temporary abstinence, but couples should temporarily abstain only with the agreement of both partners. When there are greater needs, spiritual needs, the couple may want to set aside their normal physical needs. However they should only do so temporarily.

"Three conditions are required for lawful abstention: it must be by mutual consent, for a good object, and temporary."¹⁶⁹

Normally we think of sexual activity as an indication of lack of self-control, but Paul also viewed the failure to engage in sex as a lack of self-control for a married person.

7:6 Paul's concession was allowing temporary abstinence from sex. The concession was not having sex. He did not command abstinence. He viewed regular marital relations as the norm. Paul was no ascetic who favored as little sex as possible. Abstinence was the exception to what was normal in his view.

7:7 Paul evidently was not a married man when he wrote this epistle (v. 8). We do not have enough information about his life to know whether he had never married, had become a widower, or if his wife had left him.

To Paul the single state had certain advantages for a servant of the Lord such as himself. He had to put up with many hardships in his ministry that it would have been difficult for a wife to share. Moreover God had given him grace to live as a single person without feeling consumed by the fires of lust (cf. v. 9).

He wished everyone could live as he did, but he realized that most could not. Each person has his or her own special gift (Gr. *charisma*) from God, some to live single and some to live married (cf. Matt. 19:12). These are

¹⁶⁹Ibid., p. 134.

spiritual gifts just as those gifts listed in chapters 12—14 are. The gift of celibacy is a special ability that God gives only some people to feel free from the desire or need of sexual fulfillment in marriage.¹⁷⁰

The legitimate option of singleness 7:8-9

Paul moved from advice to the married regarding sexual abstinence to advice to the unmarried. He advised this group, as he had the former one, to remain in the state in which they found themselves, but he allowed them an exception too.

7:8 Who are the "unmarried" (Gr. *agamois*) that Paul had in view? Most interpreters have taken this word in its broadest possible meaning, namely all categories of unmarried people. Others, however, take it to refer to widowers since Paul also specified widows in this verse and since he dealt with males and females in balance in this chapter.¹⁷¹ I prefer the former view.

The unmarried state has some advantages over the married state even though it is better for most people to marry (Gen. 2:18). Since it is not a sinful condition, married people should not look down on single people or even pity them because they are unmarried. Sometimes married people tend to do this because singles do not enjoy the pleasures of married life. Notwithstanding they enjoy the pleasures of single life that married individuals do not. Married people should not pressure single people to get married just because they are single.

7:9 However if a single person cannot or does not control his or her passions, it would be better to marry than to burn with lustful temptation (cf. v. 2). If a single has very strong sexual urges that may very well drive him or her into fornication, he or she would be wise to get married if possible. Of course a believer should marry a suitable Christian mate. This may be easier said than done, especially for a woman. The Lord has promised to provide the basic needs of those who put Him first in their lives (e.g., Matt. 6:33). I believe He will do so in answer to prayer either by providing a suitable mate or by relieving the sexual passion. In either case He gives more grace (10:13).

No divorce for Christians whose mates are believers 7:10-11

Again Paul advised remaining as they were, but he also allowed an exception.

¹⁷⁰Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 284.

¹⁷¹There is a Greek word for "widowers," but it does not appear in the *koine* period. *Agamos* served in its place. See *ibid.*, pp. 287-88, for additional support for this view.

"While Paul displays ambivalence toward whether widowers and widows should get married (vv. 8-9), he consistently rejects the notion that the married may dissolve their marriages."¹⁷²

7:10 The Lord Jesus Christ gave instruction concerning what believers are to do in marriage when He taught during His earthly ministry (Matt. 5:27-32; 19:3-12; Mark 10:1-12). Paul cited some of this teaching and added more of his own.¹⁷³ Of course God's instructions through Paul are just as inspired and authoritative as His teaching through Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. This is one of Paul's few commands in this chapter (cf. vv. 2-5).

The main point of Paul's advice is that Christians should not break up their marriages (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:7-9). "Leaving" and divorcing (vv. 12-13) were virtually the same in Greco-Roman culture.¹⁷⁴ In our day one popular way to solve marriage problems is to split up. Nevertheless the Lord's will is that all people, including believers, work through their marital problems rather than giving up on them by separating permanently.

7:11 If separation (divorce) occurs, they should either remain unmarried (i.e., stay as they are) or reconcile with their mate. Paul said this was to be the wife's course of action because if she left her husband she would be the mate who had to decide what to do. However the same procedure would be appropriate for the husband.

I believe Paul did not deal with the exception that Jesus Christ allowed on the grounds of fornication (Gr. *porneia*; Matt. 5:32; 19:9) because it is an exception. Paul wanted to reinforce the main teaching of Christ on this subject, namely that couples should not dissolve their marriages.

The Corinthian Christians appear to have been separating for ascetic reasons, to get away from sexual activity. In modern western culture the reason is usually the opposite; people usually divorce to marry someone else. Regardless of the reason for the temptation, Paul commanded Christian husbands and wives to stay together and to share their bodies as well as their lives with each other. It is impossible for a Christian husband and wife to provide a model of reconciliation to the world if they cannot reconcile with each other.

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 291.

¹⁷³This is one of the rare instances when Paul appealed directly to Jesus' teachings (cf. 9:14; 11:23; 1 Tim. 5:18). Usually he taught in harmony with Jesus without citing Him.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p. 293.

No divorce for Christians whose mates are unbelievers 7:12-16

In this situation, too, Paul granted an exception, but the exceptional is not the ideal. He also reiterated his principle of staying in the condition in which one finds himself or herself.

". . . one of the great heathen complaints against Christianity was exactly the complaint that Christianity did break up families and was a disruptive influence in society. 'Tampering with domestic relationships' was in fact one of the first charges brought against the Christians."¹⁷⁵

7:12-13 "The rest" refers to persons not in the general category of verse 10. Paul had been speaking of the typical married persons in the church, namely those married to another believer. Now he dealt with mixed marriages between a believer and an unbeliever, as the following verses make clear.

For these people he could not repeat a teaching of Jesus because He had not spoken on this subject. At least as far as Paul knew He had not. Nevertheless the risen Lord inspired Paul's instructions on this subject so they were every bit as authoritative as the teaching Jesus gave during His earthly ministry.

The Corinthians may have asked Paul if a believing partner should divorce an unbelieving mate rather than living mismatched with him or her. This is the problem he addressed. He counselled the believer to go on living with the unbeliever if the unbeliever was willing to do so.

"The point is clear: in a mixed marriage the Christian partner is not to take the initiative . . . in a move towards [permanent] separation."¹⁷⁶

In Judaism, wives could not divorce their husbands, but under Greek and Roman law they could.¹⁷⁷

7:14 Even though an unbeliever might affect his or her mate negatively morally or ethically, it was still better to keep the marriage together. This was so because the believing mate would affect the unbeliever positively. "Sanctified" (Gr. *hagiazō*) means to be set apart for a special purpose. God has set aside the unsaved spouse of a believer for special blessing some of which comes through his or her mate (cf. Exod. 29:37; Lev. 6:18). God will deal with such a person differently than He deals with those not married to Christians.

¹⁷⁵Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 70.

¹⁷⁶Barrett, p. 164.

¹⁷⁷Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 69.

I do not believe Paul would have objected to a couple separating temporarily if the believer was in physical danger from the unbeliever (cf. v. 15). What he did not want was for believers to initiate the termination of their marriages for this or any other reason.

Likewise the children in such a marriage would enjoy special treatment from God rather than being in a worse condition than the children in a Christian home. This probably involves their protection in the mixed home and the supply of grace needed for that sometimes difficult situation. "Holy" (Gr. *hagios*) means set apart as different.

I do not believe Paul was saying unsaved spouses and children of mixed marriages are better off than the spouses and children in Christian families. His point was that God would offset the disadvantages of such a situation with special grace.

"This verse throws no light on the question of infant baptism."¹⁷⁸

7:15

On the other hand if the unbeliever in a mixed marriage wants to break up the marriage, the believing partner should allow him or her to do so. The reason for this is that God wants peace to exist in human relationships. It is better to have a peaceful relationship with an unbelieving spouse who has departed than it is to try to hold the marriage together. This is true if holding the marriage together will only result in constant antagonism in the home. However notice that the Christian does not have the option of departing (vv. 10-11).

When the unbeliever departs, the Christian is no longer under bondage (Gr. *douleuo*, lit. to be a slave). Does this refer to bondage to hold the marriage together or bondage to remain unmarried? Most of the commentators believe it means that the Christian is free to let the unbeliever depart; he or she does not have an obligation to maintain the marriage.¹⁷⁹ Among these some hold that the believer is not free to remarry (cf. v. 11).¹⁸⁰ Most of these believe that the Christian is free to remarry.¹⁸¹ The Greek text does not solve this problem. I think Paul was not addressing the idea of remarrying here.

I would counsel a Christian whose unsaved spouse has divorced him or her to remain unmarried as long as there is a possibility that the unsaved person may return. However if the unsaved spouse who has departed

¹⁷⁸Robertson and Plummer, p. 142.

¹⁷⁹E.g., *ibid.*, p. 143; Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 302-3.

¹⁸⁰E.g., William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce*.

¹⁸¹E.g., Barrett, p. 166; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 70; Lenski, pp. 294-95; David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 518; Morris, p. 111.

remarries, I believe the Christian would be free to remarry since, by remarrying, the unsaved partner has closed the door on reconciliation.

7:16 It is possible that Paul meant Christians should not separate from their unbelieving spouses because by staying together the unbeliever may eventually become a Christian (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1).¹⁸² However he may have meant the believer should not oppose the unbeliever's departing because he may become a Christian through channels other than the witness of the believing spouse. Both possibilities are realistic so even though we cannot tell exactly what the apostle meant here what we should do is clear. The Christian can have hope that God may bring the unsaved spouse to salvation while the believer does the Lord's will.

Verse 16 is a positive note on which to close instructions to Christians who have unsaved spouses.

2. The basic principle 7:17-24

At this point Paul moved back from specific situations to basic principles his readers needed to keep in mind when thinking about marriage (cf. vv. 1-7). He drew his illustrations in this section from circumcision and slavery.

"Under the rubric 'It is good not to have relations with a woman,' they were seeking to change their present status, apparently because as believers they saw this as conforming to the more spiritual existence that they had already attained. Thus they saw one's status with regard to marriage/ceibacy as having *religious* significance and sought change because of it. Under the theme of 'call' Paul seeks to put their 'spirituality' into a radically different perspective. They should remain in whatever social setting they were at the time of their call since God's call to be in Christ (cf. 1:9) transcends such settings so as to make them essentially irrelevant."¹⁸³

7:17 Whether he or she is unmarried or married, married to a believer or to an unbeliever, the Christian should regard his condition as what God has placed him or her in for the present. The concept of "call" is a way of describing Christian conversion (cf. 1:2, 9). He or she should concentrate on serving the Lord therein rather than spending most of one's time and energy on trying to change that condition. Paul taught the priority of serving Christ, over trying to change one's circumstances, in all the churches.

"Paul's intent is not to lay down a rule that one may not change; rather, by thus hallowing one's situation in life, he

¹⁸²Barrett, p. 167.

¹⁸³Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 307.

is trying to help the Corinthians see that their social status is ultimately irrelevant as such (i.e., they can live out their Christian life in any of the various options) and therefore their desire to change is equally irrelevant—because it has nothing to do with genuine spirituality as their slogan would infer (v. 1b)."¹⁸⁴

This is the second of four instances where Paul appealed to what was customary in all the churches (cf. 4:17; 11:16; 14:33). He never did this in any of his other letters. He was reminding this church that its theology was off track, not his.

7:18-19 This principle applies to being circumcised as well as to being married. Both conditions were secondary to following the Lord obediently. God did not command celibacy or marriage, circumcision or uncircumcision. These are matters of personal choice in the church. One's ministry might be one factor in his or her decision (e.g., Acts 16:3; cf. Gal. 5:6; 6:15).

The idea of becoming uncircumcised after one has been circumcised seems strange, but some Jews did this to avoid being known as Jews when they participated in activities at the public gymnasiums.¹⁸⁵

7:20 The "condition" (NASB) or "situation" (NIV; Gr. *klesis*) is the calling (v. 17) in life in which a person was when God called him or her into His family (cf. 1:2; Eph. 4:1). Our calling as Christians, to bear witness to Jesus Christ, is more important than our calling in life, namely the place we occupy in the social, economic, and geographical scheme of things.

7:21 Paul did not mean that a Christian should take a fatalistic view of life and regard his or her physical condition as something he or she should definitely remain in forever. If we have the opportunity to improve ourselves for the glory of God, we should do so. If we do not, we should not fret about our state but bloom where God has planted us. We should regard our call to Christ as sanctifying our present situation. In the context, of course, Paul was appealing to those who felt compelled to dissolve their marriages.

Another example of this principle would be if a person became a Christian while uneducated, he can serve Christ effectively as an uneducated person in a variety of ways. Many outstanding servants of the Lord have done so. If he has the opportunity to get an education and so serve God more effectively, he should feel free to take advantage of that opportunity. Unfortunately some Christians put more emphasis on getting an education

¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 311. Cf. Robertson and Plummer, p. 144.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., p. 146.

than they do on serving the Lord. This is putting the cart before the horse and is the very thing Paul warned against here.

7:22 Paul's emphasis on the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God comes back into view in this section of verses (cf. 1:10—4:21). Priorities are in view. Does the Corinthian slave view himself primarily as a slave or as a freedman?¹⁸⁶ He was both, a slave of men but the freedman of God. Does the freedman view himself primarily as a freedman or as a slave? He was both, a freedman socially but the Lord's slave spiritually.

"This imagery, of course, must be understood in light of Greco-Roman slavery, not that of recent American history. Slavery was in fact the bottom rung on the social order, but for the most part it provided generally well for up to one-third of the population in a city like Corinth or Rome. The slave had considerable freedom and very often experienced mutual benefit along with the master. The owner received the benefit of the slave's services; and the slave had steady 'employment,' including having all his or her basic needs met—indeed, for many to be a slave was preferable to being a freedman, whose securities were often tenuous at best. But the one thing that marked the slave was that in the final analysis, he did not belong to himself but to another. That is Paul's point with this imagery."¹⁸⁷

It is unfortunate that many Christians today choose to focus on their limitations rather than on their possibilities as representatives of Jesus Christ. We should use the abilities and opportunities that God gives us rather than feeling sorry for ourselves because we do not have other abilities or opportunities.

7:23 Paul's thought returned to the Cross again (cf. 6:20). God has set us free from the worst kind of slavery having purchased us with the precious blood of His Son. How foolish then it would be for us to give up any of the liberties 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.

7:24 For the third time in this pericope (vv. 17, 20, 24) Paul stated the basic principle that he advocated. Evidently there was much need for this exhortation in the Corinthian church.

In our day upward mobility has become a god to many Christians, and its worship has polluted the church. We need to be content to serve the Lord,

¹⁸⁶A freedman was a person who had formerly been a slave but had received manumission.

¹⁸⁷Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 319.

to live out our calling, whether in a mixed marriage, singleness, a white collar or blue collar job, or whatever socioeconomic condition we may occupy.

In this section Paul chose his examples from circumcision and uncircumcision, slavery and freedom. However the larger context of the chapter is singleness and marriage. His point was that those who were single when God called them to follow Him should be content to remain single, and those who were married should stay married. Faithfulness to God or effectiveness for God do not require a change.

3. Advice concerning virgins 7:25-40

The second occurrence of the phrase *peri de* ("now concerning") occurs in verse 25 and indicates another subject about which the Corinthians had written Paul (cf. v. 1). This was the subject of single women. This section belongs with the rest of chapter 7 because this subject relates closely to what immediately precedes. Paul continued to deal with questions about marriage that the Corinthians' asceticism raised.

The advantage of the single state 7:25-28

In view of the verses in this section it seems that the question the Corinthians had asked Paul was whether an engaged girl should get married or remain single. One might understand verses 17-24 as saying no unmarried person should change her situation and get married (cf. v. 8), but this was not what Paul advocated necessarily.

7:25 The "virgins" (Gr. *parthenoi*) were a group within the "unmarried" (*agamoi*) of verse 8. Paul used the feminine gender in five out of the six uses of this noun in verses 25-38. Consequently it seems clear that he was speaking of female virgins in particular.

There are three major views about the identity of these virgins. One view is that they were the virgin daughters of men in the Corinthian church and that these fathers had questions about giving their daughters in marriage. A second view is that the virgins were both men and women who were living together in a "spiritual marriage" (i.e., without sexual relations). A third view is that the virgins were females who were engaged, or thinking of becoming engaged, but were experiencing pressure from the "spiritual" in the church to forgo marriage. I believe the text supports the third view best.

The Lord Jesus had not addressed this problem during His earthly ministry as far as Paul knew (cf. v. 12). Paul gave his inspired opinion as a trustworthy (wise) steward of the Lord who had received mercy to be such (4:2). Note that Paul appealed to the Lord's mercy, not His command. As in the first part of this chapter, Paul was offering good advice, but he was

not commanding that everyone do the same thing. Thus to choose not to follow Paul's advice did not amount to sinning.

7:26 What is the present distress or crisis (Gr. *anagke*) to which the apostle referred? It may have been a crisis in the Corinthian church or in Corinth about which we have no more specific information. However in view of Paul's description of this distress (vv. 29-31) it seems as though he was speaking of the fact that we live in the last days.¹⁸⁸ They are last days because the Lord's return for us could end them at any time.

If this is correct, we live in the same present distress as the Corinthian believers did. It is a time of distress because of the hostility of unbelievers and increasing apostasy (cf. 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3). The Apostle Paul consistently viewed the inter-advent age as a time of crisis and distress.

The last part of the verse restates Paul's basic principle of abiding in one's calling (vv. 17, 20, 24). "Man" (NASB) or "you" (NIV) is *anthropos*, meaning "person."

7:27 Paul thought it prudent to stay married rather than seeking a life of singleness with a view to serving the Lord more effectively. Obviously it would be wrong to split up a marriage for this purpose. If an unbelieving spouse had abandoned the Christian, or if he or she had lost his or her spouse to death, a single life would provide greater opportunity for Christian ministry.

7:28 Nevertheless marrying in such a case is not sinful. Furthermore if a young woman decides to marry rather than staying single, she has not sinned. However the decision to marry may complicate her service of the Lord.

For example, suppose a single woman gets into a position where an adversary may torture her for her faith. She could face that possibility more easily than a married woman who has children for whom she has responsibility could. It is that kind of "trouble" that Paul evidently had in mind.

"One of the unfortunate things that has happened to this text in the church is that the very pastoral concern of Paul that caused him to express himself in this way has been a source of anxiety rather than comfort. Part of the reason for this is that in Western cultures we do not generally live in a time of 'present distress.' Thus we fail to sense the kind of care that this text represents. Beyond that, what is often heard is that Paul prefers singleness to marriage, which he does. But quite in contrast to Paul's own position over against the Corinthians, we often read into that preference that singleness is somehow a superior status. That causes some who do not

¹⁸⁸Barrett, p. 175; Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 77; et al.

wish to remain single to become anxious about God's will in their lives. Such people need to hear it again: Marriage or singleness per se lies totally outside the category of 'commandments' to be obeyed or 'sin' if one indulges; and Paul's preference here is not predicated on 'spiritual' grounds but on pastoral concern. It is perfectly all right to marry."¹⁸⁹

Reasons for remaining single 7:29-35

Paul next called his readers to take a different view of their relationship to the world since they lived in distressing times and the form of the world was passing away. We, too, need this view of the world since we also live in distressing times and the form of the world is still passing away.

- 7:29a While it is true that the time a person has to serve Christ grows shorter with every day he or she lives, Paul probably meant that the Lord's return is closer every day. However it is not the amount of time that we have left that concerned Paul but the fact that we know our time is limited. Christians should live with a certain perspective on the future and, therefore, we should live with eternity's values consciously in view. We should be ready to make sacrifices now in view of the possibility of greater reward later (3:14).
- 7:29b-31a Married men should live as soldiers of the Cross willing to forgo some of the comforts and pleasures of family life, but not its responsibilities, since we are in a spiritual battle. Those who weep should remember that present sorrow will be comparatively short (cf. Luke 6:21). Likewise those who rejoice should bear in mind that we have a serious purpose to fulfill in life (Luke 6:25). When we make purchases, we need to consider that we are only stewards of God and that everything really belongs to Him. The Christian should use the world and everything in it to serve the Lord, but we must not get completely wrapped up in the things of this world. Therefore, whether a person is single or married he or she should live with an attitude of detachment from the world. We should not let it engross or absorb us.
- 7:31b The reason for viewing life this way is that earthly life as we know it is only temporary and is passing away.
- 7:32a Paul wanted his readers to be free from concerns about this present life so devotion to the Lord would be consistent (v. 35; cf. Matt. 6:25-34; Phil. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:7). He wanted us to live as eschatological people. Our new existence in Christ should determine our lives, not the world in its present form. Buying and marrying should not determine our existence. A clear view of the future should do that.

¹⁸⁹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 334.

- 7:32b-34 Comparing two equally committed Christians, an unmarried man can give more concentrated attention to the things of the Lord. A married man also needs to think about his family responsibilities. This is true of women, and particularly virgins, as well as men.¹⁹⁰ Some interpreters put more emphasis on the negative anxiety feeling while others stress the positive legitimate care that each person needs to show. Both aspects of concern are probably in view. Even though the unmarried state is desirable, it is not intrinsically better.¹⁹¹
- 7:35 Paul did not want his readers to regard his preceding comments as an attempt to build too strong a case for celibacy, as ascetics do. He wanted to help his readers appreciate the realities of the single and married states so they could express unhindered devotion to the Lord. Christians have genuine freedom under the Lord to choose to be single or married. However, we need to view life in view of the "present distress" and the "shortened times" as we consider our options.

Single women have freedom to choose whether they want to get married as do single men. Nevertheless the realities of life in Christ that Paul outlined in this pericope need to inform that decision.

The legitimacy of marriage 7:36-40

This section concludes Paul's entire teaching on marriage in this chapter. However it contains problems related to the meaning of "virgin" as is clear from the three different interpretations in the NASB, the NIV, and the NEB. I tend to think that these verses do not introduce a special case (advice to fathers of virgins¹⁹²) but connect with verse 35. Probably the man in view is the fiancé of the virgin who is considering the possibility of marriage with her.¹⁹³ The pericope then summarizes what Paul has already taught.

- 7:36 Paul urged any man not to feel that he must remain single or that he and his virgin girlfriend must forgo sexual fulfillment after marriage (vv. 1-7). He might have been reluctant to marry because of what Paul had written about the single state being preferable (vv. 8, 28-34). He might also have hesitated because of ascetic influences in the church that were due to a false sense of "spirituality" and possibly an overreaction to the fornication in Corinth.
- 7:37 Likewise the man who preferred to take Paul's advice to remain single should feel at peace about his decision. External pressure from the ascetic Corinthians or from what Paul himself had just written need not constrain

¹⁹⁰Queen Elizabeth I said that England was her husband. Robertson and Plummer, p. 158.

¹⁹¹Barrett, p. 181.

¹⁹²E.g., Robertson and Plummer, p. 158.

¹⁹³Barrett, p. 184.

him. He should follow his own convictions about marrying or not marrying.

7:38 The decision in view is one involving the good and the better rather than the right and the wrong or not sinning and sinning. This is a good example of an amoral situation. Paul addressed other amoral situations later in this epistle (cf. 8:1—11:1).

"So at the end Paul has agreed, and disagreed, with the Corinthians in their letter. They prefer celibacy for 'spiritual' reasons; he prefers it for pastoral and eschatological ones. But quite in contrast to them, he also affirms marriage; indeed, he does so strongly: Such a man 'does well.' But there is one final word. These verses are addressed to the man; but in keeping with his response throughout, there is a final word for married women as well."¹⁹⁴

7:39 The remaining two verses conclude both major sections of the discussion by repeating that women should not separate from their husbands (cf. vv. 1-24). This concluding reminder is especially important for virgins considering the possibility of marrying. Again Paul referred to marriage as a binding relationship (cf. vv. 15, 27). The wife is bound (Gr. *deo*) to her husband as long as he lives. Does this mean that even if he leaves her the marriage tie is unbroken? That is what many interpreters have concluded. If that is the case, remarriage after a divorce or separation would constitute adultery (cf. Matt. 19:9; Mark 10:11-12). In that case, one should avoid remarriage before the death of the spouse.

Another possibility is that Paul conceded, but did not restate, the fact that desertion by an unbelieving spouse freed the Christian and he or she was no longer under bondage to the mate (v. 15). This applied only to mixed marriages, however.

Paul regarded death as the only thing that always breaks the marriage bond. This may imply that present marital relationships will not continue in heaven just as they are now (cf. Luke 20:34-36). Jesus taught that fornication may break the marriage bond if the marriage partners do not reunite (Matt. 19:9). God may permit separation or divorce in certain circumstances (cf. Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:15), but remarriage usually results in adultery.

When a Christian woman's husband dies, she is at liberty to marry whomever she chooses provided he is a believer (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14). The same rule would apply to a Christian man whose wife dies.

¹⁹⁴Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 355.

"Long, long ago Plutarch, the wise old Greek, laid it down, that 'marriage cannot be happy unless husband and wife are of the same religion.'"¹⁹⁵

7:40 Paul expressed his opinion, that a widow would probably be better off to remain unmarried, with a very light touch, one that he used throughout this chapter. This decision, as well as all decisions about whether to marry or not, pivots on a delicate balance. I suspect that Paul would have acknowledged that given certain conditions a widow might be better off to marry.

For example, faced with the prospect of choosing between a fine Christian husband and a life of destitute poverty it would probably be better for her to remarry. However if all other things are equal, the single state seemed preferable to the apostle. Notice that the issue is the widow's happiness, not her obedience.

Paul undoubtedly knew he represented the mind of the Spirit in what he said. He simply expressed himself as he did to avoid laying too much weight on his preference.

This chapter is one of the central passages on the subject of marriage (cf. Deut. 24; Matt. 5; 19; Mark 10).¹⁹⁶ It reveals that Paul was not a hard-nosed bigot and advocate of celibacy, as some have accused him of being. He was extremely careful to distinguish his personal preferences in amoral aspects of this subject from the Lord's will. Even when the will of God was unequivocal (e.g., v. 39) he did not "pound the pulpit" but simply explained God's will in irenic fashion. May all of us who preach and teach on this sensitive subject follow his example.

B. FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS 8:1—11:1

The Corinthians had asked Paul another question, evidently in a combative spirit judging by the apostle's response. It involved a practice common in their culture.

The commentators understand the situation that Paul addressed in two different ways. Some of them believe that the eating of marketplace food that pagans had previously offered to idols was amoral in itself, but it was controversial enough to cause division among the church members. If this was indeed the issue that Paul addressed, it is only one of many similar "doubtful things." Advocates of this view believe that the apostle's directions to his readers here give us guidance in dealing with contemporary doubtful (amoral) matters.

¹⁹⁵Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 79.

¹⁹⁶See the bibliography of these notes for other helpful resources on this subject.

Other interpreters believe that eating food sacrificed to idols involved a specific form of idolatry and was, therefore, not amoral but sinful (cf. 5:10-11). They assume that Paul was responding to the Corinthians' objection to his prohibition of this practice that he had written in his former letter to them. This view sees 8:10 and 10:1-22 as expressing the basic problem to which Paul was responding. I believe the text supports this interpretation of the facts better than the former one.

"That going to the temples is the real issue is supported by the fact that the eating of cultic meals was a regular part of worship in antiquity. This is true not only of the nations that surrounded Israel, but of Israel itself. In the Corinth of Paul's time, such meals were still the regular practice both at state festivals and private celebrations of various kinds. There were three parts to these meals: the preparation, the sacrifice proper, and the feast. The meat of the sacrifices apparently was divided into three portions: that burned before the god, that apportioned to the worshipers, and that placed on the 'table of the god,' which was tended by cultic ministrants but also eaten by the worshipers. The significance of these meals has been much debated, but most likely they involved a combination of religious and social factors. The gods were thought to be present since the meals were held in their honor and sacrifices were made; nonetheless, they were also intensely social occasions for the participants. For the most part the Gentiles who had become believers in Corinth had probably attended such meals all their lives; this was the basic 'restaurant' in antiquity, and every kind of occasion was celebrated in this fashion.

"The problem, then, is best reconstructed along the following lines. After their conversion—and most likely after the departure of Paul—some of them returned to the practice of attending the cultic meals. In his earlier letter Paul forbade such 'idolatry'; but they have taken exception to that prohibition and in their letter have made four points:

"(1) They argue that 'all have knowledge' about idols [i.e., that there are no such things, so participation in these meals is not an issue, cf. vv. 1, 4]. . . .

"(2) They also have knowledge about food, that it is a matter of indifference to God (8:8) . . .

"(3) They seem to have a somewhat 'magical' view of the sacraments; those who have had Christian baptism and who partake of the Lord's Table are not in any danger of falling (10:1-4).

