

# Introduction & Exegetical Outline

## 1 Corinthians

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The question may come to your mind: *Why should I be motivated to study 1 Corinthians?* Other than the obvious answer to that question, because it is in the Word of God, I would like to suggest some other reasons why this book is so important.

1. Because this book is **very practical**. Paul brings the gospel into the market place and the law courts and into their marriages and into the worship in church and even into their homes. Paul is not content for the Corinthians to live their lives day to day, without considering how **the gospel** should affect them. As one studies 1 Corinthians, he might learn the practical ramifications of the gospel upon the day-to-day life of a New Testament believer. Additionally, the book is also very theological in orient as major contributions to **Christology** are made in chs. 1, 11, and 15, to **Pneumatology** in chs. 2, 3, 6, and 12-14, to **Soteriology** in chs. 1 and 6, to **Ecclesiology** in chs. 8-10, and to **Eschatology** in ch. 15.
2. Because **others are studying** it. The **charismatic church** uses chapters 12-14 as substantiation for the existence of tongues and other miraculous gifts. We need to know how to answer the tongues question. If that church is going to get its “bad theology” from this book, then we need to know how to properly interpret it. Not only is the charismatic movement using this book for their views on tongues, they are also using this section of the book as a justification for their views on miraculous healings. As a matter of fact, I recently heard of one young boy who tragically died as the result of the charismatic misunderstanding of this doctrine (*Consult Milwaukee Sentinel Article*).<sup>1</sup>

The **Christian Feminist movement** also considers parts of this book really important. One such group has just declared (and has also gained some support by renowned theologians) that 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 is a gloss or an addition<sup>2</sup> by some scribe and so it should not be contained in the Bible. That text says,

*For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If*

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<sup>1</sup>Ray Anthony Hemphill, 45, was a part-time charismatic preacher. This “minister was charged with a felony child abuse in a complaint that he laid on an 8-year old autistic boy during a two hour prayer session meant to expel demons-but which resulted in the boy’s suffocation and death.” He attempted to pray the “demon of Autism” out of the young child, Terrance Cottrell, Jr. The process involved him and the aunt of the boy mummifying him with sheets and laying on him while praying for him. “For the final hour, he lay chest to chest with Terrance until becoming exhausted and rising up from the boy. They were both soaked with sweat, and the boy had stopped breathing.” Many Charismatics are sincere, but yet wrong in their theology.

<sup>2</sup>An addition is a brief notation on the meaning of a verse.

*there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.<sup>3</sup>*

They state this is a gloss, although they have ‘no manuscript evidence’ to prove it.

3. Because the modern church in America is very similar to the ancient church at Corinth.

- They struggled with individualism and divisive spirits – ch. 1.
- They were carnal or fleshly – ch. 3.
- They were arrogant – ch. 5.
- They made accommodations to culture for the “sake of the gospel”- chs. 8-10.

*This is where we get into the section on Christian Liberty. Today, we like to talk about Music, Movies and so on from these passages, but it is impossible to do so, until we talk about the foundational, doctrinal core of this class.*

- They had Christians going to the law courts and suing other believers – ch. 6.
- They had Divorce problems in the church – ch. 7.

*But it goes much deeper than the surface issue here. It is better to see the real reason as the command in the middle of the section that states that wherever you find yourself, remain in the state that you are in.*

- In chapters 12-14, we learn that they had some interested more in a show than in genuine worship in their church service.

*Today, we engage in WARS over the right way to do worship. Everyone is offering ‘expert opinion’ on worship today. (REAL WORSHIP, WORSHIP BY THE BOOK, TRUE WORSHIP, WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH, SOUL SOUNAMI) But this is nothing new. Believers have struggled with this ever since the time of Paul (ch. 11-14). What we must do as we approach Corinthians is to suspend our personal conclusions for a moment and try to honestly grapple with the text. We have to admit that no one comes to this class with a lack of history. We all come with our own system, with our own way of looking at things. But this class must be one that calls us to wrestle with the text.*

The picture in the mirror is awfully familiar. Hence, we need to study this book and Paul’s counsel to this church, to see how to begin to do battle in our modern churches.

### **3 Studies that will Help you Understand 1 Corinthians**

#### **I. The Author of the Book**

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<sup>3</sup>All quotations are taken from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

It is important for us first to look at the author of this book. Paul identifies himself both in the first and the last chapter of this book (1:1 and 16:21). We must also realize that not only did Paul write this letter to the church at Corinth, he also planted this church on his second missionary journey as recorded in Acts 18: 1-18. Here Paul is said to stay with Aquilla and Priscilla. He first went into the synagogue and had a fruitful ministry there, until a conspiracy rose up against him and the Jews of the synagogue rejected him and his doctrine. So Paul stayed in Corinth and started preaching to the Gentiles in the house of Justus, who lived adjacent to the synagogue. He was also brought to Gallio a ruler at this time, but Gallio did not even want to hear such a case, and dismissed it.

It must have been some time that Paul had there with the Corinthians. We know that he came into this right off of Athens, where he was all alone. He was with the Corinthians in weakness and fear and in much trembling but God still used him to plant this church. It was bad enough, that Acts 18 records a vision that God gave to Paul that encouraged him not to give up or to give in, but to stay in Corinth and continue the work. He stayed for 18 months in 51-52 A.D. and the church at Corinth was established.

In these details that we can learn a little bit about the personality and character of this man Paul. He was a man, although very weak or depressed, that continued on for the Lord. He was a man that at one of the low points of his flesh, still had quite the passion for Christ. We see his “tenacity” in this text.

*Paul was a man that though often imprisoned and beaten would continue to go on for the Lord. Although, he was not impressive, he would impact through his message.*

## II. The Location of the Church.

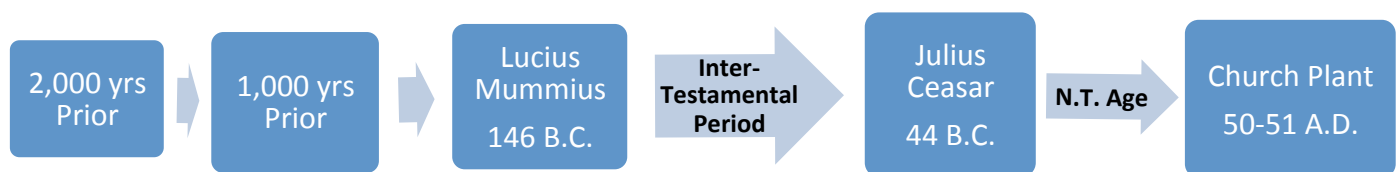
I believe that it is also important for us to discover some of the details of the place of Corinth. We will specifically look at both the city of Corinth and the church located there.

### A. The City of Corinth

*Specifically, there are **three different aspects** of this city that I feel will give us a good picture of life there.*

#### 1. The History of the City.

Notice, first the hard history of the city of Corinth. This city can best be described by focusing on 3 different time periods of Ancient Corinth.



First, we look at the **WELL-ESTABLISHED** or **OLD CORINTH**. There have been civilizations built on the site of

Paul's Corinth that trace all the way back 2,000 yrs prior to Paul. That would put it back before Abraham. But the city of Corinth started out in this spot around 1,000 bc, which would put it all the way back in David's time. Corinth was a very wealthy and prominent city from this point forward. As a matter of fact, back in the 500-400 bc, Corinth was known as the light of all Greece. It was a city of great strength. However, the ancient Roman orator, Cicero, describes how that the Light of All Greece was extinguished by Rome in 146 bc.

This leads us to the second period that I would call the ***INTER-TESTAMENTAL CORINTH***. Before this light was extinguished, Corinth was part of a thirteen city league known as the ACHEAN LEAGUE. This league of cities decided to attack SPARTA'S LEAGUE which was not a good idea, because powerful Rome was allied to Sparta. Well, Rome came and defeated the ACHEAN LEAGUE, and that is where Rome decided to make an object lesson out of Corinth, and burn it to the ground by Lucius Mummius in 146bc. Corinth's rebellion brought the full force of Rome's wrath. So, Rome hazed and looted the city. David Garland describes it this way, "reportedly, the male population was killed, the women and children were sold into slavery, and the city's treasures were plundered."<sup>4</sup> During the INTER-TESTAMENTAL time period Corinth lay dormant for about 100 years until 44 bc. During this approximately 100 years there were very few people who lived in Corinth. The expert Greco-Roman Historian, Ben Witherington III says that during the inter-testamental period "there were some Greeks who remained in and around Corinth living in the ruins, but once a colony was established they became resident aliens."<sup>5</sup> These people were basically nomads.

The final time period of Ancient Corinth starts at this point, and for lack of a better name, I call it **NT AGE CORINTH**. At that time Julius Caesar decided to rebuild the city in his own honor and the city grew until there were approximately ½ a million people when Paul visited the city in 50-51 A.D.

## 2. The Growth of the City

So, that leads us to a time in Corinth's history where the city experienced tremendous growth. How did this happen? How did this city grow from zero population to ½ million in 100 years?

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<sup>4</sup>David Garland, 1.

<sup>5</sup>Ben Witherington III, 7.

Let's notice several factors that made Corinth an attractive place for the world to populate:

**A- NEW POPULATION** -The new inhabitants of this city for the most part were made up of three different classes of people. There were many **freedmen** from Rome. These freedmen, were just one step up from the slaves of Rome and were primarily made up of prisoners or troubled slaves. This was a convenient way for Julius Caesar to get rid of some of the potential trouble people of his empire, and ship them off to Corinth. Another group that Caesar used to populate this city was retired **veterans** from Roman armies. These became the wealthy ones and the primary landowners. They were the heroic and loyal ones. *Why would he use veterans?* They secured that Corinth was a city after the ROMAN WAY. There were also the **tradesmen** that populated this city. *Why tradesmen?* Well, these were your masons, builders, and architects who could build the city.

**B - GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION** - SHOW THEM THE MAP OF CORINTH. What can we conclude about it's location? In what ways might you describe this location? (TRADE AREA, STRATEGIC, DIVERSE)

Corinth was located in a place which had many advantages. It was located on the narrow isthmus of land between Northern Greece and the Peloponnese. This was an extraordinary location for at least two reasons. They controlled both land and sea trade. Look at the map before you. The traffic of the world would pass through Corinth.