"(4) Besides, there is considerable question in the minds of many whether Paul has the proper apostolic authority to forbid them on this matter. In their minds this has been substantiated by two factors: first, his failure to accept support while with them; and second, his own apparently

compromising stance on idol food sold in the marketplace (he abstained when eating with Jews, but ate when eating with Gentiles; cf. 9:19-23)."¹⁹⁷

1. The priority of love over knowledge in Christian conduct ch. 8

The amount of corrective instruction concerning knowledge in this epistle makes clear that the Corinthian Christians valued knowledge too highly. Paul wrote that the real aim of the faith should not be knowledge but love.

Knowledge and love compared 8:1-3

Paul began by comparing the way of love and the way of knowledge to show their relative importance.

8:1 The key phrase *peri de* ("now concerning" or "now about") as well as a change in subject matter mark off a new section of this epistle.

Traditional interpreters of this passage have pointed out that in the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day, pagan Gentiles offered sacrificial animals to various pagan gods and goddesses in temples daily. Only a token portion went to the deity and burned up on the altar. The temple priests, attendants, and their families ate most of the meat, but frequently they could not eat all that the worshippers brought. Consequently they sold what remained to the meat market operators in the *agora* (marketplace). There the general public purchased it. This meat was very desirable and popular because the pagans usually offered only the best animals in sacrifice. However the butchers did not usually identify it as meat that someone had offered to an idol. Traditional interpreters believe that this is the meat in view in the discussion.¹⁹⁸ As mentioned above, I think eating in an idol temple has better support.

In dealing with this issue Paul began as he customarily did in this epistle by identifying common ground of belief with his readers (cf. 6:2; 7:1). All the believers knew that there were no other gods beside the true God. This knowledge was leading some in the church to think that eating in an idol temple was insignificant. It probably led others to make no distinction between the kinds of meat they bought in the market. This was perfectly proper, as Paul pointed out later. Nevertheless knowledge of this fact was not the only factor his readers needed to consider in their relationship to eating this food.

The apostle established at the beginning of his discussion of this important subject that knowledge by itself produces arrogance (cf. 1:5; 12:8). We have already seen that arrogance was one of the Corinthians' major

¹⁹⁷Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 360-62.

¹⁹⁸E.g., Barrett, pp. 188-89.

weaknesses (4:6, 18-19; 5:2). In contrast, love edifies. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (13:4). Paul did not mean his readers should abandon the knowledge that was foundational to their correct conduct. He meant that knowledge without love was incomplete and by itself would not lead them to correct conduct.

8:2 Paul warned that if anyone thinks he or she has fully mastered any subject he or she can count on the fact that he or she has not. The reason for this is that there is always more to any subject than any one person ever appreciates. There is always another facet to it, another point of view that one has not considered when examining it, or more information about it.

This person's knowledge is deficient in another sense. His attitude toward his knowledge is wrong. He arrogantly and unrealistically claims to have exhausted his subject rather than humbly realizing that he has not done so. To think one has fully mastered any subject is the height of arrogance. Paul said what he did here to humble some of his readers. Some claimed that since there are no such things as idols it was perfectly obvious what the Christian's relation to eating meat in an idol's temple should be.

"True *gnosis* ["knowledge"] consists not in the accumulation of so much data, nor even in the correctness of one's theology, but in the fact that one has learned to live in love toward all."¹⁹⁹

"The distinction which it seems that these rather cumbersome clauses seek to express is between, on the one hand, the collection of pieces of information (*gnosis*) about God, and, on the other, the state of being personally, and rightly, related to him."²⁰⁰

8:3 Paul chose one subject to illustrate the proper view. Accumulating all the facts about God that one can will not result in the most realistic knowledge of Him. One must also love God. If a person loves God, then God knows (recognizes) him in an intimate way and reveals Himself to him (2:10; Matt. 11:27). Consequently it is really more important that God knows us than that we know Him. When He knows us intimately, He will enable us to know Him intimately.

". . . If a man loves God, this is a sign that God has taken the initiative."²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 368.

²⁰⁰Barrett, p. 190.

²⁰¹Ibid.

Logically not only will God enable those who love Him to know Him better, but He will also enable those who love Him to understand other subjects as well. Paul said this to establish the priority of love over knowledge in determining our behavior in various amoral situations.

The content of the way of knowledge 8:4-6

Paul resumed his discussion of knowledge after digressing briefly in verses 2 and 3 to comment on the superiority of love over knowledge.

- 8:4 In this verse Paul returned to the original subject of eating meals in idol temples and applied the priority of love over knowledge to it. Unquestionably idols are not spirit beings such as God. There is only one true God (Deut. 6:4). Every Christian should know that, and the Corinthians did. "We know that" affirms what they all knew as true.
- 8:5 Nevertheless for many people, the pagans and even Christians who do not have a correct concept of deity, there are many beings they regard as gods and lords over various areas of life.

"The two terms 'gods' and 'lords,' which set up the Christian confession in v. 6, reflect the two basic forms of Greco-Roman religion as it has been modified by the coming of the Oriental cults. The 'gods' designate the traditional deities, who are regularly given this appellation in the literature but are seldom referred to as *kyrioi* ('lords'). The term *kyrios*, on the other hand, is the normal title for the deities of the mystery cults."²⁰²

- 8:6 For instructed Christians there is only one God and one Lord. Paul did not mean that there are two separate beings, God and Lord. These are two names for the one true God who exists as Father and Son. The Scriptures establish the deity of Jesus Christ elsewhere (e.g., John 1:1, 14; 10:30; Col. 1:15-19; et al.). Paul did not argue that point here but simply stated the Son's equality with the Father within the Godhead.

The point of difference is this. 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.

²⁰²Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 373.

The criterion of care for a brother 8:7-13

"He [Paul] develops an airtight case based on a solid theological foundation (8:6). But then comes the *alla* ('however' [v. 7]), and the argument moves in an entirely different direction.

"At issue is the nature of the community. Is it a community where those with a correct theology can ignore others who have an aversion to eating the idol-consecrated food? What must prevail is not the principle of superior knowledge but the realization that those who lack knowledge are those 'for whom Christ died' (8:11). Edification takes precedence over freedom; the other person's advantage takes precedence over one's own (10:23-24). The christological epistemology of 1:18—2:16 applied to the controversy over eating food offered to idols calls for a community of sensitivity and love."²⁰³

8:7 The traditional interpretation of this verse is as follows. Whereas every Christian should know that there are no other gods but the one true God, some of the Corinthians, because of their previous belief in idols, had difficulty shaking that belief. They still had needless false guilt about eating meat that someone had previously dedicated to a heathen deity. They thought they were doing something wrong even though they were not. This false guilt created a problem for them in their relationship with God.

A modern equivalent might be a Christian who gets saved out of a pagan background in which he was spending all of his free time and money on recreation of various kinds. He becomes a Christian and realizes that recreation had been his god. As a conscientious Christian he wants to avoid slipping back into that trap so he avoids recreation. He may even become critical of other believers who enjoy the forms of recreation to which he considers himself previously enslaved. He has trouble accepting recreation as a legitimate activity for Christians. When he sees other Christians enjoying recreation, he tends to look down on them as carnal. He has false guilt about participating in recreation.

Probably Paul was describing a Corinthian Christian who would go to a feast in an idol temple, as he or she had done before conversion. That person would have pangs of true guilt because by participating he or she was tacitly approving the worship and consequently the existence of the idol. Paul said the person's conscience was weak because even though he or she *intellectually* believed there was only one God, his or her *emotions* had not fully assimilated that truth.²⁰⁴

²⁰³Cousar, "The Theological . . .," p. 99.

²⁰⁴Compare Peter's compromise in Galatians 2:11-14.

- 8:8 Foods do not make us more or less pleasing to God. In our relationship to Him we are no better or worse if we participate or abstain. However eating food in a pagan temple was something else.
- "It is the clean heart, and not clean food, that will matter; and the weak brother confounds the two."²⁰⁵
- 8:9 The knowledge that some food is all right in itself is not the only factor that should determine whether we eat it or not. Love for a brother that our participation bothers is also important. The weak brother is weak because his emotions have not caught up to his intellect. In this context, a stumbling block is any barrier to another individual's personal relationship with God. The Corinthian Christians who had returned to the pagan temples for their feasts were disregarding how their participation was affecting their brethren who still viewed participation as worship of the idol.
- 8:10 In verses 10-12 Paul proceeded to appeal on behalf of the rights of the weak. Suppose a Corinthian Christian appreciated the fact that eating meat offered to an idol was insignificant in itself. He might accept an invitation from friends to share a meal in a pagan temple at which the cultic leader served that meat if he saw another Corinthian believer there. Undoubtedly some of the believers in Corinth were attending these feasts and were encouraging other Christians to take this "knowledgeable" stand.²⁰⁶ This verse is one of the clearest evidences that participating in feasts in idol temples was the issue Paul was addressing rather than simply eating marketplace meat.
- 8:11 Paul explained what had taken place in such a situation. The knowledgeable Christian had by his knowledge of what was legitimate, and by acting on the basis of that knowledge alone, destroyed his brother's relationship with God. "Ruined" seems strong, but Paul evidently foresaw the weaker brother returning to idolatry, the next step after participating in a feast in an idol temple. The apostle stressed the value of the weaker brother by referring to the fact that Christ died for him. Therefore the stronger brother dare not view him and his scruples as insignificant or unimportant.
- 8:12 We are not free to damage another person's relationship with God. We sin against God and that person when we put an occasion for stumbling before him or her. This is the very opposite of what God has called us to do, namely love God and other people (cf. Matt. 22:37-39). The ultimate

²⁰⁵Robertson and Plummer, p. 170.

²⁰⁶Bruce K. Fisk, "Eating Meat Offered to Idols: Corinthian Behavior and Pauline Response in 1 Corinthians 8—10 (A Response to Gordon Fee)," *Trinity Journal* 10 NS:1 (Spring 1989):49-70, argued that the meals here were spiritually harmless temple meals. This seems indefensible to me.

wrong of the person who lives only by his knowledge is not just that he lacks true knowledge or that he causes a brother to stumble. It is that he sins against Christ.

8:13 Paul drew a conclusion about his own behavior from what he had said on this subject. He would make love for his brethren the governor over his knowledge of what was true and permissible.

The Greek word translated "causes to stumble [or fall]" is *skandalidzo*. A *skandalon*, the noun form of the word, was the trigger on a trap. Paul viewed eating in an idol temple as a kind of trigger that might set off a trap that could snare a fellow believer. It could retard his progress and cause him pain. Paul was willing to forgo all such eating if by doing so he could avoid creating problems for other Christians in their relationships with God (cf. Rom. 14:13-23).

The issue in this chapter is not that of offending someone in the church. Paul dealt with that subject in 10:31—11:1 and Romans 14. It is, rather, doing something that someone else would emulate to his or her own hurt. Paul dealt with an attitude in the Corinthians. They were arguing for a behavior on the basis of knowledge. Paul said the proper basis was love.

Our culture promotes our personal rights very strongly. This emphasis has permeated the thinking of most Christians. We need to remember that there is something more important than our freedom to do as we please. That something is the spiritual development of other people. As those to whom other Christians look as examples, it is specially important for you and me to recall this principle as we live. Our willingness to accept this standard for ourselves will reveal our true love for God and people. Our failure to do so will reveal our lack of knowledge as well as our lack of love.

2. Paul's apostolic defense ch. 9

The absence of the key phrase "now concerning" is the clue that this chapter does not deal with a new subject. It is a continuation of the discussion of eating in idol temples that Paul began in 8:1. Subjecting our freedom for the welfare of other people is not something any of us does naturally. Paul knew his readers would profit from more instruction on this subject.

Evidently the Corinthian Christians had misunderstood Paul's policy of limiting the exercise of his activities to help others (8:13). Some in the church had apparently concluded that because he did not exercise his rights he did not have them, for example his right to material support (cf. 2 Cor. 12:13). His apparently vacillating conduct also raised questions in their minds about his full apostolic authority. For example, he ate marketplace food with Gentiles but not with Jews. Paul responded to this viewpoint in this chapter. There have been evidences of the Corinthians' unwillingness to yield to

Paul's authority throughout this letter (4:1-5; 5—6; cf. 14:36-37). This was an appropriate place for him to confront the issue.

Apostolic identity 9:1-2

- 9:1 The apostle's four rhetorical questions all expect a positive answer, and they become increasingly specific. Certainly he enjoyed the liberty that every other believer had. Furthermore he possessed the rights and privileges of an apostle. The proof of his apostleship was twofold. He had seen the risen Christ (Acts 1:21-22) on the Damascus road (Acts 22:14-15; 26:15-18), and he had founded the church in Corinth, which was apostolic work (cf. Rom. 15:15-21). Clearly Paul's apostleship was at stake in Corinth (cf. 1:1, 12; 4:1-5, 8-13, 14-21; 5:1-2).
- 9:2 Others might have doubts about Paul's apostleship, but the Corinthians certainly should not in view of his ministry among them. They themselves were the proof that he was an apostle.

Apostolic rights 9:3-14

The issue of Paul's right to their material support underlies this whole pericope.

"Philosophers and wandering missionaries in the Greco-Roman world were 'supported' by four means: fees, patronage, begging, and working. Each of these had both proponents and detractors, who viewed rival forms as not worthy of philosophy."²⁰⁷

Paul did not begin by justifying his renunciation of his apostolic rights but by establishing that he had these rights. He evidently had to begin there because the Corinthians were challenging these rights. They were assuming that Paul had worked with his hands because he lacked apostolic rights, not because he had chosen to forgo them.

- 9:3 If anyone challenged his practice of forgoing his rights as an apostle, his response follows.
- 9:4 Paul used the series of rhetorical questions that begins here to force the Corinthians to recognize—they should already have known—that he possessed full apostolic rights. In view of the other rights that follow, Paul's reference to eating and drinking here probably means to eat and drink at the expense of others. It means to accept financial support in his ministry.
- 9:5 Evidently it was customary for the other apostles and the Lord's physical brothers to take their wives with them when they travelled to minister. The churches they served covered the expenses of these women as well as

²⁰⁷Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 399.

those of their husbands. Paul may have mentioned Peter in particular because he had a strong following in Corinth (1:12). His references to the Lord's brothers in this verse and to Barnabas in the next do not necessarily mean that these men had visited Corinth. Probably the Corinthians knew about their habits of ministering second-hand.

- 9:6 The Corinthians had acknowledged the right of the other apostles to refrain from secular employment. Paul and Barnabas chose to work with their hands at times so their financial support would not burden their converts (4:12; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-9; Acts 20:34). Evidently the practice of Barnabas was well known. Paul had stooped to the demeaning work of making tents while he ministered in Corinth (Acts 18:3). Apparently some of the Corinthian Christians took Paul's action as an indication that he did not think of himself as worthy of support because he was not equal with the other apostles.
- 9:7 These three illustrations support the fact that Paul as a servant of the Lord had a right to accept support from those to whom he ministered. The Lord's servants are certainly not inferior to field hands, farmers, and animals.
- 9:8-9 God made special provision in the Mosaic Law for the oxen that served people by threshing their grain (Deut. 25:4). In so doing, Paul said, God was teaching His concern for the maintenance of all who serve others, not just oxen.
- 9:10 God meant to encourage human laborers with His provision for animals that labored. He wanted human laborers to work with the hope of pay. The people who profited from those services should consider those who served them worthy of support.
- 9:11 Spiritual things are intrinsically more important than physical things. The former will last forever whereas the latter are only temporary. How much more then should those who benefit from spiritual ministry support physically those who minister to them. "Is it too much" reveals that Paul was contending with the Corinthians, not just exhorting them.
- 9:12 As the planter of the Corinthian church Paul had a right to the support of the Corinthians more than any of their other ministers did. Yet he did not insist on his right. He chose rather to support himself so his work of establishing the church might not suffer from criticism that he was serving for the material benefits he derived from his converts.
- 9:13 Paul appealed to the common Jewish practice, that was also prevalent in pagan religions, of allowing those who minister in spiritual matters to gain physical support from those they serve.

9:14 The Lord Jesus taught the same right (Luke 10:7).

"All too often, one fears, the objective of this text is lost in concerns over 'rights' that reflect bald professionalism rather than a concern for the gospel itself."²⁰⁸

Apostolic restraint 9:15-18

Having argued vigorously for his right to the Corinthians' support, Paul now proceeded to argue just as strongly for his right to give up this right, his point from the beginning. He explained why he had deliberately not accepted their patronage. This pericope gives the reader a window into the apostle's soul. We see here what made him tick.

9:15 Paul had this right, but he chose not to use it. He did not want his readers to interpret what he had said on this subject as a veiled request for support. He had made his decision to support himself while he preached freely; the Lord did not require this of him. Consequently he could take justifiable pride in it, as anyone who makes a sacrifice for the welfare of others can.

9:16 He could not take justifiable pride in the fact that he preached the gospel, however. Even though it involved sacrificing for the benefit of others, he had made those sacrifices in obedience to the Lord (Acts 26:16-18; cf. Matt. 28:19-20). He had no choice about preaching the gospel as he did about how he would live while he did so. Preaching was his divine destiny. Indeed he would be in serious trouble with his Lord if he did not preach the gospel. (And so will we.)

9:17 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; cf. 4:1-2).

9:18 Paul's reward for preaching the gospel willingly was the privilege of preaching it without cost to his hearers. His highest pay was the privilege of preaching without pay.²⁰⁹ This choice may seem as though it was Paul's decision rather than a reward from the Lord, but he viewed it as a privilege that came to him from the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 11:7-12).

Paul had all the rights of an apostle and was free to insist on them if he chose to do so. He also had the freedom not to insist on them. His relinquishing his right to support corresponds to his giving up his right to eat in a pagan temple (8:13). In both cases it was the welfare of others that led him to forgo a legitimate right.

²⁰⁸Ibid., p. 414.

²⁰⁹Morris, p. 137. See also Barrett, p. 210.

Apostolic freedom 9:19-23

The extent to which the apostle was willing to lay aside his rights comes out in this pericope. Since Paul chose not to receive pay for his ministry in Corinth, he was free from the restrictions that patronage might impose. This left him free to become the slave of all.

9:19 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 (cf. Mark 10:45).

9:20 It was the apostle's custom to follow Jewish ways when he was in the company of Jews. He did so to make them receptive to him and his message rather than antagonistic (cf. Acts 21:20-26). He did not do this because he felt obligated to keep the Mosaic Law. He did not feel obligated to do so (Rom. 6:14). The salvation of Jews was his objective in observing Jewish laws and customs many of which dealt with abstaining from certain foods (cf. 8:13). He had circumcised Timothy at Lystra for this purpose (Acts 16:3).

9:21 Likewise when Paul was with Gentiles he behaved as a Gentile. This would have involved eating what they did, among other things.

The references to law in this verse may be confusing. In describing Gentiles as being without law, Paul did not mean that Gentiles are totally lawless (cf. Rom. 2:14). He meant they were not under the Law of Moses as the Jews were (v. 20). Paul wanted his readers to understand that even though he did not observe the Mosaic Law when he was with Gentiles (*Gr. anomos*) he was still under God's authority (*ennomos*). As a Christian he was not under the Law of Moses, but he was under the Law of Christ (cf. Gal. 6:2). The law of God for Jews before the Cross was the Law of Moses, but His law for Christians in the present age is the Law of Christ. The Law of Christ is the code of responsibilities that Christ and His apostles taught, which the New Testament contains. Some of the same commands are in the Mosaic Law though the codes, the Mosaic Law and the Law of Christ, are not the same.

"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."²¹⁰

9:22 The weak are those who have extremely sensitive consciences in the area of amoral practices (cf. 8:9) such as the Jews. Here the apostle meant

²¹⁰Ibid., p. 212.

unbelievers as is clear from what he said about them. Paul accommodated himself to their scruples. This policy undoubtedly led some people to conclude that Paul was inconsistent. His superficial inconsistency really manifested a more fundamental consistency. He did everything amoral with a view to bringing people to the Savior.²¹¹

9:23 The work of the gospel was the great axis around which everything in Paul's life revolved. He made it such so he might share in its blessings. He proceeded to explain what this involves in the following verses.

Apostolic exhortation and example 9:24-27

This passage is transitional concluding Paul's defense of his apostolic authority (9:1-23) and returning to the argument against participating in cultic meals (ch. 8). Metaphors from the athletic games fill the pericope.

9:24 The Corinthians were familiar with athletic contests. The Isthmian Games took place in a nearby town every two or three years. They were second only to the Olympic Games in importance in Greece.²¹² The Greek word translated "race" is *stadion*, the word used to describe the standard 600-foot Greek race.²¹³

Paul's emphasis in this verse was on the last statement. We should run our race so we will receive a reward from the Judge. In the Christian race we do not compete with one another for the prize. We compete with ourselves. In a foot race only one person is the winner, but in the Christian race all who keep the rules and run hard will receive a reward (cf. Matt. 6:19-21; 2 Tim. 2:5).

9:25 "Competes" is a translation of *agonidzomai* from which we get the English word "agonizes." To receive the prize of our Lord's "well done" we need to give all our effort. We also need to exercise self-control. Competitors in the Isthmian Games had to train for 10 months.²¹⁴ An athlete in training denies himself or herself many lawful pleasures to gain an extra edge of superiority. Likewise we may need to limit our liberty for a higher goal as spiritual athletes.

Winners in the Isthmian Games received a wreath of parsley, wild celery, or pine.²¹⁵ However the victorious Christian's reward is imperishable (cf. 2 Tim. 4:8). It also lies in the eschaton.²¹⁶ How much more important it is to

²¹¹See H. Chadwick, "All Things to All Men' (1 Cor. IX. 22)," *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954-55):261-75.

²¹²Morris, p. 139.

²¹³Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 89.

²¹⁴Morris, p. 139.

²¹⁵Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 89.

²¹⁶See Wall, pp. 79-89.

be willing to forgo our rights for the spiritual advancement of others than it is to train for a physical foot race (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17-18)!

9:26 In view of the comparative value of these rewards, Paul ran the Christian race purposefully, not aimlessly or halfheartedly. He wanted to gain a prize at the judgment seat of Christ. To use a different figure to make the same point, he did not shadowbox but sought to make every punch score. Christian service is not just activity. It is activity focused on a target, namely the building of the church and the defeat of the enemy who wants to destroy people. It is the work of the gospel.

9:27 In another sense Paul viewed his flesh as his enemy. He recognized the need to exercise strict self-discipline. Obviously Paul was not speaking of self-discipline in the physical realm alone. He also had in mind moral discipline and discipline in the amoral areas of his life including voluntary curtailment of personal rights and liberties (cf. 1 Tim. 4:8).

We must be careful not to confuse the fear of disqualification with the fear of damnation. Paul had no fear that he would lose his salvation (Rom. 8:29-39). In the context what he could lose was a reward.²¹⁷ How ironic and pathetic it would be for Paul to forfeit a crown through his own lack of self-discipline or by breaking the Judge's rules since He had instructed others concerning how to win one.

This whole chapter is an explanation of the last verse of the preceding chapter. More generally it clarifies the importance of limiting our legitimate liberty as Christians for higher goals, namely the glory of God and the welfare of other people.

"Almost in reaction against . . . globalization, many people are responding with increasing nationalism, sometimes with almost frightening ethnocentrism. Christians are not immune to these sweeping currents of thought. They, too, can be caught up in flag-waving nationalism that puts the interests of my nation or my class or my race or my tribe or my heritage above the demands of the kingdom of God. Instead of feeling that their most important citizenship is in heaven, and that they are just passing through down here on their way 'home' to the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22-23), they become embroiled with petty priorities that constitute an implicit denial of the lordship of Christ."²¹⁸

3. The sinfulness of idolatry 10:1-22

Paul continued dealing with the subject of going to idol temples to participate in pagan feasts in this section. In it he gave a warning to the believer who considered himself strong, the one who knew there were really no gods but the true God. Such a person felt

²¹⁷See Smith, "Can Fallen . . .," pp. 466-67.

²¹⁸Carson, p. 116.

free to accept the invitation of a pagan neighbor to dine in a pagan temple (8:10). The apostle cautioned this element in the Corinthian church because, even though there are no other gods, the possibility of participating in idolatry is very real. He drew his lesson from the experience of Israel during the wilderness wanderings (cf. Exod. 13—17; Num. 10—15).

The tragic example of Israel 10:1-5

The point of this example is that God's people can practice idolatry, and persisting in idolatry has dire consequences. Paul stressed the similarity of experience that the church, the Corinthian church particularly, and Israel shared by pointing out that each group had its own "baptism" and "Lord's Supper."

10:1-2 Paul did not want his readers to overlook a very important possibility as they thought about eating special meals in idol temples. He reminded them that their fathers in the faith, believers in Israel, were also all under the protective influence of God. The Corinthians *knew* these facts from the Old Testament, but they did not appreciate their *significance*. The cloud that led them in their wilderness wanderings symbolized God's loving care. Likewise they all experienced a miraculous deliverance when they crossed the Red Sea. Moreover all of them associated with Moses who was their leader and God's instrument in their redemption.

Baptism is the outward expression of the believer's identification with the object of his or her faith (cf. Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). Consequently Paul could say the Israelites were baptized into Moses even though they did not undergo literal water baptism in the name of Moses. By following him and submitting to his authority they expressed their identification with him. The parallel with water baptism was most vivid when they went under the cloud and crossed the Red Sea. These experiences constituted a dry baptism for the Israelites.

10:3-4 Furthermore all the Israelites, not just some of them, ate the manna and drank water from the rock. They ate manna throughout their wilderness sojourn (Deut. 8:2-4), and they drank from the rock at the beginning (Exod. 17:1-7) and at the end of it (Num. 20:2-13). Paul called the manna and water spiritual food and drink because God provided them supernaturally and because they have spiritual significance. Both of them point to Christ, the real sustainer of His people (cf. John 6:35, 48-51; 7:37-38). The Israelites thought of God as a rock (Deut. 32: 4, 15, 18, 30-31; et al.). He as a rock, not some physical rock, accompanied them in the wilderness. Their eating and drinking of God is similar to and anticipated the Christian Lord's Supper.

Paul's point in these first four verses was that the Israelites were the chosen people of God just as Christians are now the chosen people of God.

God accompanied and provided for them faithfully in the past just as He does for all Christians now.

- 10:5 In spite of these blessings, similar to those Christians enjoy, God was not happy with His people Israel. He permitted none of the adult generation of military age, 20 years old and older, to enter the Promised Land, except Caleb and Joshua. All but those two individuals from that generation died in the wilderness. How the majority displeased God and lost their privileges follows.

The application of Israel's example 10:6-13

Though idolatry was the cause of Israel's failure and the focus of Paul's warning to this church, four other evil characteristics of Israel also seem to have marked the Corinthians. These characteristics also resulted in the Israelites dying in the wilderness.

- 10:6 The experiences of the Israelites provide lessons for us. Their baptism and partaking of spiritual food and drink did not protect them from God's discipline when they craved evil things. Participation in baptism and the Lord's Supper will not protect Christians either. We should never regard participation in these ordinances as immunizing us against God's discipline if we sin against Him.

The Greek word translated "examples" is *typos* from which we get the English word "type." The experiences of the Israelites in the wilderness are types. They were early examples of situations that would recur later in history that God designed to teach His people lessons.²¹⁹

- 10:7 In verses 7-10 Paul cited four practices that got the Israelites into trouble with God. All of them were possibilities for the Corinthians as they fraternized with pagans by participating in their feasts. They are all possibilities for us too.

First, the Israelites participated in idolatry when they ate and played in the presence of the golden calf (Exod. 32:6). It is possible that their "play" involved sexual immorality (cf. Gen. 26:8; Num. 25:1-3). The scene on that occasion must have been similar to what happened at the feasts some of the Corinthians attended. There is a danger that we may compromise our commitment to God, as the Israelites did, when we participate in pagan celebrations.

²¹⁹For further information on types, see Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 196-219; Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 334-46; Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*; Elliott Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, pp. 126, 208-9.

10:8 Second, the Israelites practiced immorality (lit. fornication) when they participated in one of the Moabites' religious feasts (Num. 25:1-9).²²⁰ If this sin is only implicit in the record of the Golden Calf incident, it is explicit in the account of the Baal Peor incident. Clearly this was taking place in the Corinthian church (5:1-5, 10-11; 6:9-10, 12-20). Some Christians have participated in fornication that unbelievers have lured them into.

10:9 Third, the Israelites tested the Lord by taxing His patience.²²¹ They continued to complain even though He faithfully provided for them (Num. 21:4-9). His provision of manna and water was not adequate from their point of view, and they despised it (Num. 21:5). The Corinthians had given evidence of being dissatisfied with God's prohibition of participation in pagan feasts by opposing Paul's teaching on this point.

Likewise Christians are in danger of failing to appreciate God's provisions for them in Christ and despising Him. We can feel dissatisfied rather than thankful and content. Evidence that this attitude existed in the Corinthian church surfaces in 1:12 and 11:17-34. Perhaps the fact that some of the believers were participating in pagan feasts also indicated dissatisfaction with the Christians' special feast, the Lord's Supper.