"Strategic"

Corinth was a port city and became a bridge between Rome and the East. "Strabo attributes the city's wealth to the fortune of being 'the master of two harbors.'"<sup>6</sup> The two seaports were about 4 ½ miles apart. Cenchrea was on the Aegean Sea and Lechaenum was on the Gulf of Corinth. Ships instead of sailing around the dangerous southern tip of Greece, were unloaded and the goods were transported across the isthmus from one port to another on a dragway. Because sea travel was dangerous, especially in the fall and winter, Corinth was a much more attractive option to many sailors than the gray sea! This location assured that this would become a prosperous area.

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<sup>6</sup>Garland, 1.

This picture shows some of the “dragway” which has been excavated in Corinth. Today, a canal exists which connects these two ports. Another way that we might describe Corinth is LOOSE - *Travelers were away from the accountability of their homes, friends and family. – USA TODAY ARTICLE about three 90 YR. OLD GRANDMOTHERS – they would go to Vegas, let their hair down, play the slots, and get drunk – A LITTLE EXTREME AND SICK!*

**C - COSMOPOLITAN CITY** – Ancient Corinth is also described by many as a cosmopolitan city. This title means that it was a thriving city which influenced other cities. Anyone who could be known and heard in this city might benefit people all over the world. People were continually coming and going. As a matter of fact, one particular cosmopolitan influence which this city enjoyed was the Isthmian Games. These games were celebrated every two years, and were second in importance only to the Greek Olympic games. Athletes and spectators would come from all over the known world, and dwell in tents outside the wall of Corinth in tents for these games. Paul, a tent-maker by trade, must have realized the great importance of this city not only for his trade but especially for the gospel. Paul had many opportunities for the gospel in Corinth.

### 3. The Sin of the City

Finally, it is helpful for us to see the serious sin of this city to which Paul wrote. There are three INTER-RELATED ASPECTS OF THIS CITY WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO ITS WICKEDNESS.

**A. INDEPENDENT CITY** -Since the city of Corinth was such a new city, it was populated by a large majority of young individuals. Their elderly population was sparse. So this produced quite the independent spirit. Maybe that is why, unlike any other New Testament Church, Paul was battling the over-involvement of women in the church. This young crowd also meant that the city would not be ruled by the elderly, or wise, but by the wealthy. Money bought power in Corinth. With a strong financial climate like this, the poor would be attracted to the church, as the church took no regard on someone’s social status.

**B. IDOLATROUS CITY** -It was also a city of great idolatry. Pausanius, the Greek travelor and geographer of the second century AD, describes at least 26 sacred places in Corinth devoted to the worship of different false gods. “In the rubble of Corinth, archaeologists have unearthed 34 different deities to

which shrines were erected.”<sup>7</sup> These shrines dominated the AGORA or the market place of Corinth. This map reveals a few of the temples. But how does this knowledge of their idolatry help us exegete 1 Corinthians. When we are aware of the idolatrous background of this city, then we are able to understand the problems which Paul had to deal with in chapters 8-10. “In developed countries today, we scoff at praying to carvings of wood or stone. This theology is cold to us.”<sup>8</sup> But it was so real to them.

It is quite difficult for a modern person to understand the magnitude of the influence of idolatry on the city of Ancient Corinth. To make this a little more obvious for us today, let’s imagine a contemporary situation. Let’s say that I was the pastor of your church and that I decided to take the entire church down to a professional ball game. Let’s also imagine that before the game started, someone said a prayer. In America today, to who are public prayers normally addressed? Well, HOW WOULD IT IMPACT YOU AND YOUR CHURCH IF THE MAN OR WOMAN GOT UP AND PRAYED IN THE NAME OF JUPITER OR MARS OR APHRODITE OR DEMETER? All kinds of complex problems would present themselves. The “conservatives” among us would be all bent out of shape. They would ask: “Did you hear what he said?” While the “progressives” would say, “It’s just a prayer!” Or, “I said Jesus in my head!” Should we even go to something like that? What should we do if a Christian decides that they can do this? IDOLATRY POSED BIG PROBLEMS FOR THE CORINTHIANS! And with that idolatry also came immorality.

**C. IMMORALITY** - The ancient city of Corinth was known for its worship of the goddess of fertility named **Aphrodite**. Aphrodite was the patron goddess of the city of Corinth. There were at least three of the 26 temples in the city proper which were devoted to Aphrodite. Further, on a hill outside of Corinth called Acro-Corinth, there were some caves dug into the side which were used as a place of worship for this goddess. It was reported that at one time in this mount of immorality there were over 1,000 religious prostitutes that engaged in all forms of debauchery, cloaked as worship to their god. This occurred in the well-established period of Corinth, but it had a lasting impact on this city. The name “**corinthian girl**” was used all throughout the world at this time, to describe a woman of ill-repute or a prostitute. Aristophanes coined the term “**to**

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<sup>7</sup>Scott Haffemann, *1 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary, 25.

<sup>8</sup>Brian Jones, *Theology: A Master Key for Unlocking Application in Biblical Preaching*, no #.