10:10 Fourth, the Israelites grumbled frequently against the Lord during the wilderness wanderings. Moses recorded 10 separate instances in Exodus and Numbers. However the occasion Paul had in mind was when God sent fire that consumed some of the people on the edge of the camp (Num. 11:1-3). Here Paul added that God executed His wrath by using an angel, a fact that Moses did not mention in Numbers. The Septuagint translators used the same term, "the destroyer" (Gr. *olothreutes*), to describe the angel who executed the Egyptians' first-born on the night of the Exodus (Exod. 12:23; cf. Heb. 11:28).

Many instances of the Corinthian Christians' dissatisfactions with God's provisions for them come out in this epistle. Not the least of these was their rejection of some of the Lord's servants who had come to minister to them because they preferred some others (1:10—4:21). They did not appreciate Paul's earlier instruction to break off company with idolaters and the sexually immoral (5:9-11). Another example is the impatience of the "strong" in the church with the "weak" (8:1-3). Grumbling is a telltale sign of selfishness and discontent with what God has given us.

²²⁰Paul 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.

²²¹The best manuscript evidence suggests that "Christ" rather than "Lord" is the correct word here. If so, Paul again stressed that it was Christ that both the Israelites and the Corinthians were testing (cf. v. 4). He made the apostasy in both cases Christological.

- 10:11 Having cited four specific examples of Israelite failure (vv. 7-10), Paul restated the general principle (cf. v. 6).

The last phrase in this verse refers to the present age as the time of fulfillment about which the Old Testament prophet had spoken. We should be careful that we do not overlook the lessons of history since we live in these times.

- 10:12 Paul concluded with a word of warning to those who felt too confident that they were all right with God (cf. vv. 1-4; 8:4-6). The "strong" who felt free to participate in pagan feasts seem to be those he had in mind. Self-confidence could lead to a spiritual fall, as it had so often in Israel's history.

- 10:13 The apostle did not want his readers to overreact and become paranoid as they considered Israel's record either. Failure was not inevitable. The temptations the Corinthians faced were not unique, and the Lord would give them grace to handle any temptation they might face.²²²

God has promised to enable us to do His will in any and every situation, and He will stand true to His promise (cf. Matt. 28:20; et al.). He provides a way of escape with every temptation He allows to touch us. The use of the definite article "the" with both "temptation" and "way of escape" points to a particular way of escape that is available in each temptation. Paul did not mean there is one way of escape that is available regardless of the temptation. If we deliberately put ourselves in the way of temptation and so put God to the test (v. 9), we are not taking advantage of the way of escape. We may fall. Therefore we should flee from idolatry (v. 14).

The Corinthians were putting themselves in danger by continuing to attend cultic meals, which they needed to stop doing. Nevertheless God had made a way of escape open to them, as He had with Israel. The Lord's Supper and the Christian fellowship connected with it was His divine replacement of this idolatrous activity (v. 16).

This whole section (vv. 1-13) deals with the dangers involved in participating in pagan activities. Some of these activities are wrong in themselves because they involve idolatry, and Christians should not participate in them. If we should participate, we need to be aware that in doing so we are walking on the edge of a precipice over which many other believers have fallen, including the Israelites in the wilderness. We dare not underestimate the danger of the situation or overestimate our own ability to handle it. We need to walk closely with God every day.

²²²For other verses dealing with God's part in temptation, see Exod. 16:4; Deut. 8:2; I Chron. 21:1; Job 1:12; 2:6; Matt. 6:13; and James 1:13.

The incompatibility of Christianity and idolatry 10:14-22

The apostle proceeded to warn his readers of the danger of idolatry further (cf. v. 7). This paragraph concludes the long argument that Paul began in 8:1 concerning going to temple feasts.

10:14 Formerly Paul urged the Corinthians to flee fornication (6:18; cf. v. 8). Now he concluded all he said in verses 1-13 with the charge to flee idolatry, the worship of idols. He softened his strong command with an affectionate address ("my beloved"). Amoral activities are alright for the Christian, but if they involve or lead to idolatry we should avoid them.

10:15 This statement prepares for what follows. The apostle was confident that the Corinthians had the wisdom to understand the correctness of what he was about to tell them. He believed they could make correct judgments about what they should do. Still, to follow his logic they would need to use their minds. As we have seen, the Corinthians considered themselves very wise. They should judge for themselves that Paul was right.

10:16 The apostle employed rhetorical questions again to make his point. He was setting the Corinthians up for what he would say in verses 19-21.

Most New Testament references to the bread and the cup in the Lord's Supper occur in that order. Here Paul reversed the normal order. He probably turned them around because he wanted to give more attention to the bread in the verses that follow. The cup may focus on the vertical dimension of fellowship between the believer and the Lord whereas the bread focuses on the horizontal dimension (cf. v. 17).²²³ The pagan feasts also emphasized both dimensions of fellowship, with the god and with the fellow-worshippers.

The "cup of blessing" was a technical term for the third of four cups of wine that the Jews drank in the Passover celebration. At the Last Supper the drinking of this cup preceded the giving of thanks for the bread (cf. Luke 22:17-20). However the Lord's Supper only involved eating bread and drinking one cup (cf. 11:23-29).

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.²²⁴ 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 symbolizes, namely our sharing in the benefits of Christ's shed blood (cf. 11:25).

²²³Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 467.

²²⁴Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 94.

Likewise the bread used at the Christian feast, the Lord's Supper, is a symbol of our participation in the effects of Christ's slain body (cf. 11:24). The Greek word here translated "sharing" (NASB) or "participation" (NIV; *koinonia*) in other places reads "fellowship" or "communion." This is why another name for the Lord's Supper is the communion service.

10:17 When Christians take communion we all eat from one bread symbolic of the physical body of Christ. In the early church believers seem to have used one loaf, the literal meaning of the word translated "bread" in this verse (*artos*). Paul stressed that many people eating from one loaf symbolized the *solidarity* of our relationship as a redeemed community in Christ. (He developed the idea of the *unity* of the body more fully in 12:14-27 in his explanation of the diversity that exists within the unity of the spiritual body of Christ, the church.) The emphasis here is on the solidarity of believers that forbids all other unions.

10:18 We can see the partnership of those who partake of sacrifices with everything the altar stands for in Judaism (cf. Deut. 14:22-27). Paul referred to Israel literally as "Israel according to the flesh." He contrasted all the physical Israelites with those who are Jewish Christians (cf. Phil. 3:3). This description lends no support to the idea that the church replaces Israel in the program of God. "Israel" always refers to Jewish people in the New Testament.

Paul's line of reasoning was proceeding as follows. Christians who eat the bread at the Lord's Supper thereby express their solidarity with one another and with Christ. Likewise Jews who ate the meat of animals offered in the sacrifices of Judaism expressed their solidarity with one another and with God. Therefore Christians who eat the meat offered to pagan gods as part of pagan worship express their solidarity with pagans and with the pagan deities.

"As in the Holy Communion, therefore, so also in the Temple services, participating in sacrificial feasts is sacrificial fellowship with an unseen power, a power that is Divine. There is something analogous to this in the sacrificial feasts of the heathen; but in that case the unseen power is not Divine."²²⁵

The "wise" man in Corinth (v. 15) could have replied to Paul's conclusion as follows. Yes, but you agreed before that idols have no real existence and there is only one true God.

10:19 Paul proceeded to clarify what he meant. He was not saying that sacrifices to idols or idols themselves were anything. That is, sacrifices to idols were

²²⁵Robertson and Plummer, p. 215.

not in themselves sinful nor were idols genuine entities. On this point he and the Corinthians agreed. Idols were only pieces of wood or stone, not gods with supernatural powers. Nevertheless these idols represented supernatural powers (v. 20), and so eating cultic meals had genuine significance.

- 10:20 The power behind pagan religion is demonic (cf. Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37). Consequently people who sacrifice to idols express solidarity with demonic powers. Eating the food sacrificed to idols means that the people who participated shared in what had been sacrificed to demons just as the Israelites shared in what had been sacrificed to God. The cultic feasts were really sacrifices to demons, so they involved the worship of demons.
- 10:21 It is inconsistent for a Christian to partake in the Lord's Supper and to take part in pagan religious feasts. In the former he eats and drinks in union with Christ, and in the latter he is in union with demons who direct the devotees to worship idols. What the Lord promotes and what the demons promote are opposite. This inconsistency must be obvious to "wise men" (v. 15). Christians have a unique relationship with the Lord and with fellow-believers, which the Lord's Supper symbolizes. It is, therefore, inappropriate for us to have a similar association with demons and unbelievers (vv. 20-21), which participation in cultic events involves.
- 10:22 The Israelites provoked the Lord to jealousy by doing just such a thing when they joined in Moabite worship (Num. 25; cf. Deut. 32:17, 21-22). We are to learn from their experiences. It would be folly to provoke the Lord unless we are stronger than He. If we provoke Him and are not, we can count on His chastening since He is a jealous God.

The Corinthians were arguing for the right to attend pagan religious meals. They even viewed attendance as a way of building their "weaker" brethren. Paul responded that attendance was wrong on two counts: it was unloving, and it was incompatible with life in Christ, which their participation in the Lord's Table symbolized. He forbade any relationship with the demonic. The demonic is not as remote as some modern Western Christians would like to believe.

4. The issue of marketplace food 10:23—11:1

As with the issue of marriage, however, Paul granted that there are some matters connected with idolatry that are not wrong. He next gave his readers some help in making the tough choices needed in view of the amoral nature of some practices connected with pagan worship and the immoral nature of others. He suggested applying the test of what is edifying to these decisions. He proceeded to explain that food formerly offered to idols but sold in the marketplace was all right for Christians to eat at home. He himself had eaten such food (9:19-23), and the Corinthians had challenged him for doing so (10:29).

"But the real issues seem to lie deeper than the mere question of eating food. Both the nature of their argument for eating at the temples (8:1, 4, 8) and their criticism of Paul (9:1-3, 19-23) have revealed a basic confusion between absolutes and *adiaphora* (nonessentials). They had tried to make temple attendance an *adiaphoron*; for Paul it was an absolute because it was idolatry. At the same time they had confused the true basis for Christian behavior. For them it was a question of knowledge and rights (*gnosis* and *exousia*). For Paul it is a question of love and freedom (*agape* and *eleutheria*).²²⁶

This section's chiasmic structure reflects Paul's alternating concern for personal freedom and love for others.

- A The criterion stated: the good of others (10:23-24)
- B Personal freedom explained (10:25-27)
 - C The criterion illustrated: love governing liberty (10:28-29a)
- B' Personal freedom defended (10:29b-30)
- A' The criterion generalized: that all may be saved (10:33—11:1)

10:23 Earlier Paul had addressed the issue of Christian liberty and had said that all things were lawful for him, but all things were not beneficial (6:12). Now he went further and clarified that beneficial means beneficial for others, not just self. Thus he sought to bring the rights-conscious Corinthians to their knees.

10:24 The well-being of one's neighbor is of primary importance. The exercise of all one's liberties is of secondary importance (cf. Rom. 15:2; Phil. 2:4). The Corinthians viewed their freedom as an opportunity to pursue their own interests. Paul viewed it as an opportunity to benefit and build up another person.

10:25-26 It was not wrong to eat meat that pagans had offered in sacrifice to an idol. Any food for which one thanks God thereby becomes acceptable for human consumption assuming it is wholesome (v. 30; cf. 1 Tim. 4:3-5). This was a very un-Jewish viewpoint coming from a Jew. As earlier in this epistle and elsewhere in his writings, Paul appealed to Scripture for a supporting summary statement (Ps. 24:1; 50:12).

Remember Paul was talking about distinctions based on spiritual issues. In Christianity there is no distinction between kosher and non-kosher food (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:15). Paul was not talking about distinctions in food based on physical factors such as fat content, calories, and nutritional value. The issue was whether certain foods commend us to or condemn us before God. They do not.

²²⁶Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 477.

10:27 The invitation in view must be to the home of an unbeliever for a meal rather than to a pagan temple for participation in a religious feast. This seems clear from the next verse. This freedom may have been hard for many Jewish Christians to accept (cf. Acts 10:28; 11:2-3). Nevertheless it belonged to them. It was wise not to ask if someone had offered the meat to an idol. A Christian might pose this question in the home of a pagan host or in the marketplace (v. 25). Not inquiring would obviate the possibility of unnecessary guilt arising in the mind of a scrupulous believer.

10:28-29a A pagan host might warn his Christian guest that the food before him had been offered in an idol temple.²²⁷ The pagan's conscience is not a reference to his convictions about what is right and wrong for himself but his moral consciousness.²²⁸ He does not want his Christian guest to be unaware that he is being served food that the Christian might object to and might want to abstain from eating.²²⁹ Pagans often associated Christians with Jews at this stage of church history, and many pagans would have assumed that Christians observed the same dietary restrictions as the Jews.

We might think that in such a situation Paul would have advocated exercising Christian liberty to eat the meat, but he did not. He advocated abstaining, not because such meat was out of bounds for believers. It was not out of bounds; Christians could eat such meat. He advocated abstaining for the sake of the pagan's moral consciousness. Specifically, if the Christian ate the meat, the pagan might conclude that his guest was doing something Christians should not do. He would be wrong, of course. Yet Paul advocated not violating the pagan's understanding of what Christians should or should not do rather than instructing him about Christian freedom at the table.

"A present-day analogy may be imagined if someone with strong principles on total abstention from alcohol were the guest of friends who did not share these principles. He would be well advised not to enquire too carefully about the ingredients of some specially palatable sauce or trifle, but if someone said to him pointedly, 'There is alcohol in this, you know', he might feel that he was being put on the

²²⁷The context (v. 27) and the terminology (Gr. *hierothyton*, "sacrificial meat," rather than *eidolothyton*, "idol meat," the standard Jewish and Christian designation) present a situation in which a Christian is eating privately with a pagan, not in a temple as in 8:10. Only in verse 32 does the broader principle of not giving offense to fellow believers arise.

²²⁸Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 485.

²²⁹Another view is that the pagan host is trying to test his commitment to Christ, but this seems less probable.

spot and could reasonably ask to be excused from having any of it."²³⁰

10:29b This question resumes the thought of verses 26 and 27. Verses 28-29a are somewhat parenthetical being an illustration. We could restate Paul's thought this way. Why should another person's scruples determine my liberty? The answer is, they should because his spiritual welfare is more important than our Christian freedom.

10:30 Paul brought his own conduct in similar situations into the picture. He had eaten non-kosher food with Gentiles, but in the argument preceding this verse he advocated abstaining from such food when eating with pagans. The key, of course, is that sacrificial meat was only off limits for Paul when it offended the moral consciousness of the pagans he was with, not all the time.

"The blessing offered at one's meal, predicated on God's prior ownership of all things, means that no fellow Christian may condemn another on this question."²³¹

The Christian can give thanks to God for whatever he or she eats, but we should limit our own liberty out of consideration for what other people think is proper. We do not need to alter our *convictions* for the sake of others even though they speak evil of us, as the Corinthians did of Paul (cf. 9:19-23). Nevertheless we should be willing to change our *behavior* for the sake of unbelievers.

10:31 What glorifies God? Consideration for the consciences of other people and promotion of their well-being does. This contrasts with the observance of distinctions between foods, the satisfaction of one's personal preferences, and insistence on one's own rights. What glorifies God is what puts His preferences, plans, and program first (cf. Col. 3:17).

". . . God's own glory is the ultimate foundation of Pauline ethics (10:31)."²³²

10:32 Giving no offense means putting no obstacle in the path of a person be he Jew (cf. 9:20) or Gentile (cf. 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 (cf. 9:22). It is not a matter of simply "hurting someone's feelings."

²³⁰Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 100.

²³¹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 488.

²³²Idem, "Toward a . . .," p. 40.

Paul regarded these three groups as equal in this verse. Therefore he was probably thinking of three religious groups rather than two racial groups and one religious group. If so, he distinguished between Israel and the church in this verse. This distinction is basic to dispensationalism.

10:33 If we took the first part of this verse out of context, we might conclude that Paul was a "man pleaser" (cf. Gal. 1:10). Obviously he meant he did not allow any of his own attitudes or activities in amoral areas to create barriers between himself and those he sought to help spiritually.

He tried to practice what he preached about putting the welfare of others first (cf. v. 24). "Saved" in this context probably includes Christians and means saved in the wide sense of delivered from anything that keeps someone from advancing spiritually (cf. Rom. 15:1-3).

"Christian freedom is not given to us for our own sake but for the sake of others."²³³

11:1 Paul recommended that his readers follow his example of exercising and limiting their Christian liberty, glorifying God, and giving no offense, as well as in other areas of their lives (cf. 4:16).

All of chapters 8, 9, and 10, including 11:1, deal with the subject of the Christian's relationship to food sacrificed to idols. In summary, Paul forbade going to pagan temples for cultic meals. However, he permitted the eating of marketplace meat under normal circumstances. If something is not sinful it is permissible for the believer, but even so it may be wise to avoid it for the sake of the spiritual welfare of others. The Christian should be willing to limit his or her exercise of his or her Christian liberty because of love for others.

C. PROPRIETY IN WORSHIP 11:2-16

This section and the next (11:17-34) deal with subjects different from meat offered to idols, but Paul did not introduce them with the phrase "now concerning." These were additional subjects about which he wanted to give the Corinthians guidance. He had evidently learned of the Corinthians' need for instruction in these matters either through their letter to him, from the messengers that brought that letter to Paul, or from other sources.

1. The argument from culture 11:2-6

Paul introduced the first of the two subjects he dealt with in this chapter, the Corinthian women's participation in church worship, with praise. He did not introduce the second subject this way (vv. 17, 22). As with the other sections of this epistle, we can see the

²³³Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 105.

influence of Corinthian culture and world view in this one, particularly in the behavior of the women in the church.

11:2 Paul commended his original readers for remembering his teaching and example. This chapter deals with things that were going on in the meetings of the church primarily, as the context shows. The "traditions" (NASB) were "teachings" (NIV; Gr. *paradosis*) the Corinthians had received from the apostle. Some of these involved divinely inspired revelations and others just prudent advice (cf. 2 Thess. 3:6-10). They may have been following his instructions, but not in the proper ways, as his following discussion makes clear.

"The traditions (as the other references show) were the central truths of the Christian faith, handed on at this stage (before the emergence of Christian literature) orally from evangelist and teacher to convert."²³⁴

11:3 "But" indicates that things were not quite as Paul thought they should be. He began dealing with his subject by reminding the Corinthians again (cf. 3:23; 8:6) of God's administrative order. This is the order through which He has chosen to conduct His dealings with humans.

Jesus Christ is the head of every male human being (Gr. *aner*). Second, the male is the head of woman (Gr. *gune*). This Greek word for woman is very broad and covers women of any age, virgins, married women, or widows. Paul used it earlier in this epistle of a wife (7:3-4, 10-12, 14, 16). In this chapter it evidently refers to any woman who was in a dependent relationship to a man such as a wife to a husband or a daughter to a father. Paul probably did not mean every woman universally since he said the male is the head of woman, or a woman, but not *the* woman. He was evidently not talking about every relationship involving men and women, for example the relationship between men and women in the workplace. Third, God the Father is the head of God the Son. This shows that headship exists even within the Godhead.

The New Testament uses the term "head" (Gr. *kephale*) to describe headship in two ways. Sometimes it describes origin (source), and other times it describes authority (leader). Some scholars favor one interpretation and others the other.²³⁵ Both meanings are true to reality, so it is difficult to decide what Paul meant here.

²³⁴Barrett, p. 247. Of course, there were already a few inspired New Testament documents circulating among the churches.

²³⁵For helpful studies, see Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of *kephale* in the Pauline Epistles," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS5 (1954):211-15; Paul S. Fiddes, "'Woman's Head Is Man:' A Doctrinal Reflection upon a Pauline Text," *Baptist Quarterly* 31:8 (October 1986):370-83; Wayne Grudem, "Does *kephale* ('Head') Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A survey of 2,336 Examples," *Trinity*

In favor of the origin view, it is true that Christ created mankind, Eve came from Adam, and Christ came from the Father in the Incarnation to provide redemption. In favor of the authority view, humanity is under Christ's authority, God created woman under man's authority, and the Son is under the Father's authority. The idea of origin is more fundamental than that of authority. Also "head" occurs later in this passage with the idea of source (vv. 8, 12), so origin may be the preferable idea here too.²³⁶

11:4 Here Paul used the word "head" twice. Clearly in the first instance he meant the man's physical skull. What did he mean the second time he referred to the man's head? He could have meant his physical skull again. However, in view of what he just said (v. 3) and would say, he probably meant his spiritual head, Jesus Christ. In Judaism when a man prayed with his physical head covered, as was common, he did not thereby dishonor himself. In Christian worship the men did not wear head coverings.

Paul's reference to praying and prophesying sets his instructions in the context of the church at public worship.²³⁷ Praying involves expressing one's thoughts and feelings to God. Prophesying might involve any of three things. Prophets foretold future events pertaining especially to the kingdom of God (Matt. 11:13; Acts 2:17-18; 21:9). They also declared new revelation from God (Matt. 26:68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:64; cf. 7:39; John 4:19). Third, they could under divine impulse utter some lofty statement or message that would glorify God (Luke 1:67; Acts 9:6), or a word of instruction, refutation, reproof, admonition, or comfort for others (1 Cor. 13:9; 14:1, 3-5, 24, 31, 39). This last type of prophecy did not contain a new revelation or a prediction involving the future.²³⁸ The last activity is what seems to be in view in other references to prophesying in

Journal 6NS (1985):38-59; idem. "The Meaning of *kephale*: A Response to Recent Studies," *Trinity Journal* 11NS (1990):3-72; idem, "The Meaning of *kephale* ('head'): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:1 (March 2001):25-65.

²³⁶Barrett, p. 248.

²³⁷Harold R. Holmyard III, "Does 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Refer to Women Praying and Prophesying in Church?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:616 (October-December 1997):461-72, argued that 11:2-16 does not address congregational settings. Other commentators who held this view include J. N. Darby, *Notes of Readings on the Epistles to the Corinthians*, pp. 85-87; Olshausen, p. 174; C. T. Ellicott, *St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 202; W. E. Vine, *1 Corinthians*, p. 147; J. A. Beet, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 181; Lenski, p. 437; Grosheide, pp. 341-42; and J. MacArthur, Jr., *1 Corinthians*, p. 256.

²³⁸A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "*propheteuo*," p. 553. See also Wayne A. Grudem, "Prophecy—Yes, But Teaching—No: Paul's Consistent Advocacy of Women's Participation Without Governing Authority," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30:1 (March 1987):11-23; and idem, "Why Christians Can Still Prophesy," *Christianity Today*, September 16, 1988, pp. 29-31, 34-35. Grudem sought a middle position between the charismatic and non-charismatic interpretations of the gift of prophecy. See his *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* and *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Robert L. Thomas, "Prophecy Rediscovered? A Review of *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:593 (January-March 1992):83-96, gave a helpful critique of Grudem's views.

this epistle, and it suits the context here as well. Praying and prophesying were two major features of Christian worship services (cf. Acts 2:42).

11:5a The opposite condition existed when women prayed or prophesied in the church meetings. Every woman who had her physical skull *uncovered* thereby dishonored her metaphorical head, namely her husband or father (v. 3).

What did Paul mean when he described a woman's head as "uncovered?" There have been three major explanations. He may have meant that her head lacked some type of external cover, such as a shawl. Second, he could have meant that she had short hair that did not cover her head as completely as long hair. Third, he may have meant that she had let her hair down rather than leaving it piled up on her head. It was customary for women to wear their hair up when they went out in public. Probably he meant that she did not have an external covering on her head (view one).²³⁹ The woman would dishonor her man by participating in public worship as he did, namely with head uncovered.

Christian women typically wore a head covering in the church meetings. This was not a stylish hat, skull cap, or inconspicuous doily, as some western women do today, but a shawl that covered her entire head and concealed her hair.²⁴⁰

"Her face was hidden by an arrangement of two head veils, a head-band on the forehead with bands to the chin, and a hairnet [sic] with ribbons and knots, so that her features could not be recognized."²⁴¹

In Paul's culture most women, Christians and non-Christians alike, wore such a covering whenever they went out in public. Conservative Islamic women still veil themselves when they go out in public.

Probably the issue in the Corinthian church that Paul was addressing was that certain "wise," "spiritual," liberated women had stopped wearing this covering in the church meetings. Paul had previously written that in Christ males and females are equal before God (in many respects; Gal. 3:28). This teaching, combined with the Corinthians' carnal tendencies, were evidently the root of the problem.

11:5b-6 A woman who shaved her head in Greco-Roman culture did so to appear as a man. This resulted in the blurring of the relationship between men and women, particularly the sexual distinctions. Men typically wore their hair

²³⁹See Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 495-97, 509-10.

²⁴⁰Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 104.

²⁴¹Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 359.

short, and women wore theirs long. If a woman cut her hair short, it indicated that she wanted to take the place of a man. Not covering her head made the same statement in that society.

It was a shameful thing for a woman not to cover her head in the early New Testament churches. Such an act made a statement that she was repudiating her position as a woman. It was not so much a repudiation of her submission to her male authority as it was a repudiation of her origin as being a woman who had come from man (v. 3). The issue is origin throughout the passage, not primarily authority. Obviously a woman who repudiated her origin as a woman might also repudiate her authority to function under her male head. However in this passage Paul seems to have been dealing with the more fundamental issue of origin.

Today it is not shameful for a woman to have short hair, but it was in Paul's day. There are many short hair styles that no one regards as disgraceful. However in Paul's culture short hair for a woman represented rebellion against authority, and people considered it shameful. Paul used the common reaction to women's short hair in his day to urge his female readers to wear a head covering. His point was that since it was shameful for a woman to have short hair it was also shameful for her to have her head uncovered when she prayed or prophesied.

Must a Christian woman cover her head in church meetings today? I think not. Covering the head and wearing short hair do not normally mean the same thing in modern times, at least in the West, as they did in Paul's culture. If he were writing to a western church today, for example, I do not believe Paul would have said it is a shameful thing for a woman to have short hair. Therefore I do not think he would have said she ought to cover her head. Covering the head was a sign of acknowledgement of origin in Paul's day, which implied some acknowledgement of authority, but it is not today typically. Today there is no item of clothing that makes such a statement nor does the length of a woman's hair. A woman's whole personal demeanor, especially how she views herself as a woman, reveals this about her.²⁴²

"Although various Christian groups have fostered the practice of some sort of head covering for women in the assembled church, the difficulties with the practice are obvious. For Paul the issue was directly tied to a cultural shame that scarcely prevails in most cultures today. Furthermore, we simply do not know what the practice was that they were abusing. Thus literal 'obedience' to the text is

²⁴²For a defense of the view that women should wear head coverings today in church meetings, see Bruce K. Waltke, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:537 (January-March 1978):46-57.

often merely symbolic. Unfortunately, the symbol that tends to be reinforced is the subordination of women, which is hardly Paul's point. Furthermore, it would seem that in cultures where women's heads are seldom covered, the enforcement of such in the church turns Paul's point on its head."²⁴³

2. The argument from creation 11:7-12

Paul proceeded with a second supporting argument to correct the Corinthians' perversion regarding women's head coverings.

11:7 Men should not cover their heads in Christian worship because they are the glory of God. Whereas Paul referred to man being the image and glory of God, his primary point was that man is the glory of God. His reference to man as the image of God clearly goes back to Genesis 1:26-28, but there "glory" does not appear. "Glory" is Paul's word, his reflection on the creation of man. This is the word that he proceeded to use to contrast man and woman.

Notice that Paul did not say that the woman is to cover her head because she is the glory of man. Instead he proceeded to describe what her being his glory means. A subordinate glorifies the one in authority over him or her just by being in a subordinate position.

". . . he [Paul] says that woman is the glory of man—not his image, for she too shares the image of God, and is not (as some commentators have thought) more remote from God than is man."²⁴⁴

11:8 Woman is the glory of man, first, because she came from him in creation. As Adam glorified God by being the product of His creation, so Eve glorified Adam because she came from him. The female sex did not produce the male sex, but the first woman came from the first man. God formed Eve out of a part of Adam whom He created first (Gen. 2:18, 20).

11:9 Furthermore woman is the glory of man because God created Eve to complete Adam. God did not create the man as a companion for the woman but the woman for man's sake (Gen. 2:21-22). When Adam saw Eve for the first time, he "gloried" in her (Gen. 2:23). Neither of these verses (vv. 8-9) refer to the subordination of woman under man, though many interpreters have read this into the text. Rather they refer to her origin as being in man.

²⁴³Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 512.

²⁴⁴Barrett, p. 249.

11:10 Paul drew a conclusion from what he had already said (vv. 7-9) and gave a supporting reason for his conclusion.

Unfortunately the NASB translators have added "a symbol of" to the original text thus implying that the head covering is what women ought to wear on their heads. The Greek text simply says "the woman ought to have authority on her head." In the preceding verses the reason is that she is the man's glory. In light of verse 7, we might have expected Paul to say that because the woman is the glory of the man she should cover her head. Yet that is not what Paul said.

What is this "authority" that women ought to have on their heads? Some interpreters believe it refers to the man in her life who is in authority over her. The covering is the sign that she recognizes him in this role.²⁴⁵ This view lacks support in the passive use of *exousia* ("authority"). Furthermore the idiom "to have authority over" never refers to an external authority different from the subject of the sentence elsewhere.

Other interpreters view "authority" as a metonym for "veil."²⁴⁶ This view is unlikely because "authority" is a strange word to use if Paul really meant "veil." It would have been more natural for him to say "veil" or "covering."

A third view is to take "to have authority" as meaning "a sign of authority, namely as a means of exercising authority." Advocates believe Paul meant that women were to have authority to do things in worship previously forbidden, such as praying and prophesying along with men. Her covering would serve as a sign of her new liberty in Christ.²⁴⁷ There does not seem to be adequate basis of support for this view in the passage.

The fourth major view takes having "authority" in its usual meaning of having the freedom or right to choose. The meaning in this case would be that the woman has authority over her head (man) to do as she pleases.²⁴⁸ Obviously this seems to run contrary to what Paul taught in the passage and elsewhere. I think perhaps Paul meant that women have freedom to decide how they will pray and prophesy within the constraint that Paul had imposed, namely with heads covered. The head covering, then,

²⁴⁵The Living Bible gives this interpretation by paraphrasing the verse, "So a woman should wear a covering on her head as a sign that she is under man's authority." See also F. Godet, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2:122; Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 211.

²⁴⁶A metonym is a figure of speech in which one word appears in place of another associated with or suggested by it (e.g., "the White House says" for "the President says"). The RSV translation gives this interpretation: "That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head."

²⁴⁷Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 106. See also M. D. Hooker, "Authority on Her Head: An Examination of I Cor. XI. 10," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963-64):410-16.

²⁴⁸William M. Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul*, pp. 202-5; Morris, p. 154.

symbolized both the woman's subordinate position under the man and the authority that she had to pray and prophesy in public.²⁴⁹

The other major interpretive problem in this verse is "because of the angels." Why did Paul introduce angels into this discussion? Perhaps the Corinthian women needed to wear a head covering because angels view what is taking place among God's people (cf. 4:9; Eph. 3:10; 1 Tim. 5:21). Angels are the guardians of God's created order. For other people to see Christian women unveiled was bad enough because it was a sign of insubordination, but for angels to see it would be worse.²⁵⁰

There may also be something to the suggestion that these Corinthian women, and some of the men as well, may have been exalting themselves to the position of angels (cf. 7:1; 13:1).²⁵¹ Paul may have mentioned the angels to remind them that they were still under angelic scrutiny.

Other less acceptable interpretations of "because of the angels" are these. Women should cover their heads because evil angels lusted after women in the church (cf. Gen. 6:2). If this were the reason, should not all women wear veils at all times since angels apparently view humans in other than church meetings? They should do so because the word angels (lit. messengers) refers to pastors of the churches who might lust after them. They should wear head coverings because good angels learn to be submissive to authority from the women's example. They need to cover themselves because good angels are an example of subordination and would take offense if they viewed insubordinate women. Finally they should wear head coverings because a woman's insubordination would tempt good angels to be insubordinate.

Is observance by angels not a reason Christian women should cover their heads in church meetings today? Again I think not. In that culture a woman's appearance in public unveiled was a declaration of her rejection of her God-given place in creation. The angels would have recognized it as such, and it would have offended them. However today a woman's decision to appear unveiled does not usually make that statement. Consequently her unveiled condition does not offend the angels.

11:11 Even though the positions of man and woman differ in God's administrative order, this does not mean they can get along without each other. They are mutually dependent on each other. They complement one another. They are interdependent, even as the Son and the Father are. Paul's main point was that woman is not independent of man. This is

²⁴⁹See Barrett, p. 255.

²⁵⁰Robertson and Plummer, p. 233.

²⁵¹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 522.

further evidence that he was countering an illegitimate spirit of independence among some Corinthian women.

In a family, companionship should replace isolation and loneliness. There must be oneness in marriage for a husband and a wife to complete one another. Self-centered individuality destroys unity in marriage. If you are married, you need your husband or wife. Your spouse is necessary for you to be a well-rounded person.

11:12 Even though God created Eve from Adam, now every male comes from a female. This fact illustrates male female interdependence and balances Paul's emphasis in verse 11. Together verses 11 and 12 form a chiasm structurally. Husbands and wives have equal worth. Still God originates both of them, and both are subordinate to Him.

The apostle's emphasis in this section was on the authority that a woman has in her own right by virtue of creation. She must not leave her divinely appointed place in creation by seeking to function exactly as a man in church worship. Furthermore she should express her submission to this aspect of God's will in a culturally approved way. At the same time she must maintain a healthy appreciation for the opposite sex.

3. The argument from propriety 11:13-16

Paul now returned to the main argument (vv. 4-6), but now he appealed to the Corinthians' own judgment and sense of propriety. He raised two more rhetorical questions. The first (v. 13b) expects a negative answer and the second (vv. 14-15) a positive response. The apostle appealed to the nature of things. His points were that "nature" itself distinguishes between the sexes, and that a woman's naturally longer hair reinforces the propriety of covering her head in worship.

11:13 In Paul's culture it was not proper for a woman to act as a spokesman for people with God by praying publicly with her head uncovered. To do so would be tantamount to claiming the position of a man in God's order. The apostle did not think it wise for Christian women to exercise their liberty in a way that would go against socially accepted behavior even though they were personally submissive. Today what is socially accepted is different. Again her attitude is crucial.

11:14-15 Women's hair naturally grows longer than men's hair. Paul reasoned from this fact that God intended for women to have more head covering than men. People generally regard the reverse of what is natural as dishonorable. In the man's case this would be long hair and in the woman's case short hair. By "nature" Paul evidently meant how his culture felt about what was natural.²⁵² "Glory" means "honor."

²⁵²Barrett, p. 257.

This is a very general observation. The fact that some acceptable men's hair styles are longer than some women's does not mean these styles are perversions of the natural order. Men are usually taller than women, but this does not mean that a short man or a tall woman is dishonorable.

11:16 If any of his readers still did not feel inclined to accept Paul's reasoning, he informed them that the other churches followed what he had just explained. This is one of four similar statements in this epistle that served to inform the Corinthians that they were out of step with the other churches in their conduct (cf. 3:18; 8:2; 14:37). Some women were evidently discarding their head covering in public worship.

As with the issues of eating in idol temples and meat offered to idols, Paul dealt with a cultural practice when he dealt with head coverings. As should be clear from his argumentation, he did not feel that this was a major issue. He argued for maintaining a custom, not for obeying God, and he used shame, propriety, and custom to urge the Corinthians to cooperate. However, important issues lay behind the practices. In the case of head coverings, the issue is women's position in the life of the church, in particular their relationship to the men. Today no item of clothing consistently identifies a woman's acceptance or rejection of her role in God's administrative order. At least none does in western culture. It is usually her speech and her behavior that do. The important thing is her attitude toward her womanhood and how she expresses it, not whether she wears a particular item of clothing.²⁵³ Rather than teaching women to be submissive to men this passage glorifies womanhood.

D. THE LORD'S SUPPER 11:17-34

Most of the Corinthians had been following Paul's instructions regarding women's head coverings so he commended them (v. 2), but he could not approve their practice at the Lord's Supper. They needed to make some major changes there. What they were doing cut at the heart of both the gospel and the church. This is the one certain situation in the Corinthian church that Paul addressed in chapters 7—16 that the Corinthians themselves had not asked him about. He wrote that he had heard about it (v. 18).

By way of background, we need to remember that in antiquity meals typically accompanied public worship in the early church, in Judaism, and in the pagan world. The early Christians observed the Lord's Supper as part of such a meal, often called the love feast.

²⁵³See David K. Lowery, "The Head Covering and the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:2-34," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:570 (April-June 1986):159, who concluded that head coverings are not necessary today. For another exposition of verses 2-16 by a former Dallas Seminary professor, see H. Wayne House, "Should a Woman Prophesy or Preach before Men?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:578 (April-June 1988):141-61. He concluded they should not. See also Kenneth T. Wilson, "Should Women Wear Headcoverings?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:592 (October-December 1991):442-62, who concluded that women need not wear a head covering today, as did Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 110.

1. The abuses 11:17-26

The first abuse reflects a problem on the horizontal level, between believers in the church. The second more serious abuse was vertical, involving the church and its Lord.

Abuse of the poor 11:17-22

This aspect of the problem involved showing disregard for the poorer members of the church.

11:17 The Corinthians' behavior at the Lord's Supper was so bad that Paul could say they were worse off for observing it as they did rather than better off. Their failure was not that they failed to observe the Lord's Supper. It was that when they gathered they did not behave as the church, in which there is no distinction between "Jews or Greeks," "slaves or free" (12:13).

11:18 "In the first place" evidently refers to all that follows in verses 18-34. Paul decided to wait to deal with other similar matters until he arrived in Corinth (v. 34).

The context of the occasion in view was the assembling of the whole church family (cf. 14:23). When Paul later wrote his epistle to the Romans from Corinth, the Corinthian church was meeting in the home of Gaius (Rom. 16:23).

The divisions (Gr. *schismata*) to which Paul referred here were social groupings within the church, not differences involving loyalty to leaders (1:12).

Evidently those who had reported this abuse in the Corinthian church to Paul had given him much detail about what was happening. Paul said he believed enough of this to conclude that there was a serious problem.

11:19 Divisions or factions (Gr. *haireseis*) of this type have a positive side. They clarify whom God approves as faithful and trustworthy and who are not (cf. Matt. 10:34-37; 18:7; 24:9-13).

11:20 In the Christian church's early years the Lord's Supper occupied a more central position in the life of local assemblies than it does in most churches today. The early believers often celebrated it daily or weekly (cf. Acts 2:42-46; 20:7). However, it was just as impossible to observe this feast properly in an atmosphere of social discrimination as it was to do so while also attending feasts that honored idols (10:21).

11:21 The Lord's Supper was usually part of a meal the Christians shared together, the so-called "love feast." In Corinth instead of sharing their food

and drinks, each family was bringing its own and eating what it had brought. The result was that the rich had plenty but the poor had little and suffered embarrassment as well. This was hardly the picture of Christian love and unity (cf. Acts 2:44-46; 4:32, 34-35). Furthermore some with plenty of wine to drink were evidently drinking too heavily. They were eating their own private meals rather than sharing a meal consecrated to the Lord.

11:22 This verse contains some of the apostle's most critical statements in this epistle. If his original readers chose to behave in such a selfish way, they should stay home and eat rather than humiliating their less fortunate brethren. Such conduct showed disrespect for the church as the temple of God (cf. 3:17).

"The early Church was the one place in all the ancient world where the barriers which divided the world were down. The ancient world was very rigidly divided; there were the free men and the slaves; there were the Greeks and the barbarians—the people who did not speak Greek; there were the Jews and the Gentiles; there were the Roman citizens and the lesser breeds without the law; there were the cultured and the ignorant. The Church was the one place where all men could and did come together. . . . A Church where social and class distinctions exist is no true Church at all. A real Church is a body of men and women united to each other because all are united to Christ.

"A Church is not true Church where the art of sharing is forgotten."²⁵⁴

Abuse of the Lord 11:23-26

There was an even more serious dimension to this problem. The Corinthians were sinning against the Lord as well as one another.

11:23 What Paul taught here came ultimately from the Lord Jesus Himself. This reminder stresses the importance of this revelation.

"The verbs 'received' and 'passed on,' which occur again in combination in 15:3, are technical terms from Paul's Jewish heritage for the transmission of religious instruction. His present concern is to establish that the tradition about the Supper they had received from him came from Jesus himself: 'I received [it] from the Lord.'"²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 112-13.

²⁵⁵Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 548.

The terminology used here does not require us to understand that the Lord Jesus communicated this information to Paul personally. Paul's wording suggests that he may have been repeating exactly what others had taught him. This is not a verbatim quotation from one of the Gospel accounts.

Paul described the night Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as the night in which He was betrayed. This draws attention to the Savior's great love for His own. The Lord was graciously providing for His disciples when one of them was plotting to do away with Him.

11:24 The Greek word *eucharisteo*, "to give thanks," accounts for the fact that another name for the Lord's Supper is the Eucharist. Likewise some Christians call it "the breaking of bread" because Jesus broke the bread as Paul stated here.

There have been various interpretations of what Jesus meant when He said, "This is my body." There are four main views. Roman Catholics take it as a literal statement meaning the bread really becomes the body of Christ and the contents of the cup become the blood of Christ. They believe this is true when duly authorized representatives of the church conduct the service properly. This is the transubstantiation view. Adherents believe God transfers the body and blood of Christ into the substance of the elements. The bread and wine really become the physical body and blood of Christ.

A second view is not quite so literal. It is the consubstantiation view and, as the word implies, its advocates see the body and blood of Christ as present "in, with, and under" the elements. Christ is "really" present, though not physically present, in this Lutheran view.

The third major view is the spiritual presence view that Presbyterians and other followers of Calvin hold. For them the spiritual presence of Christ is in the elements and, as in the former views, God ministers grace to the communicant in a concrete way through participation.

The fourth view is the memorial view. Advocates believe that when Jesus said, "This is my body," he meant, "This represents my body." In other words, they understand His statement as completely metaphorical. They view the elements as pictures or emblems of the body and blood of Christ. In contrast to the preceding views this one does not see Christ present in any special sense in the elements. Ulrich Zwingli, the Swiss reformer, promoted this view. Today most of the churches from the Anabaptist

branch of Protestantism (i.e., Baptists, Methodists, independent Bible churches, et al.) follow this interpretation.²⁵⁶

"The identification of the bread with the body is semitic imagery in its heightened form. As in all such identifications, he means 'this signifies/represents my body.' It lies quite beyond both Jesus' intent and the framework within which he and the disciples lived to imagine that some actual change took place, or was intended to take place, in the bread itself. Such a view could only have arisen in the church at a much later stage when Greek modes of thinking had rather thoroughly replaced semitic ones."²⁵⁷

Jesus invited his disciples to take the bread that represented His body. He thus gave them a share in His body and invited them to participate in the meaning and benefits of His death. His body was "for" them in a double sense. It was what secured atonement *on their behalf* (cf. 15:3; Rom. 5:6, 8), and it was a body offered *in their place* (e.g., Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:21).

The Lord's request that His disciples remember Him by partaking of bread and the fruit of the vine is rich with significance. Many followers remember their leaders by erecting stone monuments to their memories and making pilgrimages to these sites. In contrast the Lord Jesus made remembering Him easy yet profound. Eating the elements helps us appreciate the fact that Christ is really within us. Eating together reminds us of our unity with other believers in Christ's body.

Remembering in biblical terminology does not mean just calling to memory. It includes realizing what the event remembered involved (cf. Exod. 13:3; 20:8; Deut. 5:15; 7:18; et al.). The Lord's Supper is not just something Christians do to bring the memory of Jesus back into fresh view. It is a memorial of the salvation that He accomplished by His death and resurrection. First Corinthians 11:24 contains the Lord's command to observe the Eucharist as do the Gospel accounts of the institution of this ordinance.²⁵⁸ It is impossible to be an obedient Christian without observing the Lord's Supper.

Some Christian groups refer to the Lord's Supper as one of the "sacraments." They mean the elements minister grace to the participant in a more direct and physical way than those who speak of it as an

²⁵⁶For more information on these views, see articles on the Lord's Supper and synonymous terms in Bible encyclopedias.

²⁵⁷Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 550.

²⁵⁸For further study of the ordinances, see Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 421-27, or any of the standard theologies.

"ordinance," assuming they are using these terms properly. An ordinance or sacrament is a rite the Lord commanded His followers to observe.

Most Protestants believe there are two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper. A few Protestant groups include foot washing as an ordinance on the basis of John 13:12-17 (e.g., the Grace Brethren, some Mennonites, et al.).

11:25 As Jesus had taken the bread and given thanks for it, so He also took the cup and gave thanks for it (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 20:25).

When Jesus shed His blood on Calvary, that blood ratified (gave formal sanction to) the New Covenant that Jeremiah had predicted (Jer. 31:31-34, cf. Exod. 24:8). The New Covenant replaced the old Mosaic Covenant (Heb. 8:8-13; 9:18-28). Even though the Jews will be the major beneficiaries of the benefits of this covenant in the Millennium, all believers began to benefit from the death of Christ when He died.²⁵⁹

This arrangement resembles one that is possible to set up in a Charitable Lead Unit Trust under the Internal Revenue Code of the United States. Suppose there was a vastly wealthy and generous philanthropist of the magnitude of a Rockefeller or Vanderbilt. As he prepared his will he bequeathed millions of dollars to various charitable causes that would benefit millions of people all over the world when he died. He also wrote into his will that when his only son reached the age of 21 he would inherit billions of dollars. When this man died, his son was only five years old, so for 16 years he did not enter into his father's inheritance. However as soon as the philanthropist died the millions of dollars he had bequeathed to charity went to work immediately to help many people.

This illustration shows how the church enters into the blessings of the New Covenant. When Christ established the Lord's Supper it was as though He notarized His will; it became official then. The will is the New Covenant. When He died His "estate" became available to those He chose to profit from it. Soon many people around the world, Jews and Gentiles in the church, began to benefit from the blessings of His death. However His chosen people, His son Israel, will not enter into their inheritance until the appointed time, namely the Millennium. Blessings for the church began almost immediately after Christ's death. Blessings for Israel will not begin until Christ's appointed time arrives.

Whenever the Jews celebrated the Passover the father who was conducting the service would explain the significance of each part to the rest of the

²⁵⁹See Rodney J. Decker, "The Church's Relationship to the New Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):290-305.

family (cf. Deut. 16:3). Jesus did the same for His disciples when He instituted the Lord's Supper.

11:26 Paul continued Jesus' explanation. Participation in the Lord's Supper dramatizes the gospel. The service becomes a visual as well as an audible setting forth of the death of Christ and its significance.

"The Eucharist is an *acted* sermon, an *acted* proclamation of the death which it commemorates; but it is possible that there is reference to some *expression of belief* in the atoning death of Christ as being a usual element in the service."²⁶⁰

Paul may have referred to "the cup" rather than "the wine," which would have been parallel to "the bread," to avoid the direct identification of the wine in the cup with blood. The idea of drinking blood was revolting to most people in the ancient world, particularly the Jews.²⁶¹ On the other hand, he may have viewed both elements symbolically, the cup being a symbol of one's lot in life and the bread a symbol of what sustains life.

The Lord's Supper is not only a memorial celebration looking back to Jesus Christ's first advent. It is also an anticipatory celebration looking forward to His second advent. Evidently when the Lord returns to set up His earthly kingdom He will establish a new form of worship that will include the offering of certain animal sacrifices (Ezek. 40—48). These will be similar to the animal sacrifices the Jews offered under the Old Covenant. However since Jesus Christ has made a final sacrifice these animal offerings will evidently be memorial and entirely for worship, not for the expiation of sin. Another possibility is that they will be for the purpose of restoring fellowship with God then.²⁶²

In this section Paul reviewed and expounded the significance of the Lord's Supper so his readers would value and celebrate it appropriately.

"In short, Paul is doing one thing and one thing alone. He is impressing on the Corinthians the tremendous importance of doing just this: eating *this* bread and drinking *this* cup. It is, after all, a matter of celebrating the Lord's *death*."²⁶³

²⁶⁰Robertson and Plummer, p. 249.

²⁶¹Barrett, p. 268.

²⁶²See Jerry M. Hullinger, "The Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40—48," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):279-89.

²⁶³Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Proclaiming the Lord's Death," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 116.

2. The correctives 11:27-34

Paul proceeded to urge the Corinthians to change their observance of the Lord's Supper and explained what they should do to correct their conduct.

Discerning the body 11:27-32

The Lord's Supper is more than a personal, introspective remembering, Paul went on to explain. It has implications for the church because in His death Jesus Christ laid the foundation for a new community of believers who bear His name. Thus the Lord's Supper should lead us to reflect on our relationship to one another as Christians as well as to recall Calvary.

11:27 An unworthy manner is any manner that does not reflect proper appreciation for the significance of the body and blood of Christ (e.g., v. 21). This does not mean that every participant must grasp the fullness of this significance. Nevertheless everyone should conduct himself or herself appropriately in view of his or her individual depth of understanding. Even a child is capable of doing this. The Corinthians had lost the point of the memorial, which involves proclaiming salvation through Christ's death portrayed in ritual. The gospel goes out when we observe the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner.

Being guilty of Christ's body and blood means being guilty of treating them in an unworthy manner, of profaning them. It does not mean that such a person is in some special sense responsible for the death of Christ.

11:28 The reason for examining oneself is to determine that we are partaking in a worthy manner rather than in an unworthy manner. In the context this would involve behaving in a loving and unselfish way toward our fellow Christians as well as being appreciative of the significance of the Lord's body and blood. We need to examine ourselves so the Lord will not have to examine and judge us for failing to participate worthily (v. 31).

Having conducted this brief self-examination the believer should then proceed to participate. An unusually sensitive Christian might hesitate to participate after thoughtful reflection feeling overwhelmed by his or her personal unworthiness. However no one is ever worthy to partake. If someone thinks he is, he is not. We are only worthy because Christ has made us worthy. We need to partake feeling unworthy to do so. This attitude is part of what it means to partake in a worthy manner.

This simple reflection and participation lie at the very root of motivation for living a life that glorifies God. The church has invented many ways to motivate Christians to put Jesus Christ first in their lives. These include altar calls, "revival" services, campfire dedication services, and many

others all of which have values. Unfortunately we have also neglected what the Lord Jesus instructed us to do that will motivate His people to live for Him better than anything else. If this observance has lost its punch, it is because those who lead it have failed to give it the preparation, attention, and priority it deserves in church life. The frequent observance of the Lord's Supper in a way that takes us back to the Cross is one of the most powerful and effective motivators for living the Christian life. If you think a frequent observance of the Lord's Supper ends to become tiresome, remember that your spouse never tires of your frequent expressions of love for him or her.

11:29 Eating and drinking in an unworthy manner results in divine judgment. Judgment is inevitable at the Lord's Table. We judge ourselves (Gr. *diakrino*) before we partake and then participate in a worthy manner, or God will judge (*krino*) us. The "body" has a double sense: the body of Christ given on the cross, and the mystical body of Christ, the church.

"The 'unworthy' or 'inappropriate' participation in the Lord's Supper that entails eating and drinking judgment against the participants comes in not 'discerning (*diakrino*) the body' (11:29). How members of the community view one another, whether they are sensitive to the poor and latecomers or whether the prevailing social customs dictate their behavior, becomes the decisive issue. Does the congregation recognize itself as the distinctive body of Christ?"²⁶⁴

11:30 In Corinth, God was judging with sickness and death. The reasons were the unjudged sin of selfish living (v. 21) and thoughtless participation in the communion service.

11:31 If God's people do not judge their own sins themselves, God will judge them. This judgment may involve physical illness or even, in extreme cases, premature physical death (cf. Acts 5; 1 John 5:16).

11:32 We should regard God's punishment of Christians as discipline (Gr. *paideia*, lit. child training; cf. Heb. 12:5-11). The condemnation God intends this discipline to spare us from experiencing is not eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord that the unsaved world will suffer (Rom. 8:1). It is premature death and the Lord's disapproval at the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 3:15; 5:5).²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴Cousar, "The Theological . . .," p. 100.

²⁶⁵This is another instance of wordplay in the Greek text. If we discerned (*diakrino*) ourselves, we would not come under divine judgment (*krino*). When God judges us (*krino*), it is to correct us so we will not be condemned (*katakrino*) with the world.

Waiting for one another 11:33-34

Practical application now follows theological explanation.

11:33 Rather than disregarding the members of the congregation who had little or no food to bring to the love feasts, those who had plenty should share what they had. They should also wait to eat until all had been served.

Many churches these days have pot luck suppers periodically that provide a modern counterpart to the first century love feast. A few Christians have felt that we should practice the love feast whenever we observe the Lord's Supper today. Most have concluded that the love feast was just the setting in which the Lord's Supper took place in the early church. Jesus did not specifically command His disciples to observe the love feast as He urged them to eat the Lord's Supper. Therefore most Christians believe the love feast is not an ordinance of the church and we do not need to perpetuate it as the early church practiced it.

11:34 If some of the Corinthian Christians were too hungry to wait to eat, they should eat something before they came to the service. Otherwise their unloving selfishness might result in the Lord's judgment. It is very important to the Lord that we put the needs of others before our own needs (cf. Phil. 2:3; et al.).

Evidently there were other details of how the Corinthians were behaving when they congregated that Paul did not want to comment on in this letter. Perhaps they were of local importance only. He planned to address these issues when he visited Corinth again (cf. 4:18-21; 16:2-3, 5-7).

The selfish attitude that marked the Corinthian church comes through strongly in this section of the epistle. It 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 Savior and for the welfare of the saints.

E. SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND SPIRITUAL PEOPLE CHS. 12—14

Paul had been dealing with matters related to worship since 8:1. He had forbidden the Corinthians from participating in temple meals but had allowed eating marketplace meat under certain circumstances (8:1—11:1). Then he dealt with two issues involving their own gatherings for worship: head coverings and the Lord's Supper (11:2-34). The issue of spiritual gifts (chs. 12—14) was the third issue involving their own gatherings for worship. This is the most important of the three as evidenced by the amount of text Paul devoted to it and by the issue itself. Paul explained that being "spiritual" at present, for the perfect state has not yet come (13:8-13), means to edify the church in worship.

"More than any other issue, the Corinthians and Paul are at odds over the role of the Spirit. For them 'Spirit' has been their entrée to life in the realm of *sophia* ('wisdom') and *gnosis* ('knowledge'), with their consequent rejection of the material order, both now (7:1-7) and for the future (15:12), as well as their rejection of the Christian life as modeled by Paul's imitation of Christ (4:15-21). Their experience of tongues as the language(s) of angels had allowed them to assume heavenly existence now (4:8), thought of primarily in terms of nonmaterial existence, rather than ethical-moral life in the present. Thus Paul tries to disabuse them of their singular and overly enthusiastic emphasis on tongues (the point of chaps. 12—14); but in so doing, he tries to retool their understanding of the Spirit so as to bring it into line with the gospel."²⁶⁶

Paul wanted to correct the Corinthians in this section, not just provide more teaching, as he did throughout this epistle. This becomes clear in chapter 14. They were abusing the gift of tongues. The whole section divides into three parts and structurally follows an A-B-A chiastic pattern, as do other parts of this letter (i.e., chs. 1—3; 7:25-40; chs. 8—10). First there is general instruction (ch. 12), then a theological interlude (ch. 13), and finally specific correction (ch. 14).

". . . there is not a single suggestion in Paul's response that they were themselves divided on this issue or that they were politely asking his advice. More likely, the crucial issue is their decided position over against him as to what it means to be *pneumatikos* ('spiritual'). Their view apparently not only denied the material/physical side of Christian existence (hence the reason why chap. 15 follows hard on the heels of this section), but had an element of 'spiritualized (or overrealized) eschatology' as well.

"The key probably lies with 13:1, where tongues is associated with angels. As noted elsewhere (7:1-7; 11:2-16), the Corinthians seem to have considered themselves to be already like the angels, thus truly 'spiritual,' needing neither sex in the present (7:1-7) nor a body in the future (15:1-58). Speaking angelic dialects by the Spirit was evidence enough for them of their participation in the new spirituality, hence their singular enthusiasm for this gift."²⁶⁷

1. The test of Spirit control 12:1-3

The apostle began his discussion by clarifying the indicators that a person is under the control of the indwelling Spirit of God. With this approach, he set the Corinthians' former experience as idolaters in contrast to their present experience as Christians. "Inspired utterance" in itself does not identify what is truly "spiritual." The intelligible content of such an utterance does when the content is the basic confession that Jesus Christ is Lord.

²⁶⁶Fee, "Toward a . . .," p. 45.

²⁶⁷Idem, *The First . . .*, pp. 572-73.

12:1 The presence of the phrase *peri de* ("Now concerning" or "Now about") plus the change in subject mark another matter about which the Corinthians had written Paul with a question (cf. 7:1; 8:1). It had to do with the gifts or abilities the Holy Spirit gives those believers He indwells.²⁶⁸ This subject is the focus of all that Paul wrote in chapters 12—14 including the famous thirteenth chapter on love.

As in 10:1, Paul implied that what followed was instruction his readers needed. "Spiritual gifts" is literally "the spirituals" (Gr. *ton pneumatikon*).²⁶⁹ This is a broader term than the gifts themselves, though it includes them. It appears to refer primarily to the people who are spiritual (cf. 2:15; 3:1). Evidently the Corinthians' question dealt with the marks of a spiritual Christian. A spiritual Christian is a believer under the control of the Holy Spirit compared with one under the control of his or her flesh (Gal. 5:16) or a demonic spirit (10:20-21).²⁷⁰

12:2 Many of the Corinthian believers had been pagans. Various influences had led them away from worship of the true God and into idolatry.