***corinthianize***” which was a by-word for the grossest type of moral sins.

The city also had unprecedented problems with venereal disease, as is clear from the votive offerings to *Asclepius* that we have from that time period which are on display in museums in modern Corinth. (DR. HORN) It was so bad in Corinth that Gordon Fee in his commentary compared the ancient city of Corinth to a combination of the modern cities of ***New York, Los Angeles*** and ***Las Vegas***. Now, let’s imagine that I went up to a young man in our class and said that with the nice “pink shirt” that he was wearing that he looked like he was from San Francisco! How would he be tempted to respond? Why?

**That is why the sin of chapter 5 may not seem to be a big deal to the Corinthians. But when Paul says, WAIT A SECOND, this sin is not even named among the Gentiles, he is saying that culture does not even permit this!!!**

## B. The Church at Corinth

We just learned that the Roman Empire had marched on Corinth to bring in life from death, and give this city a new start. Satan also had marched on this city and brought about bondage and ecstasy. Now, Paul burdened by the problems of Corinth realized that it was time for the gospel to march on the city and bring about spiritual life from darkness, and damnation. And so he goes about the long process of starting the church. But how and why did we get the letter of 1 CORINTHIANS? As I talk you through all of Paul’s interaction with the church at Corinth, we will put our findings into a diagram in your notes. This study is what scholars call the “Corinthian Correspondence.”

*There were at least three visits of Paul to Corinth and four letters that he wrote that you need to know about to understand the Corinthian Epistles.*



The “Church Plant Visit”

This visit is recorded for us in Acts 18. Paul planted the church in 51-52 A.D. We know this because of an inscription about the proconsul Gallio who ruled from 50-51 A.D. in Corinth. This church plant visit was on his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey. It was a prosperous time which lasted for 1 ½ years.



LETTER A – Previous Letter



Paul hears bad news while on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey and writes a warning to the church about fornication. This letter talked about the relationship of Christians to the fornicators, and it was misunderstood by the church at Corinth. **See 1 Corinthians 5:9-10.**

*I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – Not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.*

**Now, what would happen if we were able to find this letter?** It would be important and apostolic, but it was not inspired (perhaps rightly so since it was originally misunderstood). I am sure that many fundamentalists would have misused it!

LETTER B – 1 Corinthians

Paul hears through the report of the house of Chloe and also possibly by the three messengers (1 Cor 16:17) that came to him with a gift and also perhaps a letter full of questions from the church that there are major problems at Corinth. Look at 1 Corinthians 16:17. . .

*I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence.*

Unable to leave at this time Paul does the next best thing and sends them a letter of instruction and admonition from Ephesus. But when was 1 Corinthians written. It was probably written in ad 55 while Paul was on which missionary journey? Actually, there is a very easy way to remember when Paul wrote the different letters that he wrote. If you can count to four, you can perform this exercise. (1-2-3-4-4). So, Paul sent this letter on his third missionary journey to answer the questions of the Corinthians and to correct their problems. Paul also sends Timothy to them to help out.

THE "PAINFUL VISIT"

However, the letter was not received well and Timothy comes back with a bad report. So, Paul goes to Corinth in a last ditch effort to see this church recover (2 Cor 13:1-2). But this was a distressing confrontation (2 Cor 2:1) and Paul was attacked in many deeply and insulting ways.

LETTER C - The "severe letter"

This is the most controversial part of the Corinthian Correspondence. After his painful visit, Paul composes for him what was a very severe or tearful letter. 2 Cor 2: 3-4 describe in Paul's own words what was in this letter.

*And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.*

Paul wrote this letter to spare the Corinthians another difficult encounter and to test their obedience to his apostolic authority. But most importantly Paul wanted to express his love for this church. It truly was a tearful letter!

LETTER D - 2 Corinthians

***What is the tone of 2 Corinthians? How does it compare to 1 Corinthians?*** Look at 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. 2 Corinthians is a letter that is dominated by a good spirit. Paul is encouraged by what he hears from Titus regarding this church, and that is why chapters 1-9 are in a much better tone and mood. Some question the unity of this whole letter since the last 4 chapters (10-13) seem to be much more severe than the first part. However, it might be best to see chapters 1-9 as addressed to a REPENTANT MAJORITY of this church and

chapters 10-13 to the REBELLIOUS MINORITY (false teachers) at Corinth.

There is probably also a third visit to Corinth. When 2 Corinthians 8 is compared to Romans 15, it becomes obvious that Paul went to Corinth a 3<sup>rd</sup> time as well.

**Paul realized that the gospel must be preached in this wicked and immoral city and that is why he takes so much of his life effort and pours it into these people.** Paul spends more time in this city, than he does any other city except Ephesus! His time in Corinth represents 15-20% of his whole ministry life. A knowledge of this correspondence will help explain differences between the tone of 1 and 2 Corinthians and it will remind us that these two books are part of an ongoing conversation between Paul and the Corinthians. This church was very important to him.

### III. The Purpose of 1 Corinthians

And that leads us to the structure and theme of 1 Corinthians. We pick up the story half-way through at this point. Let's see what Paul would have them to know.

#### A. The Structure of 1 Corinthians

##### \*Introduction 1 Cor. 1:1-9

Handles 6 Major Problems	Answers 6 Major Questions
<b>I. The Problem of Division (1 Cor 1:10-2:16)</b> Paul presents the problem to the church in chapter 1:10-17, and then he proceeds to give them several solutions to the problem of division. He first states that the gospel message does not contain any fibers of division, but it is the beautiful news of the unity that Christ brings only through his sacrifice. He then goes on in chapter 2 to show how the Holy Spirit given to believers can keep from division.	<b>I. The Question of Marriage Relationships (1 Cor 7:1-24)</b> In chapter 7, Paul answers the pious view of some believers who refrain from intercourse while in marriage out of deference to their relationship with the Lord. Paul says that it is better not to do this, except maybe for a short time for the purpose of prayer and fasting. Being faithful to the calling of God is the theme of this entire chapter.
<b>II. The Problem of Carnality (1 Cor 3:1-4:21)</b> After briefly stating the problem of carnality, Paul expounds on different marks and characteristics of it. After laying the foundation for this in chapters 3 and 4, Paul uses the last verses of chapter 4 to powerfully confront this sin in the assembly at Corinth.	<b>II. The Question of the Unmarried (1 Cor 7:25-40)</b> Paul answers the questions that relate to those who are not married. What should singles do in light of their new relationship to Christ and their unsettled life situation? Paul lists some wonderful principles for singles in this section.
<b>III-IV. The Problems of Immorality and Arrogance (1 Cor 5:1 - 6:20)</b> In chapter 5 Paul presents two destructive sin in this church. The problem of fornication is presented first, but even more destructive is the idea that this church is arrogant. After fully describing these two problems	<b>III. The Question of Disputable Things (1 Cor 8:1-11:1)</b> In chapters 8-10, we have a major section which Paul devotes to handling the question of what to do with the meat offered to idols. He lays out 6 principles here that will help them decide what to do in this

in chapter 5, Paul answers the sin of arrogance in the first part of chapter six (1-11) while reserving his treatment of immorality for the end of the chapter (12-20).	matter. While Christians are free in Christ, these principles should guide them in their choices concerning their brothers and sisters in the Lord.
<b>V. The Problem of Self-Centeredness (1 Cor 11:2-34)</b> In Chapter 11 Paul deals with some assorted problems that he sees in the worship of the church at Corinth. He deals with things like the role of women in the services (2-16) and also their view on Communion (17-34). These also betray the fact of their carnality.	<b>IV. The Question of Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 12:1 – 14:40)</b> Paul devotes the next block of material to the education of the Corinthians regarding spiritual gifts in chapters 12-14. Here Paul answers the question of Spiritual Gifts. He goes through great lengths to talk about the gifts of tongues, prophecy, and knowledge, while also accenting the eternal fruit of love.
<b>VI. The Problem of Doubt (Skepticism) (1 Cor 15:1-58)</b> Chapter 15 is a great chapter on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this chapter, Paul confronts some of the Corinthians for doubting the resurrection of physical bodies. Paul defends the resurrection of the body, by explaining that Jesus Christ resurrected and that his resurrection was the “first-fruits” of the bodily resurrection of believers. He also explains the nature of our resurrected bodies, before he admonishes believers to always abound in the work of the Lord.	<b>V. The Question of Giving (1 Cor 16:1-9)</b> The Corinthians asked Paul a practical question about giving in their letter to him. So, Paul gives instructions for a gift that he is collecting from the Gentile churches of Macedonia and Achaia for the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Paul hopes that this gift will bring good-will between these different groups of believers.
	<b>VI. The Question of Fellow Servants (1 Cor 16:10-12)</b> Although the final <i>peri de</i> statement does not occur until verse 10, it is best to treat verses 10-12 as one small question about false apostles. Paul is concerned about Timothy and also explains that although he encouraged Apollos to return to them, Apollos is not ready to do so.

**\*Conclusion: 1 Cor 16:13-24**

## **B. The Themes of 1 Corinthians**

### **1. Theological problem: *A rejection of gospel***

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 1:17-18. It says,

*For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

Here, just after Paul finishes his introduction to the Corinthians, he goes straight to the gospel. The word “gospel” is used in verse 17. This is significant because the word is only used twelve times in the whole book and only in four different chapters (1,4,9,15). Also significant is the fact that Paul uses the word “gospel” at both the

beginning and end of the body of the letter. Thus, some theologians point to the fact that this topic forms an inclusion for the entire letter. They state that the mention of “gospel” functions as bookends for the whole letter. Here in chapter 1, Paul mentions gospel and then feels compelled to defend the importance of the physical crucifixion of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>

Now, please turn in your Bible to 1 Corinthians 15. Verses 1-6 say,

*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word that I preached to you- unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.*

Paul mentions “gospel” again in verse 1 of this chapter. Actually, Paul briefly describes the gospel at the very beginning of this chapter. ***How many parts of the Gospel does Paul describe in these verses?*** Well, there are two main ideas. He died, which is confirmed by his burial. He resurrected, which is confirmed by the witnesses. And which of these two ideas, death or resurrection, is the major theme of chapter 15? RESURRECTION! So, in a way this book goes from crucifixion to resurrection. Chapter 1 speaks of the importance of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and chapter 15 speaks of the importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The “GOSPEL CONCEPT” then marks out the first and last of Paul’s concerns for the Corinthians.<sup>10</sup>

Now, let me make one more digression. In both of these chapters, I believe that one can make the observation that Paul admonishes some in the church that were rejecting either the crucifixion or the resurrection. In chapter 1 it might be that some in the church were attempting to water down the teaching of the crucifixion of Jesus, because that message would be offensive to some and madness to others. Perhaps, they stated, “If we could just change the crucifixion part, then people would believe our gospel!” But Paul says, that the cross is the wisdom and power of God. In chapter 15 we learn that some at Corinth were denying the reality of the resurrection. But Paul says if there is no resurrection then *we are of all men most miserable!* So, Paul defends the crucifixion and the resurrection as undeniable parts of the gospel itself.