"Corinth was experience-oriented and self-oriented. Mystery religions and other pagan cults were in great abundance, from which cults many of the members at the Corinthian church received their initial religious instruction. After being converted they had failed to free themselves from pagan attitudes and they confused the true work of the Spirit of God with the former pneumatic and ecstatic experiences of the pagan religions, especially the Dionysian mystery or the religion of Apollo."²⁷¹

Dumb idols are idols that do not speak in contrast with the living God who does speak. Paul previously said that demons are behind the worship of idols (10:20). He did not say that the prophecy or glossolalia (speaking in tongues) being spoken in the Corinthian church proceeded from demonic sources. He only reminded his readers that there are "inspired" utterances that come from sources other than the Holy Spirit. Probably some of them had spoken in tongues when they were pagans.

²⁶⁸For defense of the view that spiritual gifts are ministries rather than abilities, see Kenneth Berding, "Confusing Word and Concept in 'Spiritual Gifts': Have We Forgotten James Barr's Exhortations?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:1 (March 2000):37-51.

²⁶⁹Paul used *pneumatika* when he wanted to emphasize the Spirit, and he used *charismata* when he wanted to stress the gift.

²⁷⁰In 2:15 Paul described all Christians as "spiritual" (Gr. *pneumatikos*, having the Spirit) in contrast to "natural" (i.e., unsaved). However, he proceeded immediately to clarify that it is not only *possession of the Spirit* but also *control by the Spirit* that marks one as truly spiritual (3:3).

²⁷¹H. Wayne House, "Tongues and the Mystery Religions of Corinth," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:558 (April-June 1983):147-48.

"In classical [Greek] literature, Apollo was particularly renowned as the source of ecstatic utterances, as on the lips of Cassandra of Troy, the priestess of Delphi or the Sibyl of Cumae (whose frenzy as she prophesied under the god's control is vividly described by Virgil); at a humbler level the fortune-telling slave-girl of Ac. 16.16 was dominated by the same kind of 'pythonic' spirit."²⁷²

12:3 Enthusiasm or ecstasy or "inspired" utterance do not necessarily indicate spirituality.²⁷³ Paul's original readers needed to pay attention to what the person speaking in such a state said.

"Not the manner but the content of ecstatic speech determines its authenticity."²⁷⁴

What the person said about Jesus Christ was specially important. No one the Holy Spirit motivated would curse Jesus Christ. Probably no one in the Corinthian church had. Likewise no one would sincerely acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, Savior and or Sovereign, unless the Holy Spirit had some influence over him or her. This was true regardless of whether the person was speaking in an ecstatic condition or in plain speech. Paul was not enabling his readers to test the spirits to see if they were of God (cf. 1 John 4:1-3). His point was that "inspired" utterance as such does not indicate that the Holy Spirit is leading a person.

The Holy Spirit leads those under His control to glorify Jesus Christ, not dumb idols, with their speech (cf. 2:10-13).

"The ultimate criterion of the Spirit's activity is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord. Whatever takes away from that, even if they be legitimate expressions of the Spirit, begins to move away from Christ to a more pagan fascination with spiritual activity as an end in itself."²⁷⁵

2. The need for varieties of spiritual gifts 12:4-31

Paul planned to return to the subject of glossolalia (ch. 14), but first he wanted to talk more generally about spiritual gifts. In the verses that follow he dealt with differences in gifts in the church.

²⁷²Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 117.

²⁷³By "inspired" utterance I mean any utterance that the speaker claimed came from God, not necessarily a truly inspired new revelation from God.

²⁷⁴Barrett, p. 279. Cf. Deut. 13:2-6; 18:21-22.

²⁷⁵Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 582.

"Having given the negative and positive criterion of genuine spiritual endowments as manifested in speech, the Apostle goes on to point out the essential oneness of these very varied gifts."²⁷⁶

Diversity, not uniformity, is necessary for a healthy church, and God has seen to it that diversity exists (vv. 6, 7, 11, 18, 24, 28). Notice that the Corinthians were doing in the area of spiritual gifts essentially what they were doing in relation to their teachers (3:4-23). They were preferring one over others and thereby failing to benefit from them all. This section of Paul's argument puts the subject of gifts into proper theological perspective whereas the previous pericope put it into its proper Christological perspective.

Diversity in the Godhead and the gifts 12:4-11

- 12:4 Although there is only one Holy Spirit He gives many different abilities to different people. Everything in this pericope revolves around these two ideas. "Gifts" (Gr. *charismata*, from *charis* meaning "grace") are abilities that enable a person to glorify and serve God. God gives them freely and graciously. That they are abilities is clear from how Paul described them here and elsewhere (Rom. 12).
- 12:5 Likewise there are different ministries or services (Gr. *diakonia*; opportunities for service) that the one Lord over the church gives.
- 12:6 Furthermore there are different effects or workings (Gr. *energēmata*; manifestations of the Spirit's power at work) that the one God who is responsible for all of them bestows. Just as Spirit, Lord, and God are distinct yet closely related in verses 4-6, so are gifts, ministries, and effects. We should probably not view these words as representing entirely separate ideas but as facets of God's work in and through the believer. It is God who is responsible for our abilities, our opportunities for service, and the individual ways in which we minister including the results.
- 12:7 Each believer regardless of his or her gifts, ministries, and the manner and extent of God's blessing demonstrates the Holy Spirit through his or her life.²⁷⁷ All three of these things manifest the Spirit's presence, not just the more spectacular ones in each category. Believers who have spectacular gifts, ministries, or effectiveness are not more spiritual than Christians who do not. Each believer makes a unique contribution to the common good, not just certain believers (cf. vv. 12-27; 3:4-10). Several examples of this fact follow in verses 8-10.

²⁷⁶Robertson and Plummer, p. 262.

²⁷⁷Paul's point was not that each believer has a gift, though that is true (cf. 1 Pet. 4:10). His point was that the Spirit manifests Himself in a great variety of ways.

12:8 Paul mentioned nine ways in which the Spirit manifests Himself through believers. The list is representative rather than exhaustive as is clear when we compare this list with other similar ones (cf. vv. 28, 29-30; 7:7; 13:1-3, 8; 14:6, 26; Rom. 12:4-8; Eph. 4:11).

In this verse there is no definite article before the word "word" in either of its uses. This probably points to Paul's referring to an utterance of wisdom or knowledge, namely a wise or knowledgeable utterance (cf. 1:17—2:16).²⁷⁸ The difference in the utterances probably lies in wisdom representing a mature perception of what is true to reality (cf. 1:24; 2:6-13; 14:6) and knowledge standing for understanding of God's mysteries (revelations) in particular (cf. 13:2; 14:6).

"It is the discourse, not the wisdom or knowledge behind it, that is the spiritual gift, for it is this that is of direct service to the church . . ." ²⁷⁹

12:9 Faith is trust in God. Every Christian has some faith just as every Christian has some wisdom and knowledge. However some believers have more God-given ability to trust God than others just as some have more God-given wisdom or knowledge than others. All believers should seek to cultivate wisdom, knowledge, and faith, but some have a larger God-given capacity for one or the other of them than other Christians do.

The "gifts of healings" (literally) by definition refer to abilities to cause healing to take place. Evidently there were various types of healings that those so gifted could produce, for example physical, psychological, and spiritual healings. Counselors and medical doctors have a degree of ability to produce healing today. However most Christians believe God has not given the ability to restore people to health instantaneously today as He did in the early church.²⁸⁰

12:10 Miracles are mighty works (Gr. *dynameis*) that alter the natural course of events. Probably all types of miracles beside healings are in view. God gave the ability to do miracles to His Son and to some Christians in the

²⁷⁸Morris, p. 170.

²⁷⁹Barrett, pp. 284-85.

²⁸⁰For a discussion of the temporary nature of some of the gifts, namely that they were in use in the early church but not thereafter, see Thomas R. Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:580 (October-December 1988):371-86; and John F. Walvoord, "Contemporary Issues in the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Part IV: Spiritual Gifts Today," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130:520 (October-December 1973):315-28. This article was reprinted under the title "The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:570 (April-June 1986):109-21. See also Vern S. Poythress, "Modern Spiritual Gifts as Analogous to Apostolic Gifts: Affirming Extraordinary Works of the Spirit within Cessationist Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:1 (March 1996):71-101.

early church to signify that He was with them and empowering them (cf. Luke 4:14—9:50; Gal. 3:5; Heb. 2:4).²⁸¹

Prophecy has a three-fold meaning in the New Testament. Prophets foretold future events. They also declared things known only by special new revelation from God. Third, they uttered under the Spirit's prompting some lofty statement or message in praise of God, or a word of instruction, refutation, reproof, admonition, or comfort for others (cf. 11:4; 13:9; 14:1, 3-5, 24, 31, 39). Evidently the first and second of these abilities passed out of existence with the composition of the New Testament books.²⁸²

"First, although prophecy was an especially widespread phenomenon in the religions of antiquity, Paul's understanding—as well as that of the other NT writers—was thoroughly conditioned by his own history in Judaism. The prophet was a person who spoke to God's people under the inspiration of the Spirit. The 'inspired utterance' came by revelation and announced judgment (usually) or salvation. Although the prophets often performed symbolic acts, which they then interpreted, the mainstream of prophetic activity, at least as it came to be canonized, had very little to do with 'ecstasy,' especially 'frenzy' or 'mania.' For the most part the prophets were understood only too well! Often the word spoken had a futuristic element, so in that sense they also came to be seen as 'predicters'; but that was only one element, and not necessarily the crucial one."²⁸³

The ability to distinguish between spirits (i.e., the spirit of the prophet through whom a higher spirit or the Holy Spirit spoke) was apparently a gift of discernment. It enabled a person to tell whether a propounded prophecy was genuine or counterfeit, from the Holy Spirit or a false spirit (cf. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:20-21).

The gift of tongues, about which Paul would say much more in chapter 14, was the ability to speak in one or more languages that the speaker had not learned. However the languages do not seem limited to human languages (cf. 13:1). Nevertheless they were intelligible with interpretation (14:10-14). They were not just gibberish.

²⁸¹Luke's Gospel, in particular, presents Jesus as teaching and then validating His teaching by doing miracles. Acts shows the apostles doing the same thing.

²⁸²The last of the New Testament books that God inspired was probably Revelation, which dates from about 95 A.D.

²⁸³Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 595.

It should be noted . . . that only tongues is included in every list of 'gifts' in these three chapters [12:8-10, 28, 29-30; 13:1-3, 8; 14:6, 26]. Its place at the *conclusion* of each list in chap. 12, but at the beginning in 13:1 and 14:6, suggests that the problem lies here. It is listed last not because it is 'least,' but because it is the problem. He always includes it, but at the end, after the greater concern for diversity has been heard."²⁸⁴

The person with the ability to interpret tongues could translate what a tongues-speaker said accurately so that others present could know the meaning of what he or she said. Presumably some Christians with the gift of tongues also had the gift of interpreting tongues so they could explain what they had said.

- 12:11 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 again the Spirit's sovereignty in distributing the gifts (cf. 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.

There is a general progression in this list from the more common to the more uncommon and esoteric gifts (cf. v. 28). The more unusual gifts that appear toward the end of this list attracted the Corinthians. Some gifts were probably more common at one place and in one church than were others depending on the Spirit's sovereign distribution (cf. 1:4-5). Some were probably more common at some times than at others, too, as the Spirit bestowed them.

The body and its members 12:12-14

Paul now compared the body of Christ, the universal church, though by extension the local church as well, to a human body. Again his point was not that the church needs to have unity but that it needs to have diversity.

- 12:12 The apostle spoke of this comparison in other epistles as well (Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 1:18; 2:19). He probably adapted the idea of the body politic, an essentially secular but commonly understood concept, to illustrate the church. There can be unity in a body without uniformity. Here the apostle stressed the fact that diversity among the members is an essential part of a unified body. Evidently the Corinthians were striving for unanimity and did not appreciate that there can and must be diversity in a "spiritual" church.

²⁸⁴Ibid., p. 572. Cf. idem, "Tongues—Least of the Gifts? Some Exegetical Observations on 1 Corinthians 12—14," *Pneuma* 2 (1980):3-14.

12:13 The baptism of the Spirit took place initially on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:33; 11:16). Subsequently individual believers experienced Spirit baptism when they personally trusted Christ as their Savior (Acts 11:15-17).

In Spirit baptism the Holy Spirit baptizes (Gr. *baptidzo*, lit. submerges) the believer into the body of Christ. He makes us a part of it. Water baptism illustrates this. Every believer experiences Spirit baptism regardless of his or her race or social status. We are now on equal footing in the sense that we are all members of the body of Christ.

The figure of drinking of one Spirit recalls John 7:37-39 where Jesus invited the thirsty to come and drink of Him to find refreshment. Baptism and drinking are both initiation experiences and take place at the same time. In the first figure the Spirit places the believer into Christ, and in the second the Spirit comes into the Christian. This is probably a case of Semitic parallelism in which both clauses make essentially the same point.

". . . the Spirit not only surrounds us, but is within us."²⁸⁵

12:14 Both bodies, the physical human body and the spiritual body of Christ, consist of many members. This fact helps us realize our limited contribution to the larger organism. A body composed of only one organ would be a monstrosity.

The modern church often uses this pericope to stress the importance of unity, which is a great need today. However, Paul's emphasis originally was on the importance of diversity.

The application of the figure 12:15-26

Paul proceeded to elaborate his analogy.

12:15-16 Perhaps Paul chose the feet, hands, ears, and eyes as examples because of their prominence in the body. Even though they are prominent and important they cannot stand alone. They need each other.

". . . Chrysostom remarks that the foot contrasts itself with the hand rather than with the ear, because we do not envy those who are very much higher than ourselves so much as those who have got a little above us . . ."²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵Barrett, p. 289.

²⁸⁶Robertson and Plummer, p. 273.

- 12:17 Different functions as well as different members are necessary in the body (cf. v. 4). Paul's point was not the inferiority of some members but the need for all members.
- 12:18 Paul again stressed God's sovereignty in placing each member in the body as He has chosen in this verse. We need to discover how God has gifted us and to become as effective as possible where He has placed us. We should concentrate on using the abilities we have received rather than longing to be different or insisting on doing things that God has not gifted us to do (cf. 7:26-27).
- "Whenever we begin to think about our own importance in the Christian Church, the possibility of really Christian work is gone."²⁸⁷
- 12:19 If all the members of the human body were the same, it would not be able to function as a body. It would be incapable of getting anything accomplished. For example, if all had the gift of tongues, the gift that the Corinthians valued so highly, the body would not function.
- 12:20 This is not the case in the human body, however. It has a variety of members, but it is one unified organism.
- 12:21 It is interesting that Paul used the head and the feet as examples, the top of the body and the bottom. He was reminding those who felt superior that those whom they regarded as inferior were also necessary (cf. 11:17-34). Too often because we differ *from* each other we also differ *with* each other.
- 12:22 Rather than regarding themselves as superior, the "haves" in the church needed to remember that the "have nots" were important for the effective operation of the whole organism. Even the little toe, or the pancreas, plays a crucial role in the physical body.
- 12:23-24a When dealing with our human bodies we bestow more honor on our less honorable parts by covering them up. This makes our unseemly members more seemly. Paul may have been referring to the sexual organs.²⁸⁸ On the other hand, the more honorable parts, such as our face, do not require special covering. The point is that we take special pains to honor our less esteemed physical members, and we should do the same in the church rather than neglecting or despising them. When is the last time your church gave public recognition to the nursery workers or the clean up crew?

²⁸⁷Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 127.

²⁸⁸Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 613-14.

12:24b-25 God has constructed bodies, both human and spiritual, so the different members can care for one another. He does not ignore any member but makes provision for each one. We do not always see this in the human body, but it is true. Likewise God's honoring the less prominent members in the church may not be apparent now, but it will be at the judgment seat of Christ if not before then.

God does not want dissension (Gr. *schisma*) in His body. There was some in the Corinthian church (1:10; 11:18). Rather (strong contrast in the Greek, *alla*) the members should have anxious care for one another. Paul illustrated this attitude with what follows.

12:26 The suffering of one means the suffering of all, and the well-being of one means the well-being of all.

"Plato had pointed out that we do not say, 'My finger has a pain,' we say, 'I have a pain.'"²⁸⁹

In view of this we can and should honestly rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15).

Paul's preceding comments about the body (vv. 12-26) are applicable to both the physical body and the spiritual body of Christ. However, he was speaking about the human body primarily, as an illustration of the spiritual body.

The fact of diversity restated 12:27-31

Next, the apostle spoke more specifically about the members of the body of Christ again (cf. vv. 1-11).

12:27 "You" is emphatic in the Greek text and is plural. The Corinthian Christians are in view, but what Paul said of them applies to all groups of Christians. Together we make up the body of Christ, and each of us is an individual member in it. Again, what Paul said of the church is true of it in its macro and in its micro forms, the universal church and the local church.

12:28 Paul listed eight kinds of members with special functions. This list differs somewhat from the one in verses 8-10 where he identified nine manifestations of the Spirit's working. This list, as the former one, is selective rather than exhaustive.

The ranking of these gifted individuals is evidently in the order of the importance of their ministries. When Paul said all the members were essential earlier (v. 21) he did not mean some did not have a more crucial function to perform than others. He did not mention this distinction there

²⁸⁹Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 126.

because he wanted each member to appreciate the essential necessity of every other member. In another sense, however, some gifts are more important than others (v. 31; 14:1).

God called and gifted the apostles to plant and to establish the church in places the gospel had not yet gone. *Apostello* means to send out, so it is proper to think of apostles as missionaries. Prophets were the channels through whom God sent His revelations to His people (cf. Eph. 2:20). They wrote the books of the New Testament. Teachers gave believers instruction in the Scriptures. Teachers were more important in the church than the prophets who simply gave words of edification, exhortation, and consolation (14:3), but they were less important than the prophets who gave new authoritative revelation. The latter type of prophet is in view in this verse.

". . . a scholar will learn more from a good teacher than he will from any book. We have books in plenty nowadays, but it is still true that it is through people that we really learn of Christ."²⁹⁰

Workers of miracles and healers gave dramatic proof that the power of God was working in the church so others would trust Christ. They may have ministered especially to the Jews since the Jews looked for such indications of God's presence and blessing (cf. 1:22). Helpers seem to have provided assistance of various kinds for people in need. Administrators managed and directed the affairs of the churches. Tongues speakers bring up the rear in this list as being the least important of those mentioned. Paul said more about their relative importance in chapter 14.

"The shortness of the list of charismata in Eph. iv. II as compared with the list here is perhaps an indication that the regular exercise of extraordinary gifts in public worship was already dying out."²⁹¹

12:29-30 These two verses contain a third list of gifts in a descending order of priority. Each of Paul's seven questions expects a negative answer. The apostle's point was that it would be ridiculous for everyone to have the same gift. Variety is essential. It is wrong to equate one gift, particularly speaking in tongues, with spirituality.

12:31 Paul advised the Corinthians to seek some gifts more than others because some are more significant in the functioning of the body than others. While the bestowal of gifts is the sovereign prerogative of the Spirit (vv.

²⁹⁰Ibid., p. 129.

²⁹¹Robertson and Plummer, p. 281, n. Cf. *A Dictionary of the Bible*, "Lord's Day," 3:141, by N. J. D. White.

8-11, 18), human desire plays a part in His bestowal (cf. James 4:2). This seems to indicate that the Spirit does not give all His gifts to us at the moment of our salvation. I see nothing in Scripture that prohibits our viewing the abilities God gives us at birth as part of His spiritual gifts. Likewise a believer can receive a gift or an opportunity for service or the Spirit's blessing on his ministry years after his conversion. Everything we have or ever will have is a gift from God.²⁹²

God did not give the gift of apostleship in the technical sense to any other than those whom Christ Himself selected who had seen the risen Lord. It went to a small group in the first generation of the church's history. Apostleship in the general sense of one sent out with a message continues today. Normally we refer to these gifted people as missionaries to distinguish them from Paul and the 12 apostles.

Likewise we use the term prophet in a technical and in a general sense today. Usually we think of prophets as people who gave new revelation from God or predicted the future. As I have pointed out, prophets also spoke forth a word from the Lord by exhorting or encouraging the church. The Greek word *prophetes* means "one who speaks forth." In the first technical sense prophets have ceased in the church. In the second general sense they are still with us.²⁹³ We usually refer to them as preachers to distinguish them from first century prophets who gave new revelation and predicted the future.

Today some people who desire to sharpen their ability to preach and teach the Scriptures enroll in seminary to do so. This is one example of zealously desiring the greater gifts.

However, Paul said there is an even more important discipline that a believer should cultivate to reach the goal of being maximally effective. That way involves valuing and cultivating love (ch. 13). The apostle did not mean, of course, that one should disregard the most important gifts but seek love. We should give attention to cultivating love and cultivating abilities that are strategically important in Christ's body. Nevertheless as important as sharpening abilities is, it is even more important that we excel in loving.

"The most excellent way' which Paul will now show his friends at Corinth is not one more gift among many, but 'a way beyond all this.' That extraordinary way is, of course, the way of *agape*, that fruit of the Spirit which is of

²⁹²See Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 120.

²⁹³See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.

primary importance to every believer and to the body of Christ."²⁹⁴

"What Paul is about to embark on is a description of what he calls 'a way that is beyond comparison.' The way they are going is basically destructive to the church as a community; the way they are being called to is one that seeks the good of others before oneself. It is the way of edifying the church (14:1-5), of seeking the common good (12:7). In that context one will still earnestly desire the things of the Spirit (14:1), but precisely so that others will be edified. Thus it is not 'love versus gifts' that Paul has in mind, but 'love as the only context for gifts'; for without the former, the latter have no usefulness at all—but then neither does much of anything else in the Christian life."²⁹⁵

Chapter 12 is a chapter that stresses balance. On the one hand each Christian is only a part of a larger organism, but each is an indispensable part. In one sense we are equally important because we all serve an essential function, but in another sense some are more crucial than others. God determines our gifts, ministries, and individual differences, yet our desire and initiative do have something to do with our service as well. Ability, ministry opportunity, and individuality are very important, but love is even more important. A good measure of our personal maturity as Christians will be how well we can keep these paradoxes in balance in our personal lives and ministries. The Corinthians needed help in this area.

"The Church is neither a dead mass of similar particles, like a heap of sand, nor a living swarm of antagonistic individuals, like a cage of wild beasts: it has the unity of a living organism, in which no two parts are exactly alike, but all discharge different functions for the good of the whole. All men are not equal, and no individual can be independent of the rest: everywhere there is subordination and dependence. Some have special gifts, some have none; some have several gifts, some only one; some have higher gifts, some have lower: but every individual has some function to discharge, and all must work together for the common good. This is the all-important point—unity in loving service."²⁹⁶

3. The supremacy of love ch. 13

Paul now proceeded to elaborate on the fact that love surpasses the most important spiritual gifts. Some of the Corinthian Christians may not have possessed any of the gifts mentioned in the previous three lists in chapter 12, but all of them could practice love.

²⁹⁴Thomas A. Jackson, "Concerning Spiritual Gifts: A Study of I Corinthians 12," *Faith and Mission* 7:1 (Fall 1989):68.

²⁹⁵Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 625.

²⁹⁶Robertson and Plummer, pp. 269-70.

Clearly all of them needed to practice love more fully. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) is a more obvious demonstration of the Spirit's presence in a life and His control over a life than the gifts of the Spirit.

Love is the most fundamental and prominent of these graces. The love in view is God's love that He has placed in the believer in the indwelling Spirit that should overflow to God and others. It is the love that only the indwelling Holy Spirit can produce in a believer and manifest through a believer. Fortunately we do not have to produce it. We just need to cooperate with God by doing His will so the Spirit can produce it.

"A Christian community can make shift somehow if the 'gifts' of chapter 12 be lacking: it will die if love is absent. The most lavish exercise of spiritual gifts cannot compensate for lack of love."²⁹⁷

This chapter is something of a digression in Paul's argument concerning keeping the gift of tongues in its proper perspective (cf. 14:1), but it strengthens his argument considerably.

The necessity of love 13:1-3

In these first three verses Paul showed that love is superior to the spiritual gifts he listed in chapter 12.

"It is hard to escape the implication that what is involved here are two opposing views as to what it means to be 'spiritual.' For the Corinthians it meant 'tongues, wisdom, knowledge' (and pride), but without a commensurate concern for truly Christian behavior. For Paul it meant first of all to be full of the Spirit, the *Holy Spirit*, which therefore meant to behave as those 'sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be his holy people' (1:2), of which the ultimate expression always is to 'walk in love.' Thus, even though these sentences reflect the immediate context, Paul's concern is not simply with their over-enthusiasm about tongues but with the larger issue of the letter as a whole, where their view of spirituality has caused them to miss rather widely both the gospel and its ethics."²⁹⁸

"All four classes of gifts (xii. 28) are included here: the ecstatic in v. 1; the teaching (*propheteia*) and the wonder-working (*pistis*) gifts in v. 2; and the administrative in v. 3."²⁹⁹

13:1 Probably Paul began with tongues because of the Corinthians' fascination with this gift (cf. ch. 14). That is where the problem lay. He also built to a climax in verses 1-3 moving from the less to the more difficult actions.

²⁹⁷Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 124.

²⁹⁸Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 630.

²⁹⁹Robertson and Plummer, p. 288.

Evidently Paul used the first person because the Corinthians believed that they did speak with the tongues of men and of angels (cf. 14:14-15).

Speaking with the tongues of men and angels does not refer to simple eloquence, as the context makes clear (cf. 12:10, 28, 30). The tongues of men probably refer to languages humans speak. The tongues of angels probably refer to the more exalted and expressive language with which angels communicate with one another. They may refer to languages unknown to humans, namely ecstatic utterance. However throughout this whole discussion of the gift of tongues there is no evidence that Paul regarded tongues as anything but languages. Throughout the New Testament, "tongues" means languages.

Of course humans do not know the language of the angels, but it is an exalted language because angels are superior beings. The Corinthians evidently believed that they could speak in angelic languages. Paul's point was that even if one could speak in this exalted language and did not have love (i.e., act lovingly) his or her speech would be hollow and empty.³⁰⁰ Gongs and cymbals were common in some of the popular pagan cults of the time.³⁰¹ They made much noise but no sense.

13:2 Prophecy was a higher gift than glossolalia but was still inferior to love (cf. 14:1-5). Earlier Paul wrote of the importance of understanding life from God's perspective and grasping the truths previously not revealed but now made known by His apostles (2:6-13). Nevertheless the truth without love is like food without drink. Possession of spiritual gifts is not the sign of the Spirit, but loving behavior is.

Even faith great enough to move mountains is not as important as love (12:9; cf. Matt. 17:20; Mark 11:23; Luke 17:6). A mountain is a universal symbol of something immovable.

13:3 Even what passed for charity, self-sacrifice for less fortunate individuals, is not the same as real love (Gr. *agape*). It is inferior to it. It might profit the receiver, but it did not profit the giver.

Paul's personal sufferings for the salvation of others were also worthless without love (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-29; 12:10). Even one's acceptance of martyrdom might spring from love. Notwithstanding if it did not it was valueless in the sight of God and would bring no divine reward to the one who submitted to it (cf. Dan. 3:28; Rom. 5:2-3; 2 Cor. 1:14).

Paul was not setting love in contrast to gifts in this pericope. He was arguing for the necessity and supremacy of love if one is to behave as a true Christian.

³⁰⁰To act lovingly, of course, means to seek actively the benefit of someone else.

³⁰¹Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 125; Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 131; Robertson and Plummer, p. 289.

"Love is the indispensable addition which alone gives worth to all other Christian gifts."³⁰²

The character of love 13:4-7

The apostle next pointed out the qualities of love that make it so important. He described these in relationship to a person's character that love rules. We see them most clearly in God and in Christ but also in the life of anyone in whose heart God's love reigns.

13:4a Patience and kindness like love are aspects of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). The first characteristic is love's passive response and the second its active initiative. Patience and kindness mark God, Christ, and truly Christian behavior.

13:4b-5 Paul followed the two positive expressions of love with seven verbs that indicate how it does not behave. The first five of these marked the Corinthians, as we have seen. They were envious (cf. 3:3; 4:18), boastful (ostentatious; 3:18; 8:2; 14:37), proud (4:6, 18-19; 5:2; 8:1), rude (7:36; 11:2-16) and self-seeking (10:24, 33). Their behavior was not loving. Love does not deal with other people in a way that injures their dignity. It does not insist on having its own way, nor does it put its own interests before the needs of others (cf. Phil. 2:4). It is not irritable or touchy, but it absorbs offenses, insults, and inconveniences for the sake of others' welfare. It does not keep a record of offenses received to pay them back (cf. Luke 23:34; Rom. 12:17-21; 2 Cor. 5:19).

"One of the great arts in life is to learn what to forget."³⁰³

In the last two characteristics Paul moved beyond what this letter reveals marked the Corinthians.

13:6 Love takes no delight in evil or the misfortunes of others, but it takes great pleasure in what is right.

"Love cannot share the glee of the successful transgressor."³⁰⁴

"Love absolutely rejects that most pernicious form of rejoicing over evil, gossiping about the misdeeds of others; it is not gladdened when someone else falls. Love stands on

³⁰²Barrett, p. 303.

³⁰³Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 136.