Now, the primary question that Paul seems is addressing in this book is ***why the gospel is not working at Corinth***. I believe that the whole purpose can be brought back to this question. If one were to ***ask some of the believers*** in the church at Corinth this question (“why the gospel is not working?”), some might say because it is broken or that it is an antiquated message. Others might say that it is unnecessary offensive in nature. They might explain that some things in their culture

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<sup>9</sup>Can you prove that the Corinthians were denying “crucifixion” or is this mirror reading?

<sup>10</sup>The Corinthians were rejecting the bodily resurrection of believers, not necessarily the resurrection of Christ.

have changed which make this message unpopular. Their solution to this problem then is to modify the message of the cross. But in response, Paul will bring up the cross in just about every section of the book. It is central to his discussion on divisions (1:18-31), carnality (**4:8-13**), to his discussion of incest (5:7-8), lawsuits (6:7), sexual immorality (6:20), marriage (7:23), idol meat (**8:11**), the Lord's Supper (11:26), spiritual gifts, and the resurrection.<sup>11</sup>

**Paul's answer** to this question is different. Paul links their lack of power in the gospel to the fact that they have not "held fast" to it! This rejection of the very essence of the gospel has then produced the devastating practical effects. Because the Corinthians desire to change the theology of the gospel, they begin to tolerate a world of others sins. When you don't hold fast to the gospel, there are certain ethical components of our lives that start going wacky! Their rejection of the gospel has led to carnality and division in the church at Corinth. In chapter 6 (verses 1-11), their abuse of the "law courts" can be traced to the unwillingness of believers to wait for the resurrection for vindication of their rights! The abuse of the body, which Paul describes in the same chapter (12-20) can also be traced back to a compromise of the theology of the resurrection ("if our bodies are not resurrected, then it does not matter what I do with my body"). Garland notes that the Corinthians lacked a "clear eschatological vision."<sup>12</sup> They forgot or did not realize that God was going to reward believers with new immaterial bodies.

So, Paul's answer is that the gospel in their culture is only hindered because of their rejection of the gospel itself. *If you "tweak" the gospel, you mess with its power.*

**2. Practical Problem:** *Everything starts with their carnality . . . the deepest practical demonstration of their sin.*

I think just by looking at the book in general that it is very clear that Paul wanted to reform the actions and the attitudes of the Corinthian believers. He answers their questions and he handles their problems to do just that. We have already listed the different problems which Paul addresses in the church (division, carnality, filthiness, self-centeredness, doubt). Now, when Paul is specifically dealing with the problem of carnality in 1 Corinthians 3:3 he asks,

*For you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?*

Paul gives three evidences for their carnality as being envy, strife and division. Here Paul seems to show that carnality is their root problem! These others sins spring from their fleshliness! This church was in many ways a mirror of the city or the culture around them. So, Paul warns the church: STOP BEING CARNAL!

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<sup>11</sup>Garland was helpful for this list, 17.

<sup>12</sup>Garland, 14.

Now, I can't help but think that a culture that has so many varieties of sins like ours could not learn from a book like 1 Corinthians. We live in a wicked culture. Here are some recent statistics on America:

- 1 - There are three times as many adult book stores in America today than McDonald's restaurants.
- 2- Lust is running rampant as is apparent from TV, COMPUTERS, and BILBOARDS.
- 3 - There are 683,000 women a year raped in the US. That is about 2,000 a day.
- 4- There are 1.5 million babies aborted a year - about 4,000 a day.

And the church is doing very little about it. Maybe it is because ***we too are carnal.***

### **C. Purpose: Stop Being Carnal!**

Exegetical Outline  
1 Corinthians<sup>13</sup>  
Professor Brent A. Belford

I. The Introduction to the Book (1 Corinthians 1:1-9).

Summary: Paul's opening thoughts to the Corinthians include his formal introduction of the authors of this letter and a description of the original readers. Paul's letter will address many difficult subjects and complex issues in the church at Corinth, so Paul feels compelled to start his letter on a good note. While establishing "good will" with the Corinthians by expressing his confidence of God's work in their lives, Paul foreshadows issues which he plans to address later in the letter. Ultimately, the Corinthians must understand that God will confirm them blameless in the "Day of the Lord Jesus Christ."

The first nine verses of the book form the introduction to the epistle. In these verses Paul lays out the basic nature of the letter, making his argument in three directions.

- A. The prelude to his appeals in the letter (1-3). *Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

In verses 1-3 Paul introduces the authors and describes the readers of this letter. Paul and Sosthenes are the authors and they write through the will of God. Sosthenes must have been known by this church, but we do not know much about him. We cannot prove that this is the same Sosthenes as Acts 18:17, but there is a good possibility that it is.

Both he and Paul are writing to the church "of God" which is at Corinth. The words "of God" represent a genitive construction which indicates Divine ownership. We do not normally indicate ownership like this in English today (ex. the tie of Brent or Brent's tie).

The church at Corinth is a part of what God was doing in the world through the ministry of the Apostles (***with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ***). Paul not only reminds them of God's universal work in this text, he also reminds them of this later in the book (7:17; 11:16; 14:33, 36).

- B. The basis of his appeals in the letter (4-7). *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you*

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<sup>13</sup>I must take the following actions to make this material better: 1) identify key words for word studies all throughout 1 Corinthians, 2) create notes on 1 Corinthians 12-16, 3) revise notes on 1:17-31, and 4) revise notes on 6:12-20.



*were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge- even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you- so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

There are two basic ideas in verses 4 through 7 which form Paul's basis for exhorting them in this letter. If these two things were not true, then there would be no reason for Paul to appeal to the Corinthians in a letter.

1. He reveals their past heritage (4-6). *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge- even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you.*

It is obvious that God graced the Corinthians in both **intellectual** and **spoken** (confessional) ways. Specifically, it says that God has enriched them in *logos* (word) and *knosis* (knowledge). It is interesting that Paul uses these two words here as these two terms were popular to philosophical systems in the ancient world. They were especially important in Greco-Roman rhetoric. ***There is something underlying these concepts which we just do not understand in our modern world. It may be that the divisions in the church were a result of some being distracted by a preacher who was especially eloquent.*** This may be because of the ministry of Apollos at Corinth (***Read Acts 18:24-19:1***). Apollos was described in Acts as being an eloquent man, which probably means that Apollos was gifted and trained in the use of Greco-Roman rhetoric. Apollos was mighty in logos and knowledge. The "***Apollos group***" might have been attracted to his ministry because of his powerful preaching. In particular, Apollos may have been all heated up with his new-found knowledge of the Holy Spirit. The results of his eloquent pneumatic teaching might have been division, individualism, and showmanship. On the contrary, Paul's preaching and teaching was not eloquent at all (1 Cor 2; 2 Cor 10:10).

However, let's return to our text. In **verses 4 and 5**, Paul rightfully thanks God that the Corinthians have been enriched in utterance and knowledge by God. The word ***logos*** means speech or word. This might be in reference to eloquence. It is this category of giftedness in which tongues and prophecy fall. Paul will address logos fully in chapters 1-4. Paul denounces "human talk" in chapters 1-4. He derides words produced from man's wisdom. Yet, he also declares the value of 'spiritual talk' in these chapters (2:6-16).

***Knosis*** is explained fully in chapter 8 and the last part of chapter 13. Knowledge speaks of spiritual insight. Paul values and appeals to the knowledge which the Corinthians possess. However, he will also denounce this church on eleven different occasions in 1 Corinthians for their lack of knowledge in a situation. He says, "Don't you know" (3:16; 5:16; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24; 12:2). His use of this question normally comes when he discusses ***moral issues***.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Garland discusses some of this information about "knowledge" in his commentary on page 34.

In **verse 6**, he says, *even as the witness of Christ was also verified or proven to them*. Paul is thankful that God chose to confirm the message of Christ to this church. The Corinthians were enriched because the message of Christ was confirmed to them.

2. He reflects on present realities (7). *So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In verse 7, Paul says that presently the Corinthian church is lacking in no spiritual gift. ***Now, let's stop! How is verse 7 related to verse 6?*** (My opinion: verse 7 is the result of verse 6 or perhaps even verses 5 and 6 – *The testimony of Christ was confirmed among you with the result that you were not lacking in any spiritual gift*)

Paul shows how gifts confirmed or verified the truth of the gospel and the work of God among the Corinthian church.

This is very ironic because of chapters 12-14 and the problems in the church with spiritual gifts. The problems at Corinth do not have to do as much with spiritual giftedness as they have to do with spiritual fruit. It is true that they are lacking in no area of giftedness. It is also true that they are awaiting the coming of the Lord. This reality is a wonderful characteristic for any child of God. We must await the coming of the Lord.

Thus, the basis of Paul's appeals for the Corinthians to deal with their own problems is God's graciousness to them. ***How has God been gracious to us in the past and even present as a church?*** We might also learn from Paul here to appeal to other believers on this basis – the basis of God's grace to them.

- C. The outcome of his appeals in the letter (8-9).

At the end of the introduction, Paul's confidence is that God will sustain the believers at Corinth. These verses represent the guaranteed outcome of his appeals to the Corinthians.