³⁰⁴Robertson and Plummer, p. 294.

the side of the gospel and looks for mercy and justice for all, including those with whom one disagrees."³⁰⁵

"Christian love has no wish to veil the truth; it is brave enough to face the truth; it has nothing to conceal and so is glad when the truth prevails."³⁰⁶

13:7 Love covers unworthy things rather than bringing them to the light and magnifying them. It puts up with everything. It is always eager to believe the best and to "put the most favorable construction on ambiguous actions."³⁰⁷

"This does not mean . . . that a Christian is to allow himself to be fooled by every rogue, or to pretend that he believes that white is black. But in doubtful cases he will prefer being too generous in his conclusions to suspecting another unjustly."³⁰⁸

It is hopeful that those who have failed will not fail again rather than concluding that failure is inevitable (cf. Matt. 18:22). It does not allow itself to become overwhelmed but perseveres steadfastly through difficult trials.

The permanence of love 13:8-13

Paul moved on to point out that Christian love (*agape*) characterizes our existence now and forever, but gifts (*charismata*) are only for the present. The Corinthians were apparently viewing the gifts as one evidence that they were already in the eschatological stage of their salvation.

13:8 Love never fails in the sense of falling away when the physical temporal things on which affection rests pass away; it outlasts temporal things. Gifts of the Spirit will pass away because they are temporary provisions, but the fruit of the Spirit will abide.

Prophecies are messages from God, but when we stand before Him and hear His voice there will be no more need for prophets to relay His words to us. Likewise when we stand before God there will be no need to speak in other languages since we will all understand God when He speaks. The knowledge that is so important to us now will be irrelevant then because when we are in God's presence we will know perfectly (v. 12; cf. 1:5; 8:1; 12:8). The knowledge in view seems to be knowledge of God's ways in

³⁰⁵Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 639.

³⁰⁶Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 137.

³⁰⁷Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 127.

³⁰⁸Robertson and Plummer, p. 295.

the present age. As will become clearer in chapter 14, Paul's preference regarding the gifts was prophecy, but the Corinthians favored tongues and knowledge.

The verb Paul used to describe what will happen to prophecy and knowledge is in the passive voice in Greek and means "shall be terminated" (from *katargeo*; cf. 2:6). The verb he used to describe what will happen to tongues is in the middle voice and means "automatically cease of themselves" (from *pauo*).³⁰⁹ The passive voice points to God terminating prophecy and knowledge when we see Him. The middle voice suggests that tongues will peter out before we see God.³¹⁰ Church history testifies that this is what happened to the gift of tongues shortly after the apostolic age.³¹¹ Paul's dropping tongues from his discussion at this point supports the fact that the gift of tongues would not last as long as knowledge and prophecy. He continued to speak of knowledge and prophecy in the next verses.

13:9 In the meantime, before we see the Lord, our knowledge and prophecy are imperfect in contrast with what they will be when we see Him. Prophecy is imperfect in the sense that revelations of His mind are only partial, incomplete.

13:10 In the light of the context, what is perfect (Gr. *teleion*, mature, whole, complete) probably refers to the whole truth about God.³¹² Another possibility is that it is our state when we stand in the Lord's presence.³¹³ When we reach that point in history the Lord will remove (*katargeo*, cf. v. 8) what is partial, the limits on our knowledge and the other limitations we suffer in our present condition. Variations on this second view are that the perfect refers to the Rapture,³¹⁴ to the Lord's return,³¹⁵ or to the maturing of Christ's body through the course of the church age.³¹⁶

³⁰⁹A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:179.

³¹⁰See Stanley D. Toussaint, "First Corinthians Thirteen and The Tongues Question," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):311-16.

³¹¹Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 1:236-37. See also George W. Dollar, "Church History and the Tongues Movement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):316-21. See also the series of four articles by F. David Farnell, "Is the Gift of Prophecy for Today?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:595 (July-September 1992):277-303; 596 (October-December 1992):387-410; 150:597 (January-March 1993):62-88; and 598 (April-June 1993):171-202.

³¹²Barrett, p. 306.

³¹³Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 645; Thomas R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* pp. 333-34.

³¹⁴Toussaint, "First Corinthians . . .," pp. 312-14.

³¹⁵Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1744; Robertson and Plummer, p. 297.

³¹⁶Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: An exegetical study of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, pp. 106-13; idem, "Tongues . . . Will Cease," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 17:2 (Spring 1974):81-89; and idem, "1 Cor 13:11 Revisited: an Exegetical Update," *Master's Seminary Journal* 4:2 (Fall 1993):187-201. See also Farnell, 150:598:191-93.

Another view is that the perfect refers to the completion of the New Testament canon and the partial to the incomplete canon and the Corinthians' partial knowledge.³¹⁷ They were incomplete because God had not yet given all the prophecy He would give to complete the New Testament. However this view puts too much weight on prophecy and knowledge and not enough on our other temporary limitations to which Paul also referred (v. 12).

A third possibility is that the perfect refers to the new heavens and new earth.³¹⁸ However the New Testament does not reveal that God will remove Christians' limitations to any greater extent sometime *after* we see the Lord Jesus than He will *when* we see Him (cf. Rom 8:32).

13:11 Paul compared our present phase of maturity to childhood and that of our later phase, when we are with the Lord, to adulthood. It is characteristic of children to preoccupy themselves with things of very temporary value. Likewise the Corinthians took great interest in the things that would pass away soon, namely knowledge, tongues, and prophecy. A sign of spiritual maturity is occupation with things of eternal value such as love. Again Paul was stressing the difference between the present and the future.

13:12 Another illustration of the difference between our present and future states as Christians is the mirror. In Paul's day, craftsmen made mirrors out of metal.

". . . Corinth was famous as the producer of some of the finest bronze mirrors in antiquity."³¹⁹

Consequently the apostle's point was not that our present perception of reality is somewhat distorted, but in the future it will be completely realistic.³²⁰ Rather it was that now we see indirectly, but then we will see directly, face to face. Today we might say that we presently look at a photograph, but in the future we will see what the photograph pictures.

Now we know (Gr. *ginosko*) only partially. When the Lord has resurrected or "raptured" us and we stand in His presence, we will know fully (Gr. *epignosko*), as fully as God now knows us.³²¹ Now He knows us directly, but then we will also know Him directly.

³¹⁷Merrill F. Unger, *New Testament Teaching on Tongues*, p. 95; Myron J. Houghton, "A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:611 (July-September 1996):344-56.

³¹⁸John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 231.

³¹⁹Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 647-48. Cf. Robertson and Plummer, p. 298.

³²⁰Michael Fishbane believed a midrashic interpretation of Numbers 12:8 and Ezekiel 43:3 influenced Paul's writing of this verse. See "Through the Looking Glass: Reflections on Ezek 43:3, Num 12:8 and 1 Cor 13:8," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986):63-74.

³²¹I do not mean that we will be omniscient; we will not be. We will be fully aware.

13:13 "Now" resumes Paul's original thought about the supremacy of love. It does not carry on the contrast between what is now and what will be later. In contrast to what will pass away—namely knowledge, tongues, and prophecy—faith, hope, and love will endure (cf. Rom 5:1-5; Gal. 5:5-6; Eph. 4:2-5; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Heb. 6:10-12; 10:22-24; 1 Pet. 1:3-8, 21-22). Faith here is not the gift of faith (v. 2; cf. 12:9) but the trust in God that characterizes all His children.

Among the enduring virtues love is the greatest because it will only increase when we see the Lord rather than decreasing in us, as faith and hope will. In the future we will continue to trust God and hope in Him, but the reality of His presence will make it easier for us to do so then than it is now.

Apparently Paul introduced faith and hope at this point to show that love is not only superior to the gifts, but it is superior even to other virtues. Faith and hope are gifts, and they are also Christian virtues of the same type as love. Yet love even outstrips the other major Christian virtues because it will outlast them.

"Love is a property of God himself. . . . But God does not himself trust (in the sense of placing his whole confidence in and committing himself to some other being); if he did, he would not be God. . . . If God hoped he would not be God. But if God did not love he would not be God. Love is an activity, the essential activity, of God himself, and when men love either him or their fellow-men they are doing (however imperfectly) what God does."³²²

The point of this beautiful classic exposition of love is this. We should value and give attention to the cultivation and practice of love even more than to that of the spiritual gifts (cf. 12:31). The gifts, as important as they are, are only partial and temporary. As love is the greatest of the virtues that will endure forever, so the gift of tongues is the least of the gifts. It will last only a short time.

4. The need for intelligibility 14:1-25

Paul went on to elaborate on the inferiority of the gift of tongues that the Corinthians elevated so they would pursue more important gifts. His point was that *intelligible* inspired speech (i.e., prophecy) is superior to *unintelligible* inspired speech (i.e., tongues) in the assembly. He argued first for intelligible speech for the sake of the believers gathered to worship (vv. 1-25). In this whole comparison Paul was dealing with the gift of tongues without the gift of the interpretation of tongues.

³²²Barrett, p. 311.

The superiority of prophecy to tongues 14:1-5

The apostle began this discussion of tongues by comparing it to the gift of prophecy that the Corinthians also appreciated (cf. 12:10, 28; 13:8). He urged the Corinthians to value prophecy above tongues because it can edify and lead to conversion since it involves *intelligible* "inspired" speech.

14:1 This verse sums up what Paul had just written about love, and it resumes the thought in 12:31 by restating that exhortation. In contrast to some of the milder advice he gave in this epistle, Paul urged his readers strongly to follow the way of love. This imperative then advances the thought by urging the readers to seek the gift of prophesying in particular.

"At the end of chap. 12, where he had been speaking specifically of the *gifts* themselves as gracious endowments, he told them, 'eagerly desire the greater *charismata*.' Now in a context where the emphasis will be on the activity of the Spirit in the community at worship, he says, 'eagerly desire the things of the Spirit [*ta pneumatika*].'"³²³

14:2 Glossolalia by itself is not edifying to other people, but prophecy is. This statement again raises a question about what speaking in tongues involved.

On the day of Pentecost people spoke in tongues and other people who knew the languages spoken received edification because they heard of God's mighty deeds in their native languages (Acts 2:1-11). Interpreters were unnecessary on that occasion (cf. Acts 10:46; 19:6). Evidently what was taking place in the Corinthian church was different from what took place on the day of Pentecost. In Corinth, and perhaps in other early churches, people spoke in tongues among people who did not understand the languages. An interpreter was necessary for those present to understand and benefit from what the tongues-speaker was saying in a strange language (vv. 5, 13). Paul used "tongues" and "languages" interchangeably in this passage (cf. vv. 2, 10, 11, 13, et al.). This is an important proof that tongues were languages.

Some Christians have suggested another distinction. They have claimed that the tongues in Acts were foreign languages but the tongues in Corinthians were ecstatic utterances, not languages but unintelligible speech.³²⁴ There is no basis for this distinction in the biblical text,

³²³Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 655.

³²⁴E.g., Robertson and Plummer, pp. 301, 306.

however. The terminology used is the same, and the passages make good sense if we take tongues as languages wherever they occur.³²⁵

If someone spoke in an unknown language and no one could interpret what he was saying, the person speaking was not speaking to men. God knew what he was saying even though no one else did including the person doing the speaking. In his human spirit the speaker was uttering mysteries (Gr. *mysteria*, things hidden or secret from the understanding of those in the church listening). Obviously Paul's concern was the edification of the church. He did not disparage the gift of tongues itself, but he put it in its rightful place.

Note, too, that Paul described the spirit as distinct from the mind (cf. vv. 14-19).

"Contrary to the opinion of many, spiritual edification can take place in ways other than through the cortex of the brain. Paul believed in an immediate communing with God by means of the S/spirit that sometimes bypassed the mind; and in vv. 14-15 he argues that for his own edification he will have both. But *in church* he will have only what can also communicate to other believers through their minds."³²⁶

- 14:3 In contrast to the foreign speech uttered by tongues-speakers, those present could understand what a prophet spoke in the language of his audience. It benefited the hearers by building them up, encouraging them, and consoling them. "Edification," "exhortation," and "consolation" set forth the primary ways in which prophecy (preaching) builds up the church. Its main purpose as a gift was not to predict events in the future but to build up believers in the present.

Official Apostles	The Twelve and the Apostle Paul
Functional (unofficial) apostles	Church planters and missionaries
Official Prophets	Communicated new revelation
Functional (unofficial) prophets	Communicated edification, exhortation, and consolation

- 14:4 The person who spoke in tongues in church edified himself or herself. He or she praised God and prayed to God while speaking in a tongue. He or she also benefited from realizing that the Holy Spirit was enabling him or

³²⁵In 13:1 Paul wrote "of the tongues of men and of angels," evidently two types of languages. See also S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "The Gift of Tongues and the Book of Acts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):310-11.

³²⁶Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 657.

her to speak a language that he or she had not studied. This would have encouraged the tongues-speaker, but that one did not edify himself or herself in the sense of profiting from the message the Holy Spirit had given. He did not know what his words meant unless he also had the gift of interpretation, but in this discussion Paul left that gift out of the picture almost entirely (cf. v. 5). Had he known what he was saying he could have communicated this to those present in their language. That is what a prophet did.³²⁷ Paul's point was that edifying the church is more valuable than edifying oneself. He did not deny that speaking in tongues does edify the tongues-speaker (cf. vv. 14-15, 18-19).

- 14:5 Paul acknowledged the value of the gift of tongues even though it also required an interpreter. Nevertheless he made it clear that the ability to prophesy was more important. The issue, again, is private versus public benefit. Since Paul depreciated speaking in tongues without interpretation so strongly, it seems very likely that this is what the Corinthians were doing in their meetings. The real issue was not a conflict between tongues and prophecy but between unintelligible and intelligible utterance.

In this whole discussion "prophecy" does not refer primarily to a prepared sermon but to an impromptu word that someone would share in a service in which congregational participation was possible.

Supporting analogies 14:6-12

Paul illustrated his point that hearers do not benefit at all from what they do not understand. He used musical instruments as examples and clarified more about foreign languages.

- 14:6 This verse sets the scene for what follows in this pericope. "Revelation," "knowledge," "prophecy," and "teaching" are all intelligible utterances. These words probably refer to a new revelation (cf. 12:8), an insight into truth, a word of edification, exhortation, or consolation from the Lord (v. 3), or instruction in the faith.
- 14:7-8 Even the sounds people make using inanimate musical instruments need to be intelligible to profit anyone. This is especially obvious in the case of a call to battle. If the bugler blows a confused tune, the army will not know whether to attack or retreat. The harp and the flute, as well as the bugle, were commonplace in the Greco-Roman world.
- 14:9 Incomprehensible speech may be personally satisfying to the one talking, but it profits only a little those who are listening. The only profit would be

³²⁷Remember that prophets did not just foretell the future or announce new special revelation from God. They also delivered statements or messages in praise of God, or a word of instruction, refutation, reproof, admonition, or comfort for others. See my note on 11:4.

entertainment. For example, when an international student sings a song in his or her native language in chapel, almost everyone enjoys the song but does not receive edification from it.

14:10-11 Clearly Paul was speaking about languages, not gibberish, even though the Greek word translated "languages" (*phone*) means "sounds" or "voices." The context shows he had languages in mind, either human or angelic. A non-Greek was a foreigner (Gr. *barbaros*, barbarian) to a Greek. The word *barbaros* is onomatopoeic, meaning the foreigner's language sounded like so much "bar bar bar" to the Greek. Paul's point was that for communicating, the tongues-speaker who did not have an interpreter was no better than an incomprehensible barbarian. Even though his speech has meaning to the speaker, it has none to the hearers.

I enjoy watching and listening to an opera occasionally. I like to listen to the music for its own beauty even if I cannot understand the words. However, when the foreign words being sung are translated into English with captions above the stage or on the screen, I enjoy it even more. I also profit from learning from the story, which I cannot do if all I take away from the performance is the memory of beautiful sounds.

14:12 In view of this the Corinthians who were zealous for spiritual gifts would be better off pursuing the gifts that would enable them to build up the church. They should value these rather than the gifts that gave them some personal satisfaction when they exercised them but did not edify others. The Corinthians were zealots when it came to spirits (Gr. *pneumatōn*). The translators interpreted this word as synonymous with *pneumatikon* (spiritual gifts, v. 1), but it is different. Probably Paul meant that they were zealous over a particular manifestation of the Spirit, what they considered the mark of a "spiritual" Christian, namely the gift of tongues (cf. vv. 14-15, 32).

"Utterances that are not understood, even if they come from the Spirit, are of no benefit, that is, edification, to the hearer. Thus, since they have such zeal for the manifestation of the Spirit, they should direct that zeal in corporate worship away from being 'foreigners' to one another toward the edification of one another in Christ."³²⁸

Application in view of believers 14:13-19

Paul continued his argument by clarifying the effect that unintelligible speech has on believers gathered for worship.

³²⁸Ibid., p. 666.

- 14:13 The Corinthian who already had the gift of tongues should ask the Lord for the ability to interpret his or her utterances so the whole church could benefit from them (cf. v. 5). Note that Paul never said they should abandon this gift, but their practice of it needed correcting.
- 14:14 Public prayer is in view here, as it is in this whole chapter (v. 16), but some may have been praying in tongues privately as well. While praying in a tongue might give the person doing so a certain sense of exultation in his spirit, his mind would not benefit. He would not know what he was saying. The "spirit" (Gr. *pneuma*) seems to refer to that part of the person that exercises this spiritual gift. It is separate from the mind obviously (cf. v. 4). The person's spirit prays as the Holy Spirit gives him or her utterance.
- 14:15 Paul advocated praising and praying to God with both the spirit (emotions) and the mind (understanding).³²⁹ One reason tongues is an inferior gift is that in it the reason has no control.

Sometimes modern Christians who believe they have the gift of tongues wonder if they should speak in tongues in private even though they do not know what they are saying. Some of them claim that doing so edifies them (v. 4). Let us assume they are speaking some language that they have not studied, which is what the tongues-speakers in the early church were speaking. This, by the way, eliminates most modern tongues-speakers since most modern tongues-speakers simply repeat gibberish.³³⁰ Paul did not discourage speaking unknown languages in private. Nonetheless the relative value and profitability of such an experience are so minimal that its practice seems almost foolish in view of the more edifying options that are open to Christians. Perhaps the current preoccupation with feeling good, in contrast to having to work hard with one's mind to edify the church, is what make this practice so attractive to many today.

"It is, of course, impossible for anyone to prove experimentally that speaking in tongues cannot occur today. It may be demonstrated, however, that speaking in tongues is not essential to God's purpose now, and that there are good reasons to believe that most if not all the phenomena which are advanced as proof of modern

³²⁹The spirit and the mind are both receptors as well as expressers of impressions. Music without words makes a real impression on us even though that impression is not intellectual.

³³⁰A pastor friend of mine who used to "speak in tongues" said he had taught many Christians to "speak in tongues" and could teach anyone to do so. According to him it just requires learning a few phrases, getting oneself into the proper emotional state, and releasing one's inhibitions.

speaking in tongues is either psychological or demonic activity."³³¹

- 14:16-17 Paul used the word "bless" for pray here. When we praise God in prayer we say a benediction on Him, a word of blessing. Those believers (Gr. *idiotes*) who do not understand what the person praying in tongues is saying are unable to add their affirmation at the end of the prayer. "Amen" means "so be it." Whenever we lead in public prayer we should do it so the other people praying can join us and affirm our words. It is clear in verse 16 that Paul was speaking about a public worship situation. Giving thanks in public worship is important even if no one else joins in, but it is even more important that other believers can join in.
- 14:18-19 Corinthian tongues-enthusiasts could not reject Paul's instruction because he did not have the gift himself and so failed to appreciate its value. He believed in the validity of the gift but did not value it highly.³³² He almost deprecated it. Edifying instruction was 10,000 times more important than personal private exultation for the building up of the church gathered for worship. The edification of the body is, of course, God's great purpose for Christians today (Matt. 16:18).

Paul affirmed the gift that the Corinthians apparently regarded as the sign of genuine spirituality, but he did so by correcting their thinking about what was really important in their meetings. Worship should never be selfish, but it should always be intelligible.³³³

Application in view of unbelievers 14:20-25

Uninterpreted tongues did not benefit visiting unbelievers any more than they edified the believers in church meetings. Prophecy, on the other hand, benefited both groups.

- 14:20 Thinking that tongues-speaking demonstrates spirituality evidences immaturity.

"Children prefer what glitters and makes a show to what is much more valuable; and it was childish to prefer ecstatic utterance to other and far more useful gifts."³³⁴

There is a sense in which it is good for Christians to be childlike, namely in our innocence regarding evil. Still in understanding, we need to be mature (cf. 3:1-2). The Corinthians were not innocent in their behavior any more than they were mature in their thinking.

³³¹John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 185-86. Most of the books on the modern tongues movement listed in the bibliography of these notes deal with this issue in more detail.

³³²See Chadwick, p. 269.

³³³Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 145.

³³⁴Robertson and Plummer, p. 315.

- 14:21 The Law refers to the Old Testament here since the passage Paul cited is Isaiah 28:11-12. The context of this passage is the Israelites' refusal to accept Isaiah's warnings concerning the coming Assyrian invasion. God said because they refused to listen to the prophet's words He would "teach" them by using their foreign-speaking invading enemy. Nevertheless even then, God said, they would not repent. Isaiah preached repentance to the Israelites in their own language, but they did not repent. Then God brought the invading Assyrians into Israel. Still His people did not repent even though God "spoke" to them of their need to repent by allowing them to hear the foreign language of this enemy.
- 14:22 The "then" in this verse anticipates what is to come rather than drawing a conclusion from what has preceded.
- Tongues-speaking in the church signified to visiting unbelievers that the Christians were mad (v. 23).³³⁵ Prophecy signified to the believers that God was present and speaking.
- 14:23 Paul painted a picture of the Corinthian church assembled and engaged in a frenzy of unintelligible tongues-speaking. Two types of individuals walk in. One is a believer untaught in the matter of spiritual gifts and the other is an unbeliever. To both of them the worshippers appear to be insane rather than soberly engaged in worship and instruction. The church meeting would resemble the meetings of a mystery cult in which such mania was common.
- "It was strange that what the Corinthians specially prided themselves on was a gift which, if exercised in public, would excite the derision of unbelievers."³³⁶
- 14:24-25 If, on the other hand, the church was practicing prophesying and was receiving instruction, both visitors would gain a positive impression from the conduct of the believers. More importantly, what the prophets said would also convict them (cf. 2:14-15). Paul's description of their response came from Isaiah 45:14 (cf. Zech. 8:23) and contrasts with the unresponsiveness of the Israelites to messages God sent them in foreign languages. Prophecy would result in the repentance of visiting unbelievers, but tongues-speaking would not. These verses summarize the effects of good Christian preaching on unbelievers.

³³⁵See Zane C. Hodges, "The Purpose of Tongues," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:479 (July-September 1963):226-33; J. Lanier Burns, "A Reemphasis on the Purpose of Tongues," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:527 (July-September 1975):242-49; and Harold W. Hoehner, "The Purpose of Tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:20-25," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, pp. 53-66.

³³⁶Robertson and Plummer, p. 317.

"The gift of prophesying, however successful, is no glory to the possessor of it. It is the Spirit of God, not the preacher's own power, that works the wonderful effect."³³⁷

Paul did not mean that every individual in the church would either speak in tongues or prophesy (cf. v. 23). He meant that if one of those gifts dominated to the exclusion of the other the stated results would normally follow.

"The Corinthians tend to shut their ears to prophecy because they gain more satisfaction from listening to tongues than from hearing their faults exposed and their duties pointed out in plain rational language."³³⁸

Paul permitted only intelligible utterances when the church gathered for worship because they edify believers and bring the lost to conviction of their need for salvation.

5. The need for order 14:26-40

The Corinthians' public worship practices not only failed to be edifying and convicting, but they also involved disorderly conduct. Paul proceeded to deal with this additional need to help his readers value these qualities over the pseudo spirituality that they associated with glossolalia.

The ordering of these gifts 14:26-33

The apostle now began to regulate the use of tongues with interpretation, and he urged the use of discernment with prophecy.

"St Paul has here completed his treatment (xii.—xiv.) of *pneumatika*. He now gives detailed directions as to their use."³³⁹

14:26 The apostle did not want any one gift to dominate the meetings of this richly gifted church. Again his list of utterance gifts was limited and selective. Many Christians could make a variety of contributions to the general spiritual welfare of the congregation. He permitted the use of tongues but not their exclusive use and only if someone provided an interpretation (v. 27).

"That many in Corinth exercised their gifts in the interests of self-development and even of self-display can hardly be

³³⁷Ibid., p. 318.

³³⁸Barrett, p. 324.

³³⁹Robertson and Plummer, p. 319.

doubted; this was contrary to the law of love which regulates all Christian behaviour."³⁴⁰

- 14:27-28 Paul laid down three guidelines for the use of tongues in public worship. First, the believers should permit only two or at the most three interpreted tongues messages. This is in harmony with the inferior contribution that tongues make compared with prophecy. Second, the speakers should give them consecutively rather than concurrently to minimize confusion. The Spirit does not overpower the speaker but is subject to the speaker, and the Spirit leads speakers to contribute in appropriate times and ways. The Spirit's leading of the Old Testament prophets to speak at appropriate times and settings illustrates this. Third, the Christians should not allow tongues without interpretation in the church services, though Paul did permit private tongues-speaking (vv. 2, 4, 27). However remember that tongues were languages, and Paul valued private tongues-speaking quite low (vv. 2, 10, 11, 13, 14, et al.).
- 14:29 Likewise the prophets should minister in an orderly fashion and limit themselves to two or three messages at a service. The others in the congregation (not just other prophets) should pay attention to what they said. The Greek word *diakrino* means "pass judgment" (NASB) or "weigh carefully" (NIV). In 12:10 it reads "distinguish." Here it probably means to evaluate carefully and, if need be, to reject if the ministry was not in harmony with Scripture.
- "The apostle does *not* instruct the churches to sort out the true and false *elements in any particular prophecy*. Rather, he instructs them to sort out the true and false *prophecies among the many they would hear*."³⁴¹
- 14:30-31 Here we seem to have an example of two of the different kinds of prophesying that took place in the early church conflicting with each other. What Paul seems to have envisioned was one person—men and women could prophesy in this sense (11:4-5)—sharing a word from the Lord. This type of prophesying was open to almost anyone in the church. While this person was speaking, another prophet received a revelation from the Lord. This appears to be a more direct revelation than just the desire to address the congregation that had moved the first speaker to minister. In such a case the first speaker was to give preference to the person making the new revelation. Presumably the first speaker would finish what he was saying later.

³⁴⁰Barrett, p. 327.

³⁴¹R. Fowler White, "Does God Speak Today Apart from the Bible?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, p. 84. This essay is a rebuttal of the teaching of Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, pp. 133-43, 209-15; and Grudem, *The Gift . . .*; idem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 1049-61, on this subject.

"There was obviously a flexibility about the order of service in the early Church which is now totally lacking. . . . Everything was informal enough to allow any man who felt that he had a message to give to give it.

14:32-33 Prophets were to control themselves when speaking, even when giving new revelation (cf. vv. 27-28). The nature of this gift was that it did not sweep the prophet into a mindless frenzy. Pagans who received demonic revelations frequently lost control of themselves. Inability to control oneself was no evidence that the prophet spoke from God. On the contrary, it indicated that he was not submitting to God's control because God produces peace, not confusion.

"The theological point is crucial: the character of one's deity is reflected in the character of one's worship. The Corinthians must therefore cease worship that reflects the pagan deities more than the God whom they have come to know through the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 12:2-3). God is neither characterized by disorder nor the cause of it in the assembly."³⁴²

Again the apostle reminded his readers that what he was commanding was standard policy in the other churches (cf. 1:2; 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:36). This reminds us again that this church had some serious underlying problems.

Confusion and disorder in church services are not in keeping with the character of God and so dishonor Him.

The ordering of the women 14:34-35

Paul had formerly acknowledged that women could share a word from the Lord in the church meetings (11:4-16). Now he clarified one point about their participation in this context of prophesying.

14:34 The word translated "silent" (Gr. *sige*) means just that, namely to keep silent or to hold one's peace. However in 11:5 Paul spoke as though women prophesying in the church was a common and acceptable practice. I think the best explanation of this apparent contradiction comes out of the context, as is usually true. Paul had just permitted others in the congregation to evaluate the comments that a prophet made (v. 29). Now he qualified this by saying the women should not do so vocally in the church meetings as the men could. The teaching of the Law on this subject appears to be a reference to woman's subordination to the authoritative

³⁴²Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 697.

man in her family (Gen. 3:16). The "Law" then would refer to the Old Testament, as in verse 21.

14:35 Rather than calling out a question in the middle of some male or female prophet's message, a woman was to wait and ask her husband about it at home after the service. Presumably unmarried women would ask their fathers or some other man in the church after the service. Men could raise questions or make comments, but too much of this could ruin the order of the service and the edifying value of the message. Consequently Paul asked the women, evidently because of their natural position of subordination, to refrain. It is improper for a woman to speak in church meetings in the situation Paul addressed in the context. That situation is the questioning and perhaps challenging of what a prophet said who was sharing something he or she believed God had given him or her to pass on to the church.³⁴³

There have been many other explanations of this apparent contradiction. Richard Lenski assumed that all of what Paul said in 14:26-32 applies only to men and that he added verses 33-36 as an appendix to deal with women's participation.³⁴⁴ However this does not harmonize with 11:4-5. William Barclay believed at this point Paul was not able to rise above the spirit of his age that said women should not participate in intellectual activities on a par with men.³⁴⁵ This view fails to appreciate the implications of Paul's inspiration by the Spirit as he wrote as well as his high regard for women that he expressed elsewhere in his writings. G. Campbell Morgan seems to have regarded Paul's prohibition as necessary in view of conditions unique in Corinth.³⁴⁶ C. K. Barrett believed Paul did not write verses 34-35. He presumed some other person added them to the text later when Christians thought good order was more important than the freedom of the Spirit.³⁴⁷ Gordon Fee also argued that these verses are inauthentic.³⁴⁸ Harry Ironside believed the occasions at which women could speak were different from the official meetings of the church at which they were to be silent.³⁴⁹ David Lowery wrote that Paul wanted the married women whose husbands were present in the meeting to be silent, but that other women could speak if properly covered.³⁵⁰ S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., seems to have felt women could never speak in the church

³⁴³This is the view of Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, pp. 136-37; Morris, pp. 201-2; Robertson and Plummer, p. 325; James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman In Biblical Perspective*, pp. 188, 190; and others including myself.

³⁴⁴Lenski, p. 614.

³⁴⁵Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 151.

³⁴⁶Morgan, pp. 180-81.

³⁴⁷Barrett, pp. 332-33.

³⁴⁸Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 699-702.

³⁴⁹Harry A. Ironside, *Addresses on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 454-55.

³⁵⁰Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 541.

meetings except when they prayed or prophesied.³⁵¹ H. Wayne House concluded women could not speak if others considered what they said was authoritative.³⁵² Anne Blampied said Paul told the women to keep silent because they were violating the principle of order in the church, not because they were women.³⁵³

The most common view is that Paul forbade some form of inappropriate speech, not all speech.³⁵⁴ The second most popular interpretation is that Paul forbade some form of "inspired" speech other than prophecy, perhaps contradicting the prophets or speaking in tongues.

"Paul's long response to the Corinthians' enthusiasm for tongues is now finished. The basic issue is over what it means to be *pneumatikos* ('spiritual'); and on this issue Paul and they are deeply divided. They think it has to do with speaking in tongues, the language(s) of the angels, the sure evidence that they are already living in the pneumatic existence of the future. For this reason they have great zeal for this gift (cf. v. 12), including an insistence on its practice in the gathered assembly. Apparently in their letter they have not only defended this practice, but by the same criterion have called Paul into question for his lack of 'spirituality.' Hence the undercurrent of apologetic for his own speaking in tongues in vv. 6, 15, and 18.

"Paul's response to all this has been twofold. First, they are to broaden their perspective to recognize that being Spirit people by its very nature means a great variety of gifts and ministries in the church (chap. 12). Second, the whole point of the gathered people of God is edification, the true expression of love for the saints. Whatever they do in the assembly must be both intelligible and orderly so that the whole community may be edified; thus it must reflect the character of God, which is how it is (or is to be) in all the churches of the saints (v. 33)."³⁵⁵

Concluding confrontation 14:36-40

Paul concluded his answer to the Corinthians' question concerning spiritual gifts (chs. 12—14) and his teaching on tongues (ch. 14) with a strong call to cooperation. He zeroed in on their individualism (v. 36; cf. v. 33) and confronted them on the issue of who indeed was spiritual (v. 37). As a prophet of old he warned anyone who disagreed with his instructions (v. 38) and finally summarized his argument (vv. 39-40; cf. 4:18-21).

³⁵¹S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "1 Corinthians," in *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1255.

³⁵²H. Wayne House, "Caught in the Middle," *Kindred Spirit* 13:2 (Summer 1989):14; idem, "The Speaking of Women and the Prohibition of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:579 (July-September 1988):301-18.

³⁵³Anne B. Blampied, "Paul and Silence for 'The Women' in I Corinthians 14:34-35," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 18:2 (October 1983):143-65.

³⁵⁴E.g., Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 135.

³⁵⁵Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 709.

- 14:36 In this verse Paul reminded the Corinthians that they did not set the standard for how the church meetings should proceed. Their arrogance evidently drew this warning. The Corinthian church was not the mother church nor was it the only church to which the gospel had come (cf. 11:16; 14:33b). Therefore the Corinthian readers should submit to the apostle's direction (cf. 9:1-23).
- 14:37 Anyone could easily validate a Corinthian's claim to being a prophet or spiritual. He could do so by seeing if he or she acknowledged that what Paul had written was authoritative because he was an apostle of the Lord. Submission to apostolic authority was the test, not speaking in tongues. Submissiveness to the apostles and their teaching was an expression of submission to the Lord Himself (cf. 7:10, 25). It still is.
- 14:38 The Corinthians should not recognize as a prophet or as a person under the control of the Holy Spirit anyone who refused to acknowledge the apostle's authority. Failure to recognize the Lord as the source of Paul's teaching would lead to that person's failure to be recognized (i.e., acknowledged with approval) by the Lord (cf. 8:2-3)
- 14:39 "Therefore" signals a summation of the entire argument on spiritual gifts. "My brethren" sounds a loving note at the end of this very stern discussion (cf. 1:10). "Desire earnestly to prophesy" repeats the imperative with which Paul began (v. 1). "Do not forbid to speak in tongues" concedes the legitimacy of their favorite gift. Paul heartily encouraged the exercise of the gift of prophecy, but he only permitted the gift of speaking in tongues with certain qualifiers.

As time passed, God no longer gave prophets revelations concerning the future. The apostle John was evidently the last person to function as a prophet in this sense (cf. Rev. 22:18). They also no longer received new revelation from the Lord. We can see this passing away even during the history of the church that Luke recorded in Acts. Much of the revelation contained in the books of the New Testament was of this type. In this sense the gift of prophecy was foundational to the establishment of the church and has ceased (Eph. 2:20). Nevertheless people continued to speak forth messages from the Lord, the basic meaning of the Greek word *propheteuo* (to prophesy). In the more general sense this gift is still with us today (cf. v. 3).

Paul said his readers were not to forbid speaking in tongues. He meant they were not to do so provided they followed the rules he had just explained for the exercise of the gift. Certainly if someone has the New Testament gift of tongues, he or she should observe these rules today as well. However, many Christians seriously doubt that anyone has this gift

today. Christians involved in the charismatic movement believe the gift does exist today. Nevertheless the differences between tongues-speaking as practiced today and what took place in first century churches has led most believers to conclude that these are very different experiences.

14:40 The foundational principles that should underlie what takes place in church meetings are these. Christians should do everything in a decent and orderly manner, everything should be edifying (v. 26), and a spirit of peace should prevail (v. 33).

This chapter on speaking in tongues is extremely relevant because of current interest in the charismatic gifts of the Spirit. If believers followed the teaching in this chapter alone, even in charismatic churches, there would be far less confusion in the church over this subject.

"In these three chapters (xii.—xiv.) the Apostle has been contending with the danger of *spiritual anarchy*, which would be the result if every Christian who believed that he had a charisma were allowed to exercise it without consideration for others."³⁵⁶

F. THE RESURRECTION OF BELIEVERS CH. 15

The Apostle Paul did not introduce the instruction on the resurrection that follows with the formula that identifies it as a response to a specific question from the Corinthians (i.e., *peri de*). From what he said in this chapter he apparently knew that some in the church had adopted a belief concerning the resurrection that was contrary to apostolic teaching. They believed that there is no resurrection of the dead (cf. vv. 12, 16, 29, 32). Apparently he included this teaching to correct this error and to reaffirm the central importance of the doctrine of the resurrection in the Christian faith.

". . . the letter itself is not finished. Lying behind their view of spirituality is not simply a false view of spiritual gifts, but a false theology of spiritual existence as such. Since their view of 'spirituality' had also brought them to deny a future resurrection of the body, it is fitting that this matter be taken up next. The result is the grand climax of the letter as a whole, at least in terms of its argument."³⁵⁷

"This chapter has been called 'the earliest Christian doctrinal essay,' and it is the only part of the letter which deals directly with doctrine."³⁵⁸

Evidently the Corinthians believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but belief in His resurrection did not necessarily involve believing that God would raise all believers in Christ. Christ's resurrection gave hope to believers about the future, but that hope did not

³⁵⁶Robertson and Plummer, p. 328.

³⁵⁷Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 713.

³⁵⁸Robertson and Plummer, p. 329.

necessarily involve the believer's resurrection. This seems to have been the viewpoint of the early Christians until Paul taught them that their bodily resurrection was part of their hope, which he did here. Thus this chapter has great theological value to the church.

"... apparently soon after Paul's departure from Corinth things took a turn for the worse in this church. A false theology began to gain ground, rooted in a radical pneumatism that denied the value/significance of the body and expressed in a somewhat 'overrealized,' or 'spiritualized,' eschatology. Along with this there arose a decided movement against Paul. These two matters climax in this letter in their pneumatic behavior (chaps. 12—14) and their denial of a resurrection of the dead (chap. 15), which included their questioning of his status as *pneumatikos* ([spiritual] 14:36-38) and perhaps their calling him an 'abortion' or a 'freak' (15:8). Thus, as elsewhere, Paul sets out not only to correct some bad theology but at the same time to remind them of his right to do so."³⁵⁹

I. The resurrection of Jesus Christ 15:1-11

Paul began by reaffirming their commonly held belief: Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. In this section the apostle stressed the objective reality of both Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

- 15:1 The Corinthians and all Christians have their standing in Christ as a result of the gospel message.
- 15:2 Paul did not entertain the possibility that his readers could lose their salvation by abandoning the gospel he had preached to them. The NIV translation captures his thought well. Their denial of the Resurrection might indicate that some of them had not really believed the gospel.
- 15:3 As with the events of the Lord's Supper (11:23) Paul had heard of the Lord Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances and had then passed this information along to others. Elsewhere he wrote that he had not received the gospel from other people but directly from the Lord (Gal. 1:11). Probably some aspects of it came to him one way and others another. He apparently received the essence of the gospel on the Damascus road and learned more details from other sources.

"He received the facts from the Apostles and others; the import of the facts was made known to him by Christ (Gal. i. 12)."³⁶⁰

Three facts are primary concerning Jesus' death. He died, He died for people's sins, and He died as the Scriptures revealed He would. These

³⁵⁹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 716.

³⁶⁰Robertson and Plummer, p. 333.

facts received constant reaffirmation in the early preaching of the church (cf. Acts 3:13-18; 8:32-35).

"People are wicked and sinful; they do not know God. But Christ died 'for our sins,' not only to forgive but also *to free people from their sins*. Hence Paul's extreme agitation at the Corinthians' sinfulness, because they are thereby persisting in the very sins from which God in Christ has saved them. This, after all, is what most of the letter is about."³⁶¹

"Since Judaism did not interpret this passage messianically, at least not in terms of a personal Messiah, and since there is no immediate connection between the death of Jesus and the idea that his death was 'for our sins,' it is fair to say that whoever made that connection is the 'founder of Christianity.' All the evidence points to Jesus himself, especially at the Last Supper with his interpretation of his death in the language of Isa. 53 as 'for you' (see on 11:23-25)."³⁶²

15:4 Burial emphasizes the finality of the Messiah's death (cf. Acts 2:29) and attests the reality of His resurrection (cf. Acts 13:29-30).

The perfect tense and passive voice of the Greek verb translated "was raised" implies that since God raised Him He is still alive. The third day was Sunday. Friday, the day of the crucifixion, was the first day, and Saturday was the second. The phrase "according to the Scriptures" probably describes the Resurrection alone in view of the structure of the sentence (cf. Lev. 23:10-14; Ps. 16:10-11; 17:15-24; Isa. 53:10b; Hos. 6:2).

"Though the resurrection is part of the gospel message, it is not part of the saving work of Christ on the cross. The resurrection is stated as proof of the efficacy of Christ's death. Having accomplished redemption by His death, Jesus Christ was 'raised because of our justification' (Rom. 4:25). The fact that Jesus Christ is alive is part of the Christian's good news, but individuals are saved by His death, not by His resurrection."³⁶³

15:5 Peter was, of course, the leader of the disciples. Perhaps Paul referred to the Lord's special appearance to Peter (Luke 24:34) because some in the

³⁶¹Fee, "Toward a . . .," p. 49.

³⁶²Idem, *The First . . .*, p. 724.

³⁶³Thomas L. Constable, "The Gospel Message," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, p. 203.

Corinthian church revered Peter (1:12) as well as because he was the key disciple. "The twelve" refers to the 12 disciples even though only 11 of them were alive when the Lord appeared to them. This was a way of referring to that particular group of Jesus' followers during His earthly ministry (Matt. 10:1).

15:6 This is the only record of this particular appearance in the New Testament. That Jesus appeared to so many people at one time is evidence that His resurrection body was not a spirit. Many people testified that they had seen Him on this single occasion. Since the Resurrection took place about 23 years before Paul wrote this epistle, it is reasonable that the majority of this group of witnesses was still alive. Any skeptical Corinthians could check with them.

15:7 This James was most likely the half-brother of Jesus. He became the leader of the Jerusalem church.

The apostles as a group included Matthias who was not one of the 12 original disciples. This probably refers to a collective appearance to all the apostles.

15:8 Paul regarded the Lord's appearance to him on the Damascus road as an equivalent post-resurrection appearance and the Lord's last one. The apostle may have referred to himself as he did (lit. as if to an abortion) not because his apostleship came to him prematurely. The Lord appointed him some time after the others. He probably did so because compared with the backgrounds and appointments of the other apostles Paul's were unusual.

"Since this is such an unusual term of deprecation, and since it occurs with the article, *the* 'abortion,' it has often been suggested that the Corinthians themselves have used the term to describe Paul, as one who because of his personal weaknesses is something of a 'freak' in comparison with other apostles, especially Apollos and Peter. Others have suggested that the term is a play on Paul's name—*Paulus*, 'the little one.' Hence they dismissed him as a 'dwarf.' This has the advantage of helping to explain the unusual 'digression' in vv. 9-10, where he in fact allows that he is 'least' of all the apostles; nonetheless God's grace worked the more abundantly in his behalf.

"In any case, whether it originated with them, which seems altogether likely, or with Paul himself in a sudden outburst of self-disparagement, it seems hardly possible to

understand this usage except as a term that describes him vis-à-vis the Corinthians' own view of apostleship."³⁶⁴

Paul stressed the appearances of the risen Christ (vv. 5-9) because they prove that His resurrection was not to a form of "spiritual" (i.e., noncorporeal) existence. Just as His body died and was buried so it was raised and many witnesses saw it, often many witnesses at one time.

- 15:9 The apostle probably used their view of him as a "freak" to comment on his view of himself in this verse and the next one. Evidently Paul felt himself the least worthy to be an apostle. He did not regard his apostleship inferior to that of the other apostles, however. The reason for his feeling this way was the fact that while the other apostles were building up the church he was tearing it down.
- 15:10 Paul's apostolic calling was a gracious gift from God. The giving of God's grace proves vain when it does not elicit the appropriate response of loving service. Paul responded to God's unusually great grace to him by offering back unusually great service to God. However, he did not view his service as self-generated but the product of God's continual supply of grace to him. God saved Paul by grace, and Paul served God by God's grace.
- 15:11 Paul and the other apostles all believed and preached the same gospel. Paul did not proclaim a different message from what Peter, James, and the others did. This commonly agreed on message is what the Corinthians had believed when those who had ministered in Corinth had preached to them. By denying the resurrection the Corinthians were following neither Apollos, nor Cephas, nor Christ. They were pursuing a theology of their own.

The point of this section of verses was to present the gospel message, including the account of Jesus Christ's resurrection, as what many reliable eyewitnesses saw and all the apostles preached. Paul did this to stress that Jesus Christ's resurrection, which most of the Corinthians accepted, had objective reality, not to prove that He rose from the dead. Even though Paul had a different background from the other apostles, he heralded the same message they did. Consequently his original readers did not need to fear that what they had heard from him was some cultic perversion of the truth. It was the true gospel, and they should continue to believe it.

2. The certainty of resurrection 15:12-34

In the preceding paragraph Paul firmly established that the gospel the Corinthians had believed contained the fact that God had raised Jesus Christ bodily, along with other

³⁶⁴Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 733.

equally crucial facts. Next he proceeded to show the consequences of rejecting belief in the resurrection of the body.

The negative alternative 15:12-19

Paul first appealed to the Corinthians' logic.³⁶⁵ Here it becomes clear for the first time in the chapter that some of them were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead. If they were correct, they had neither a past nor a future.

15:12 Belief in the resurrection of the body seems to have been difficult for Greeks to have accepted in other places as well as in Corinth (cf. Acts 17:32; 2 Tim. 2:17). Evidently some of the Corinthian Christians were having second thoughts about this doctrine.

"These deniers apparently believe that those who are truly 'spiritual' (in the Corinthians' sense) are already 'reigning with Christ' in glory (see 4:8)."³⁶⁶

"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."³⁶⁷

15:13-14 Belief in bodily resurrection is foundational to the Christian faith. If the resurrection of the body is impossible, then the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fiction. If He did not rise, the apostles' preaching rested on a lie, and consequently the Corinthians' faith would have been valueless as well as misplaced.

This is the first in a series of conditional statements that run through verse 19. They are first class conditions in the Greek text, which express the assumption of reality for the sake of the argument. In verse 13 Paul did not express disbelief in the resurrection from the dead. He assumed there is none to make a point. This was also his tactic in verses 14, 16, 17, and 19.

15:15 Moreover the apostles would not just be in error, they would be false witnesses against God. They would be saying something untrue about God, namely that He raised Jesus Christ when He really had not. This would be a serious charge to make against the man who had founded their church and claimed to represent God. Really by denying the resurrection the unbelieving Corinthians were the false witnesses.

³⁶⁵In this form of logic, called *modus tollens*, Paul's argument was that since Christ was raised there is a resurrection of believers. That Paul had believers in view, rather than all people, seems clear in that he was discussing the hope of believers. Other passages teach the resurrection of other groups of people, even all others (e.g., Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:4-5, 12; et al.).

³⁶⁶Furnish, p. 74.

³⁶⁷Barclay, *The Letter . . .*, p. 156.

15:16-18 Paul repeated his line of thought contained in verses 12-14 in different terms. If Christ was still dead and in the grave, then confidence in Him for salvation is futile.³⁶⁸ This means the believer is still dead in his or her sins. He or she is without any hope of forgiveness or eternal life. Christians who had already died would be lost forever, eternally separated from God.

"The denial of their future, that they are destined for resurrection on the basis of Christ's resurrection, has the net effect of a denial of their past, that they have received forgiveness of sins on the basis of Christ's death."³⁶⁹

Paul evidently meant that given the Corinthians' position the believer has no future of any kind. "Perished" probably has this meaning since even though they denied the resurrection they were baptizing for the dead (v. 29). It seems unlikely that they would have done this if they believed that death ended all.

15:19 If the Christian's hope in Christ is just what he or she can expect this side of the grave, that one deserves pity. Of course there are some benefits to trusting Christ as we live here and now (cf. 1 Tim. 4:8). However, we have to place these things in the balance with what we lose in this life for taking a stand for Him (cf. Phil. 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:4-5; 9:25). If we have nothing to hope for the other side of the grave, the Christian life would not be worth living.

To summarize his argument, Paul claimed that if believers have no future, specifically resurrected bodies like Christ's, we have no past or present as well. That is, we have no forgiveness of our sins in the past, and we have no advantage over unbelievers in the present.

"It is a point of very great importance to remember that the Corinthians were not denying the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; what they were denying is the resurrection of the body; and what Paul is insistent upon is that if a man denies the possibility of the resurrection of the body he has thereby denied the possibility of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and has therefore emptied the Christian message of its truth and the Christian life of its reality."³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸See Norman L. Geisler, "The Significance of Christ's Physical Resurrection," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146:582 (April-June 1989):148-70.

³⁶⁹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 743.

³⁷⁰Barclay, *The Letter . . .*, p. 153.

The positive reality 15:20-28

Paul turned next to show that the resurrection of Christ makes the resurrection of believers both necessary and inevitable. The consequences of this fact are as glorious as the effects of His not being raised are dismal. Those "in Christ" must arise since Christ arose. His resurrection was in the present, but ours will be in the future (i.e., in the eschaton). Christ's resurrection set in motion the defeat of all God's enemies including death. His resurrection demands our resurrection since otherwise death would remain undefeated.

15:20 The argument advances here by connecting the believer with Christ. Christ was the firstfruits of the larger group of those whom God has chosen for salvation. This is the last mention of Christ's resurrection in the argument, but all that follows rests on this fact.

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 (Lev. 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 (Lev. 23:15-17). The firstfruits they offered following the Passover were only the first of the crops that they offered later. Paul saw in this comparison the fact that other believers would rise from the dead just as Jesus Christ did. He used the firstfruits metaphor to assert that the resurrection of believers is absolutely inevitable. God Himself has guaranteed it.

15:21-22 The apostle also drew a lesson from two uniquely representative men, Adam and Christ. Adam was the first man in the old creation, and, like him, all of his sons die physically. Christ is the first man in the new creation, and, like Him, all of His sons will live physically (cf. Rom. 5:12-19). Obviously Paul was referring to believers only as sons of Christ. Both Adam and Jesus were men. Therefore our resurrection will be a human resurrection, not some "spiritual" type of resurrection. Physical resurrection is as inevitable for the son of Jesus Christ as physical death is for the son of Adam.

15:23 The word translated "order" or "turn" is a military one used of ranks of soldiers (*tagma*). Paul's idea was that Christ was the first rank and experienced resurrection. Christians are in a different rank and will experience resurrection together at a different time, namely at the Lord's coming (Gr. *parousia*, lit. appearing, i.e., at the Rapture). The apostle did not go on to give a complete explanation of the various resurrections here. There will be other ranks of people who will rise at other times: Tribulation saints, Old Testament believers, the unsaved, etc. His point

here was that the resurrection of Christians is just as certain to take place as the fact that Christ's already took place. He did not mean that our resurrection will be of a different type than Christ's (i.e., "spiritual" rather than physical).

15:24-26 The end refers to the end of the present heavens and earth in view of what Paul said about it here. This will come more than 1,000 years after the Rapture. Then Christ, who will have been reigning over His earthly millennial kingdom, will turn over that reign to His Father. Christ's abolishing all other rule, authority, and power will take place when He subdues the rebels that rise up against Him at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:7-10). He will also defeat death, and from then on no one will die. The saved will enter the new heavens and new earth to enjoy bliss with God forever while the lost will suffer everlasting torment (Matt. 25:46; Rev. 20:11—21:1).

"Many see evidence of the millennium in Paul's discourse on resurrection (1 Co 15, esp. vv. 20-28)."³⁷¹

". . . it is not only possible but probable that Paul understood this final triumph to take place during the millennial reign of Christ. To sum up the principal evidence, Paul's use of *epeita* ('after that') and *eita* ('then') in 1 Corinthians 15:23-24, the syntax of 15:24-25, and the parallel use of Psalms 8 and 110 in 1 Corinthians 15 and Hebrews 1 and 2 all point to the understanding that when Paul mentioned a kingdom and reign in 15:24-25, he referred to the reign of Christ on this earth following His return and prior to the eternal state, a time that Revelation 20:4-6 calls 'the thousand years.'"³⁷²

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.

15:27 Paul saw Jesus Christ as the person who fulfilled the prophecy recorded in Psalm 8:7.³⁷³ In the psalm the ruler in view is man, but He will be the Man who regained for humanity all that Adam lost (cf. Ps. 110:1). Of course, God Himself will not be under the rule of the Son of God. He is the One who will finally bring all things into subjection to Christ.

³⁷¹Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 280.

³⁷²D. Edmond Hiebert, "Evidence from 1 Corinthians 15," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, p. 234.

³⁷³See Donald R. Glenn, "Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2: A Case Study in Biblical Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, pp. 44-45.

15:28 Finally God will be the head of everything (cf. Rom. 11:36). The earthly millennial kingdom will end and everything will merge into the eternal kingdom of God (cf. Isa. 9:7; Luke 1:33).³⁷⁴ Christ will be submissive to His Father forever. This is the central passage that affirms the eternal functional (not ontological) subordination of the Son to the Father (cf. 3:22-23; 11:3; John 17:24; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 2:9-11).³⁷⁵ The Resurrection set in motion a chain of events that will ultimately culminate in the death of death. Then God will resume being what He was before creation, "all in all."

"The meaning seems to be that there will no longer be need of a Mediator: all relations between Creator and creatures, between Father and offspring, will be direct."³⁷⁶

In this pericope Paul traced the career of Christ from His resurrection to His final exaltation, which will occur at the end of the present heavens and earth. Undoubtedly he intended his readers to identify with the Savior since he had taught them that believers reproduce the experiences of their Lord as they reproduce His attitudes and actions. In view of what lies ahead, how foolish it would be to deny the resurrection of the body. This passage clarifies the true significance of Easter.

Other arguments for resurrection 15:29-34

Paul turned from Christ's career to the Christian's experience to argue *ad hominem* for the resurrection.³⁷⁷ The Corinthians' actions, and his, bordered on absurdity if the dead will not rise. This paragraph is something of a digression, and the main argument resumes in verse 35.

15:29 This verse probably refers to proxy baptism, the custom of undergoing baptism for someone who died before he or she could experience baptism.³⁷⁸ Evidently the Corinthians were practicing this for people who became Christians on their deathbeds or under other conditions that made

³⁷⁴Cf. Saucy, *The Case . . .*, pp. 321-22. Some interpreters believe the kingdom Paul referred to is Christ's present cosmic lordship that he exercises from heaven, e.g., C. E. Hill, "Paul's Understanding of Christ's Kingdom in I Corinthians 15:20-28," *Novum Testamentum* 30:4 (October 1988):297-320. But this view does not harmonize well with biblical eschatology.

³⁷⁵John V. Dahms, "The Subordination of the Son," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:3 (September 1994):351-64. See also Mark 13:32; 14:62; John 1:1; 14:28; 1 Cor. 8:6; Phil. 4:19-20.

³⁷⁶Robertson and Plummer, p. 358.

³⁷⁷An *ad hominem* argument is one that appeals to self-interest rather than to logic.

³⁷⁸Morris, p. 219, wrote that there are 30 to 40 different explanations of this verse. See the commentaries for other views and John D. Reaume, "Another Look at 1 Corinthians 15:29, 'Baptized for the Dead,'" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):457-75. Joel R. White, "Baptized on Account of the Dead": The Meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:29 in its Context," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116:3 (1997):487-99, believed the first reference to "the dead" in this verse refers to the apostles who had died metaphorically (cf. v. 31).

it difficult or impossible for them to undergo baptism in water. Paul's mention of the custom is not necessarily an endorsement of it. On the other hand, he did not specifically condemn it either.

Whether he approved of it or not, the Corinthian believers were evidently doing it. Paul used this practice to argue for the reality of resurrection. His point was that if there is no physical resurrection it is foolish to undergo baptism for someone who had died because in that case they are dead and gone forever.³⁷⁹ Suppose, on the other hand, there is a resurrection. When God will raise those baptized by proxy, they would not suffer shame for failure to undergo baptism while they were alive. Those who had not benefited from proxy baptism would suffer embarrassment.

The Corinthians may have carried proxy baptism over into the church from pagan religions. That is a distinct possibility since we have seen that they had done this with other pagan practices. There is nothing in Scripture that encourages this practice, though some have interpreted this verse as an encouragement. Some Christian groups that believe water baptism contributes to a person's salvation advocate it. Today the Mormons do. However the mention of a practice in Scripture does not always constitute endorsement of it. We have seen this in chapters 8—11 especially.

- 15:30 If there is no resurrection, why did Paul endure so many hardships and dangers in his ministry? The apostle's sacrifices do not prove there will be a resurrection, but they do show that he believed there would be one. He willingly faced death daily because he believed God would raise him and that his resurrected body would continue beyond the grave.
- 15:31 Paul backed up this assertion with a kind of oath. He said he faced death daily just as he boasted about the Corinthians. In this epistle Paul was quite critical of his readers. Probably he meant that he boasted in their very existence as Christians rather than that he boasted to other churches about their behavior.
- 15:32 One example of facing death occurred in Ephesus where Paul was when he wrote this epistle. His fight with "wild beasts" was not with wild animals. This expression describes his conflict with very hostile human adversaries. The phrase *kata anthropon* ("from human motives" or "for . . . human reasons," lit. according to man) identifies Paul's words as figurative language. Furthermore Roman citizens did not participate in hand to hand combat with animals in the arenas.³⁸⁰ Perhaps Demetrius and or Alexander were Paul's antagonists (Acts 19:24-41; 2 Tim. 4:14).

³⁷⁹See Barrett, pp. 362-63; Robertson and Plummer, p. 360.

³⁸⁰Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 149; Robertson and Plummer, p. 362.

Paul quoted Isaiah 22:13 to prove his point (cf. Eccles. 2:24; 9:7-10). If there is no resurrection we may as well live only for the present.

15:33 This quotation, contained in a comedy by Menander titled *Thais*, but perhaps dating back to Euripides,³⁸¹ had become proverbial. The Greeks generally recognized 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.

15:34 The Corinthians needed to think correctly. Rather than living for the present, as their pagan neighbors were undoubtedly encouraging them to do, they needed to stop sinning and fulfill their present purpose, namely propagating the gospel. It was a shame that they had neighbors who still had no knowledge of God since they had much knowledge of God (1:5; 8:1).

"Since salvation finally has to do with being known by and knowing God (13:12), what makes the Corinthians' persisting in sin so culpable is that it keeps others from the knowledge of God (15:34).³⁸²

It may be that Paul was also using irony to refer to the "spiritual" viewpoint of the Corinthians. The appearance of "knowledge" here again raises that possibility since, as we have seen, "knowledge" was a Corinthian fascination. Paul had also spoken something to their "shame" earlier (cf. 6:5). If he meant to be ironic, the apostle was probably putting down those responsible for taking the church in the dangerous direction that it had gone. He would have meant that his readers should sober up and stop sinning because some of them did not have the truth, which was to their shame.

These *ad hominem* arguments do not prove beyond doubt that God will raise the bodies of people from the dead, but they support Paul's stronger logical arguments in the preceding section (vv. 12-34). They show that Christians generally and the apostle in particular believed in the Resurrection deeply. It affected the way they lived, as it should.³⁸³

3. The resurrection body 15:35-49

Paul next addressed the objection that the resurrection of the body is impossible because when a person dies his or her body decomposes and no one can reassemble it. The Corinthians seem to have wanted to avoid thinking that the material body was essentially

³⁸¹Morris, p. 221.

³⁸²Fee, "Toward a . . .," p. 40.

³⁸³For an introduction to reincarnation, which denies resurrection, see H. Wayne House, "Resurrection, Reincarnation, and Humanness," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):131-50.

good. Hellenistic dualism seems to have influenced their thinking about the human body and, therefore, the resurrection.³⁸⁴ They did not, and most people do not, view very positively a resurrection that involves simply resuscitating human corpses. Paul proceeded to show that the resurrection of believers was not that but a resurrection of *glorified* bodies. Paul taught a more glorious future for believers than the present "spiritual" existence that some in Corinth lauded.

"The Corinthians are convinced that by the gift of the Spirit, and especially the manifestation of tongues, they have already entered into the spiritual, 'heavenly' existence that is to be. Only the body, to be sloughed off at death, lies between them and their ultimate spirituality. Thus they have denied the body in the present, and have no use for it in the future."³⁸⁵

A key word in this section of Paul's argument is "body" (Gr. *soma*), which occurs 10 times compared to no times in the first 34 verses.³⁸⁶

Analogies from nature 15:35-44

The apostle proceeded to offer two sets of analogies (seeds, vv. 36-38; and types of bodies, vv. 39-41) that he then applied to the resurrection of the dead (vv. 42-44).

15:35 This objection to the resurrection has to do with the reconstruction of the body out of the same elements that it formerly possessed. Obviously it would be impossible to reassemble the same cells to reconstruct a person after he or she had been dead for some time. This is the primary problem that Paul solved in the rest of this pericope.

For example, if someone died at sea and sailors buried him, a fish might eat his body. The atoms and molecules of his body would become part of the fish. If a fisherman caught and ate the fish, its body would become part of the fisherman's body. If the fisherman died and an undertaker buried him in the ground and someone eventually sowed wheat over his grave, the fisherman's atoms and molecules would go into the wheat. A third person would eat the wheat and so on. How could the first person's body ever come together again?

15:36-38 Such an objection sounds very reasonable on the surface, but it is really foolish, and it drew a sharp rebuke from Paul. The "wise" Corinthians

³⁸⁴Dualism is the philosophy, so common in pagan Greek thought, that the body is only the husk of the real "person" who dwells within. The more one can live without the constraints that the body imposes the better. The biblical view, on the other hand, is that the body is essentially good and just as much a part of the real "person" as the immaterial part (cf. Gen. 2:7).

³⁸⁵Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 778.

³⁸⁶"Dead" (Gr. *nekros*), on the other hand, appears 11 times in verses 1-34 but only three times after verse 34. These facts illustrate the shift in Paul's argument.

were "fools!" The body that God resurrects will not be the same *type* of body that died even though it is the body of the same person. Paul proceeded to illustrate with a seed of grain. A new form of life springs forth from death. The body surrounding the life is different before and after death. Likewise human life exists in one form of body before death, and after death it exists in a different type of body. God does this with grain, so He can do it with humans too. This is so obvious in nature that we can understand Paul's sharp retort in verse 36.³⁸⁷

15:39-41 This passage begins and ends by stressing the differences within kinds of bodies. The second and fifth sentences stress the differences within genus while contrasting the earthly with the heavenly. The central elements state the realities of earthly and heavenly "bodies." Structurally the passage is a chiasm.³⁸⁸

- A** Not all *flesh* is the same (i.e., earthly bodies).
B Examples of different kinds of flesh: people, animals, birds, fish
C There are heavenly and earthly kinds of bodies.
C' The splendor of heavenly bodies is of one kind and the splendor of earthly bodies is of another kind.
B' Examples of different kinds of splendor: sun, moon, stars
A' Not all stars (i.e., heavenly bodies) have the same *splendor*.

In verse 39 Paul used animal life to point out the different types (substance) of flesh: human, land animals, birds, and fish. This anticipates what he said later about the earthly and heavenly existence of believers. A body can be genuinely fleshly and still subsist in different forms for different environments. The fact that there are different kinds of bodies among animals should help us understand that there can also be different kinds of human bodies. Some human bodies are mortal and some are immortal. Some are corruptible and others incorruptible.

Likewise the fact that celestial bodies differ in glory (brightness) should help us realize that human bodies can also differ in glory. The glory of a perishable mortal human body is much less than that of an imperishable immortal human body. Also the differing glory of the heavenly bodies argues for differences among glorified believers.

15:42-43 The human body goes into the ground perishable, as a seed. However, God raises it imperishable, as grain. It goes into the ground in a lowly

³⁸⁷A fool in biblical literature is someone who excludes God from consideration. That is exactly what the Corinthians were doing when they failed to observe what God did in the seed that they sowed in their fields.

³⁸⁸Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 783.

condition (in "dishonor"), but it arises with honor ("glory"). It is weak when it dies, but it is powerful when it arises.

- 15:44 It is natural (Gr. *psychikon*, soulish), belonging to the present age; but it becomes spiritual (*pneumatikos*, i.e., supernatural), belonging to the future age. The Corinthians had not entered into their eschatological states yet. This would come with their resurrections. Their *bodies* would become spiritual, namely fitted for their future existence.

The analogy from Scripture 15:45-49

Paul now returned to his analogy between Adam and Christ (cf. vv. 21-22) to reinforce his argument, which he had brought to a head in verse 44.

- 15:45 The natural body is physical, the product of Adam who received life from God (Gen. 2:7). That life resides in a body characterized as "soulish" (i.e., alive with material and immaterial components). It eventually dies. However the resurrection body is spiritual, the product of Jesus Christ, the second Adam, who gives new life. That life will inhabit a body that will never die. Paul called it spiritual because it is ready for the spiritual rather than the physical realm. Moreover it comes to us from a spirit being, Jesus Christ, rather than a physical being, Adam. One can assume full "spiritual" existence, including a spiritual body, only as Christ did, namely by resurrection.³⁸⁹

- 15:46 Even though God breathed life into Adam at Creation, that gift constituted Adam a natural person fitted for the present order. The breathing of new life into believers at resurrection, so to speak, will make us spiritual persons fitted for the eschaton. We have the physical body until the eschaton, not before it begins.

Paul may have included this word of clarification to refute the Platonic idea that the ideal precedes the real. Plato taught that the ultimate realities are spiritual, and physical things only represent them. This is probably a view that some in Corinth held. Paul said the physical body precedes the spiritual body, which is the ultimate body.

- 15:47-48 God formed Adam out of dust to live on this planet (Gen. 2:7). Jesus Christ had a heavenly origin. However, Paul seems to have meant more than this since he compared two human beings, "the first Adam" and "the last Adam." His emphasis seems to have been that the first Adam was fitted for life in this age with natural life whereas the last Adam was fitted for life in the age to come with spiritual life. God equipped both to live in the realm that they would occupy. Similarly the bodies we inherit from

³⁸⁹For further discussion, see Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "Life-Giving Spirit': Probing the Center of Paul's Pneumatology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:4 (December 1998):573-89.

Adam are for earthly existence. The bodies we will receive from Christ at our resurrection will be for living in the spiritual realm. Paul was not speaking of heavenly existence as distinct from life in hell but as spiritual in contrast with earthly.

"Each race has the attributes of its Head. As a consequence of this law . . ., we who once wore the likeness of the earthly Adam shall hereafter wear that of the glorified Christ. What Adam was, made of dust to be dissolved into dust again, such are all who share his life; and what Christ is, risen and eternally glorified, such will be all those who share His life."³⁹⁰

15:49 Those born only of the first Adam, whom God equipped to live in the natural world, likewise exist in that world. However those born also of the last Adam, whom God equipped to live in the supernatural world by resurrection, also will exist in that world. Paul concluded this pericope by reminding them that their bearing the image of the heavenly Adam was still future, and it is certain.

God's intent to make man in His own image (Gen. 1:26) will finally reach fulfillment when believers eventually receive bodies that enable us to live in the spiritual sphere as He does. God's forming man out of the dust of the ground and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life was only the first step toward God's realization of His goal. His creation of resurrection bodies for us will be the second and final step.

"The problem is that the Corinthians believed that they had already assumed the heavenly existence that was to be, an existence in the Spirit that discounted earthly existence both in its physical and in its behavioral expressions. What Paul appears to be doing once again is refuting both notions. They have indeed borne—and still bear—the likeness of the man of earth. Because of that they are destined to die. But in Christ's resurrection and their being 'in him' they have also begun to bear the likeness of the man of heaven. The urgency is that they truly do so now as they await the consummation when they shall do so fully."³⁹¹

4. The assurance of victory over death 15:50-58

Paul brought his revelation of the resurrection to a climax in this paragraph by clarifying what all this means for the believer in Christ. Here he also dealt with the exceptional case of living believers' transformation at the Rapture. Transformation is absolutely necessary to enter the spiritual mode of future existence. This transformation will happen when Christ returns.

³⁹⁰Robertson and Plummer, p. 374.

³⁹¹Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 795.

15:50 The apostle's introductory words indicate a new departure in his thought. The phrase "flesh and blood" refers to the mortal body and living mortals in particular. It is impossible for us in our present physical forms to enter into, as an inheritance, the heavenly place in the kingdom of God that Christ said He was going to prepare for us (John 14:2-3). It is of the spiritual order. "The perishable" also describes us now but looks at the destruction of our present bodies through death.

15:51 "Behold" or "Listen" grabs the reader's attention and announces something important. Paul was about to explain something never before revealed, a mystery (Gr. *mysterion*; cf. Matt. 13:11; Rom. 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; 6:19; et al.). He had previously written that at the Rapture dead Christians would rise before God will catch living Christians up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:15-17).³⁹² He had just revealed that resurrection bodies will be different from our present bodies, spiritual rather than natural (vv. 35-39). Now he revealed that living believers translated at the Rapture would also receive spiritual bodies.

Not every Christian will die before he or she receives a new body, but every one must experience this change, even the "spiritual" Corinthians. Whether we are alive or dead when the Rapture takes place we will all receive spiritual bodies at that moment.

15:52 This transformation will not be a gradual process but instantaneous. The Greek word translated "moment" or "flash" (*atomos*) refers to an indivisible fragment of time. The blinking of an eye takes only a fraction of a second.

This trumpet blast will summon Christians home to heaven (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16). It is the last trumpet that connects with *our* destiny, the one that signals the end of our present existence and the beginning of our future existence.³⁹³

"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

³⁹²The three key New Testament passages that deal with the Rapture are John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

³⁹³See Barnabas Lindars, "The Sound of the Trumpet: Paul and Eschatology," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67:2 (Spring 1985):766-82.

simultaneous, as of two companies obeying the same signal."³⁹⁴

Some posttribulationists equate this trumpet with the seventh or last trumpet of Revelation 11:15-18.³⁹⁵ This does not seem to me to be valid. Other trumpets will sound announcing various other events in the future (cf. Matt. 24:31; Rev. 8:2, 6, 13; 9:14; et al.). However, Christians, believers living in the church age, will not be on the earth, and those trumpets will not affect us.³⁹⁶ The fact that Paul included himself in the group living at the time of the Rapture shows he expected that event to take place imminently (cf. 1 Thess. 4:15, 17). If he had believed the Tribulation precedes the Rapture, it would have been natural for him to mention that here.³⁹⁷

"Christ's return is always imminent; we must never cease to watch for it. The first Christians thought it so near that they faced the possibility of Jesus' return in their lifetime. Paul thinks he too may perhaps be alive when it happens."³⁹⁸

"The simple fact is that Paul did not know when Christ would return. He was in the exact position in which we are. All that he knew, and all that we know, is that Christ may come at any time."³⁹⁹

Paul did not answer the interesting questions of who will blow or who will hear this trumpet.

Throughout Israel's history God announced His working for the nation and He summoned His people to Himself with the blowing of trumpets (Exod. 19:16, 19; 20:18; Lev. 25:9; Num. 10:2, 8-10; et al.). He will use a trumpet for this purpose at the Rapture as well.

15:53 The dead will rise in bodies that are not subject to corruption, and the living will receive immortal bodies too. Paul may have wanted to contrast the dead and the living by the terms he chose for each in the first and

³⁹⁴Robertson and Plummer, p. 377.

³⁹⁵E.g., Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, p. 73.

³⁹⁶Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, pp. 259-69, showed that this "last trump" is not the very last one.

³⁹⁷For more evidence that the Rapture takes place before the Tribulation, see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 193-218; John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*; idem, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*; and Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 482-87.

³⁹⁸Gaston Deluz, *A Companion to 1 Corinthians*, p. 248. See also Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, ch. 6: "The Imminency of the Coming of Christ for the Church," pp. 108-37.

³⁹⁹Lenski, p. 737.

second parts of this verse respectively.⁴⁰⁰ Still the distinction is not strong enough to be significant. Both the dead and the living will receive imperishable immortal bodies.

- 15:54 This transformation will fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah 25:8. What Paul just revealed harmonizes with prophetic Scripture. God will overcome death (cf. vv. 23-28).
- 15:55 Paul modified for his own purposes Hosea's defiant challenge for death to do its worst (Hos. 13:14) and used the passage to taunt death himself. Death is man's last enemy (cf. v. 25). God will defeat it when He raises His people to life.
- 15:56 The fatal sting of death touches humans through sin (Rom. 6:23). What makes sin sinful is the law of God (Rom. 7:7-11). Because Jesus Christ overcame sin and fulfilled the law, death cannot hold its prey (Rom. 5:12, 20). Death is still an enemy in the sense that it robs us of mortal life. Notwithstanding it is not a terror to the believer because it is the doorway into an immortal life of bliss.
- 15:57 The victory over the condemnation of the law, sin, and death comes to us through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 8:2). For this Paul was very grateful to God, as every believer should be.
- 15:58 Paul concluded his discussion of the resurrection with an exhortation to be faithful in the present (cf. 4:16-17; 5:13; 6:20; 7:40; 10:31-33; 11:33-34; 12:31; 14:39-40).

"Despite the magnificent crescendo with which Paul brings the argument of chap. 15 to its climax, the last word is not the sure word of future hope and triumph of vv. 50-57; rather, in light of such realities, the last word is an exhortation to Christian living (v. 58). Thus, eschatological salvation, the great concern of the epistle, includes proper behavior or it simply is not the gospel Paul preaches."⁴⁰¹

Specifically Paul's exhortation does not just call for ethical behavior (cf. vv. 33-34) but for continued involvement in fulfilling the Great Commission, the work of the gospel.

This chapter began with a review of the gospel message from which some in the church were in danger of departing by denying the resurrection. The charge to remain steadfast therefore probably means to remain steadfast in the gospel as the Lord and the apostles

⁴⁰⁰Joachim Jeremias, "Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God," *New Testament Studies* 2 (1955-56):152.

⁴⁰¹Fee, "Toward a . . .," p. 58.

had handed it down to them. Paul's readers should not move away from it but should remain immovable in it. They should also increase their efforts to serve the Lord even as Paul had done (v. 10). Rather than living *for* the present (v. 32) believers should live *in* the present with the future clearly in view (cf. 1:9; 9:26). One day we will have to give an account of our stewardship (3:12-15).

No one except Jesus Christ has come back from the dead to tell us what is on the other side. However, His testimony through His apostles is sufficient to give us confidence that there is life and bodily resurrection after death. We will live that life in a changed body that will be incapable of perishing. It is therefore imperative that we make sure we and all around us enter that phase of our existence with our sins covered by the sacrifice of Christ.

G. THE COLLECTION FOR THE JERUSALEM BELIEVERS 16:1-12

I have chosen to include this section with the others that deal with questions the Corinthians had asked Paul rather than with Paul's concluding comments because it begins "*peri de*" (7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:12; cf. 8:4). Probably they had asked about the collection Paul was assembling in a letter or through messengers. This is the least confrontational section in this epistle, though we can detect tension here too.⁴⁰²

1. Arrangements for the collection 16:1-4

16:1 It seems that the Corinthian Christians had heard about the collection (Gr. *logeias*, extra collection) Paul was getting together for the poor saints in Jerusalem (v. 3) and wanted to make a contribution. James, Peter, and John had encouraged Paul and Barnabas to remember the poor when they were in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:10; cf. Acts 11:27-30). There is no record of the directions Paul gave the Galatian churches, to which he referred here, in any of his other surviving epistles. The churches of Galatia evidently were those in southern Galatia including Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul had passed through this region as he moved toward Ephesus from which he wrote this epistle (Acts 18:23).

16:2 From the earliest day of the church's existence Christians assembled on Sundays to worship in commemoration of the Lord's resurrection. The Lord had not commanded this, but it quickly became customary. The Jews met on Saturdays.

"This is our earliest evidence respecting the early consecration of the first day of the week by the Apostolic Church. Apparently, the name 'Lord's Day' was not yet in use, and the first day of the week is never called 'the sabbath' in Scripture."⁴⁰³

⁴⁰²Problems over this collection emerge clearly in 2 Corinthians.

⁴⁰³Robertson and Plummer, p. 384.

Sunday would have been a natural occasion to put money aside for fellow believers since it was particularly on this day that Christians reviewed their responsibilities. Paul did not specify whether the individual Christian should keep the money in his possession or whether a church official should. The former alternative seems more probable in view of the apostle's language.⁴⁰⁴ Note also that he did not say how much to set aside except that it was to be as the Lord had blessed them. The amount was totally up to the givers. Paul mentioned nothing here about giving proportionately to one's income. We saw earlier that both rich and poor made up this church (11:21). Paul's counsel amounted to, Save a little regularly now so you will not have to make a major withdrawal from your bank account later.

16:3 Paul planned to send a representative from each of the contributing churches, or possibly groups of churches, to Jerusalem with the gift. The letters he spoke of may have been letters of introduction from himself since it appears that at this time he did not plan to make this trip himself. Such a procedure would guarantee that the money would arrive safely and that people would perceive the whole project as honest (cf. 2 Cor. 8:21).

16:4 The apostle was open to the possibility of going to Jerusalem as part of the group if this seemed best. After he wrote this letter he decided to go (Rom. 15:25-26) and indeed went (Acts 20:16, 22; 21:17; 24:17).

These few verses along with 2 Corinthians 8—9 provide guidelines for individual Christians and churches in giving. The principles Paul advocated were that saving up for giving should be regular and in response to the Lord's provision materially. The believers should manage their gifts with integrity. Everything they did should not only be above reproach, but other people should perceive it as such.

Notice that Paul made no mention of tithing. Tithing is a method of giving that God prescribed for the Israelites under the Mosaic Law. People practiced tithing as an act of worship commonly in the ancient Near East (cf. Gen. 28:22).⁴⁰⁵ It was also a common tax.⁴⁰⁶ The Mosaic Law really required that the Israelites give back to God about one-third of their incomes. However, Christians are not under the Mosaic Law (Rom. 10:4; et al.). It is therefore understandable that neither Jesus Christ nor the apostles commanded tithing. Some Christians believe that since Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20) tithing antedates the Mosaic Law and is therefore binding on Christians. Nevertheless the absence of any reference to tithing in the New Testament plus the teaching of other guidelines strongly suggest that God wants us to follow a different

⁴⁰⁴Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 813.

⁴⁰⁵See C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, 1:207.

⁴⁰⁶W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, pp. 245-51. This is still true in some modern countries. For example, in England part of every person's taxes goes to maintain the Church of England. Some residents regard this part of their tax as their contribution to the church or their tithe.

method. The principles that should govern Christians in our giving appear throughout the New Testament but mainly in 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

"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."⁴⁰⁷

2. The travel plans of Paul and his fellow apostles 16:5-12

As the preceding verse revealed, Paul's plans were tentative to some extent. He wanted the Corinthians to know that he anticipated a return to Corinth and hopefully a stay of several months. Timothy and Apollos might return too.

16:5 At the time he wrote, Paul planned to head north from Ephesus and then spend some time in Macedonia. Macedonia was the Roman province north of Corinth where Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea stood. He then planned to travel south to Corinth. Paul later changed this plan and travelled directly from Ephesus to Corinth (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2) and returned to Ephesus (cf. 2 Cor. 2:5-8; 7:12). Later he visited Macedonia and then Corinth (2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:6-16).⁴⁰⁸

16:6-7 Paul did spend the winter in Corinth, but it was the winter after the one when he expected to be there, the winter of 57-58 rather than 56-57 (cf. Acts 20:2-3; Rom. 16:1, 23). He sensed the need to spend a good long visit in Corinth, and in view of the problems in the church that he mentioned in this letter we can understand why.

16:8 The Jews celebrated Pentecost in late May or early June so Paul probably wrote 1 Corinthians in the spring of the year (cf. 5:7; 15:20). It is not unusual that since he was a Jewish believer with the evangelization of the Jews on his heart he would refer to important events in the Jewish calendar such as Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-21). Perhaps the early Christians paid more attention to the significant events in the life of the church than many independent churches do today.⁴⁰⁹ The feast of Pentecost, of course, also marked the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).

16:9 Paul occasionally used the door as a metaphor for opportunity (cf. 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). He stayed in Ephesus three years to take advantage of his opportunities there. He did not regard adversaries there as an indication of a closed door or as a sign that God wanted him to move on to more

⁴⁰⁷Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 817.

⁴⁰⁸See Richard Batey, "Paul's Interaction with the Corinthians," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1985):139-43.

⁴⁰⁹Churches that observe "the Christian year" tend to make more of these observances.

comfortable ministry. He followed his own advice and remained immovable abounding in the work of the Lord in Ephesus (15:58).

- 16:10-11 Timothy's visit to Corinth from Ephesus was not very tentative. Paul had already sent him (and Erastus; Acts 19:22) or was about to send him when he penned this epistle (4:17). Evidently Timothy's relative youth tended to make some people despise him, and he tended to be fearful (cf. 1 Tim. 4:12). Paul advised the Corinthians, who judged by external appearances, to give him the respect he deserved for doing the Lord's work as Paul did, not just for Timothy's own sake. We do not know the names of Timothy's travelling companions.

It may have been Timothy's report of conditions in Corinth when he returned to Ephesus that moved Paul to go directly to Corinth himself rather than waiting until he had visited Macedonia. Paul referred to this visit as painful because while in Corinth he encountered strong opposition (cf. 2 Cor. 2:1-8; 7:12; 12:14; 13:1-2).

- 16:12 This verse may contain Paul's final response to the questions the Corinthians had asked him. It is the sixth instance of that key phrase "*peride*" ("Now concerning"). Paul's relations with this eloquent brother were perfectly friendly, as this verse reveals (cf. 1:12). We do not know why he did not want to revisit Corinth with Timothy or whether he ever did visit that city again.

IV. CONCLUSION 16:13-24

The Apostle Paul concluded this epistle with a series of imperatives, exhortations, and news items.

A. FINAL EXHORTATIONS 16:13-18

As I have pointed out, each section in this epistle concludes with some practical admonition. These verses constitute a summary exhortation for the whole letter.

- 16:13-14 Paul urged his somewhat unstable readers to be watchful regarding danger from inside as well as outside the church (cf. Acts 20:29-30). Most of the problems in this church evidently arose from within the congregation. This expression sometimes occurs with anticipation of the Lord's coming, so that may have been in Paul's thinking as well (e.g., Matt. 24:42). His readers should also stand firm in their trust in God and their commitment to His Word and will (cf. 15:58). Rather than acting like immature children they should behave as mature men (cf. 1:12). They should be strong in the Lord rather than weak in the faith (cf. Josh. 1:7-8). Above all, love should motivate and mark them (ch. 13). This was the great need of this church.

16:15-16 The Corinthians had a special problem with submission to authority, as we have seen. Many in the church wanted to do their own thing. Verses 16-18 would have encouraged them to appreciate some less flashy servants of the Lord.

Stephanus and his family were Paul's first converts in Achaia (1:16). They had given themselves unselfishly to serving the Corinthians. They were probably loyal to Paul and may have been the source from which the apostle received some of his information about conditions in this church. Paul urged that his readers appreciate Stephanus and his family for their ministry and not ride over them but submit humbly to them. They should treat others such as them with similar honor. Service, not status, should be the basis for honor in the church.

16:17-18 Stephanus had recently visited Paul in Ephesus with the two other Corinthian brothers the apostle named. They may have carried the questions Paul answered in this letter as well as information about conditions in the church. They had all ministered refreshingly to Paul as they typically did in Corinth. Paul wanted the Corinthians to be sure to recognize them too.

B. FINAL GREETINGS AND BENEDICTION 16:19-24

"The letter now concludes with a series of standard (for Paul) greetings (vv. 19-22) and the grace-benediction (v. 23). But Paul cannot quite give up the urgency of the letter, so he interrupts these two rather constant elements of his conclusions with one final word of warning to those who have been causing him grief, this time in the form of an extraordinary curse formula (v. 22). The apparent harshness of this warning is matched by the equally unusual addition of a final word of affirmation of his love for them (v. 24), found only here in his extant letters. Thus even to the end the unique concerns that have forged this letter find their expression."⁴¹⁰

16:19 Several churches in the Roman province of Asia had come into existence while Paul used its capital city, Ephesus, as his base of operations (Acts 19:10).

The names of Aquila and Prisca (Priscilla) usually occur in reverse order in the New Testament. Evidently their friends, of which Paul was one, felt free to use both orders. This suggests that they served the Lord as a harmonious team with individual strengths and talents. They had lived in Corinth after leaving Rome (Acts 18:2), and it was there that Paul first met them. They had left Corinth for Ephesus with Paul and settled in that city

⁴¹⁰Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 834.

(Acts 18:18-21). Their house became a meeting place for the church (cf. Rom. 16:5). Church buildings were unknown until the third century.⁴¹¹

- 16:20 The holy kiss, holy because saints (1:2) exchanged it, was a common practice among believers, and it still is today in some parts of the world. It consisted of women kissing women and men kissing men on the cheek.
- 16:21 Paul customarily dictated his letters, and a secretary wrote them down (cf. Rom. 16:22). However, he usually added a word of greeting at the end in his own hand that authenticated his epistles as coming from him (cf. Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17). All of what follows is probably what he added.
- 16:22 Normally Paul used the Greek word *agape* for love (except in Titus 3:15). Here he used *phileo*. Consequently this may have been a saying believers used in the congregational worship of the churches. "Maranatha" (NASB) is an Aramaic expression meaning "Our Lord, come." Probably Paul did not translate it into Greek because believers commonly spoke it in Aramaic in the services of the early church (cf. Rev. 22:20). Since it was Aramaic it probably originated in Palestine where people spoke that language. They exported it to the Greek-speaking congregations that retained its form.

"It is strange to meet with an Aramaic phrase in a Greek letter to a Greek Church. The explanation is that that phrase had become a watchword and a password. It summed up the vital hope of the early Church, and Christians whispered it to each other, identified each other by it, in a language which the heathen could not understand."⁴¹²

"It would appear, then, that the fixed usage of the term 'Maranatha' by the early Christians was a witness to their strong belief in the imminent return of Christ. If they knew that Christ could not return at any moment because of other events or a time period that had to transpire first [i.e., the Tribulation], why did they petition Him in a way that implied that He could come at any moment?"⁴¹³

- 16:23-24 Paul concluded this strong but loving epistle with a prayerful benediction of God's grace. Note that this letter also began, "Grace to you" (1:3).

⁴¹¹Barclay, *The Letter . . .*, p. 187

⁴¹²Ibid., p. 188.

⁴¹³Showers, p. 131. Cf. Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 17, 20.

"Grace is the beginning and the end of the Christian [sic] gospel; it is the single word that most fully expresses what God has done and will do for his people in Christ Jesus."⁴¹⁴

Paul also added assurance of his own love for all the believers in Corinth, not just those who supported him.

⁴¹⁴Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 839.

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