1. Paul's confidence concerning the Corinthian believers (8). *Who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In verse 8, Paul says that he is confident that the Corinthians will be blameless in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, we see Paul's confidence about the church at Corinth. He is confident that they will be verified or proven in the future, just as the testimony of Christ was proven to them when Paul came originally to Corinth (6). Verse 8 means that ***God will confirm them to the end (result) so that no one will be able to blame them.***

2. Paul's confidence in God (9). *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

But in verse 9, we learn that this confidence is not in the Corinthians themselves. ***How is verse 9 connected to verse 8?*** (This is one of most important questions that you ask yourself in Bible study – “How is this verse/phrase connected to the verse/phrase before it?” ***TRY IT THIS WEEK!*** - verse 9 is the REASON, GROUND, or BASIS of Paul’s confidence for the Corinthian believers)

Paul is confident because God is faithful! The basis of their position as saints is simply found in God. His character and faithfulness is insurance for the Corinthians.

Now, ***why is Paul speaking this way? Why does he open his letter by reflecting upon the nature of the work of God in the lives of the Corinthians?***

May I submit three reasons? First, Paul is establishing “good will” for the strong admonitions which he will make later. Second, He is introducing “topics of conversation” which will be furthered addressed later (word, knowledge, spiritual gifts, the coming of the Lord, the universal work of God, etc.). Third, Paul is motivating the Corinthians to know God’s great love. By introducing the concept that God is faithful to present us blameless before the Lord in the Day of Judgment, Paul is appealing to the graciousness of our God. And he does this at the beginning of his letter to encourage us to love God more.

Let’s imagine that I were to take my boy Levi on a little walk. As we went out on our walk, I began talking with him and asked him if he trusts me. When asked this question, Levi says, “Yes, Daddy, I trust you!” So, while on our walk, I decided to test his trust of me. I took him up to the edge of a cliff and said that *if* he trusts me then it shouldn’t be difficult for him to allow me to hold him out over the cliff by his hand. So, Levi agrees. Now, what would happen if Levi let go of my hand? Well, nothing would happen because I love my buddy and there is no way that I am going to let him fall. What would happen though if I let go of Levi’s hand? Well, after sometime Levi would fall because he would not be able to hold himself up. I use this illustration to describe the embrace of God for his children.

God is holding us and will not let us go. Some people feel that if this truth is really understood, then believers will be tempted to live their life in license and not care about what they do. After all, God is still holding them. However, I would submit that if God’s embrace is really understood, then the believer will return the embrace and they will do so not out of fear, but out of love. In the introduction to 1 Corinthians, Paul is attempting to motivate people by the grace and love of God to embrace Him. The more we understand of the embrace of God, the more we are compelled to love Him.<sup>15</sup> In particular, God has called them into “fellowship.”

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<sup>15</sup>In illustrating the value of being motivated by love as opposed to fear, Stephen Westerholm describes two different marriages. “We may take Jack’s delight in pleasing Jill as a sign of their happy marriage; not so, Dan’s nervous attempts to win Dana’s favor. Both Jack and Dan may buy chocolates for their spouses. Jack, however, does so joyfully and almost without reflection, assured of Jill’s love and goodwill. Dan, on the other hand, fearful lest his peace offering be dismissed with contempt, sweats oceans as he ponders which box to purchase, and when, and with what words, to present it. Jack feels no compulsion to be kind, though he is so: how else would he treat the woman he loves? Dan’s acts

There is no more appropriate meditation which could be offered to a church which was in real danger of falling apart.

II. The 1<sup>st</sup> Problem: a discussion of the division in the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:10-2:16).

Summary: In 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, Paul addresses the first problem in the church at Corinth. Although it was Paul's desire that this church be unified in the gospel, he hears that they are divided into different groups within the local assembly. So, Paul quickly appeals to the nature and authority of Christ as a basis for unity within the assembly. After establishing that fact, Paul continues to deal with their division by describing two profound theological answers to their division. First, Paul appeals to **the cross of Christ** as the basis of Divine reconciliation (1:17-2:5). If Christians are reminded of the amazing reconciling power of the cross and the depth of their own forgiveness on account of the gospel, then they will be motivated to forgive others of any personal offences. Second, Paul reveals **the illumination of Spirit** as the key for doctrinal and practical Christian unity. When God's people are led by the Spirit of God, they become remarkably similar to each other in doctrine and practice.

Now, let me ask you a very important question about division. ***Why do we have passages like this one about the great need for unity in the church,<sup>16</sup> but plenty of others passages about the need to ostracize anyone who does not stand for truth in the church? Are these passages in contradiction to each other?*** Well, the passages that call for separation normally do so when essential truths of God's Word are being disobeyed or corrupted. What we have in 1 Corinthians is an internal local church division over non-essential differences. We tend to separate over non-essential issues and Paul's message in the first two chapters of this book is one that can help us emphasize the type of unity that must be in our churches.

Before we get too deep into this section, I would like for you to consider a statement from Gordon Fee. He says, "One of the desperate needs of the church is to recapture the vision of what it is by grace and therefore also what God intends it to be. . . [this] is its single greatest need."<sup>17</sup> ***What do you think of this phrase?*** We need to examine our individual roles in the church and affirm our part in the body of Christ. We cannot allow petty divisions to keep us from our ability to impact the world. A healthy church will accomplish God's purposes in a community.<sup>18</sup>

A. The statement of their division (1:10-16)

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of would-be kindness carry little conviction: he sees no other way to gain his wife's approval, yet doubts the outcome, whatever he does." Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, 23.

<sup>16</sup>Great passages on unity include Phil 2, Phil 4, and John 17.

<sup>17</sup>Fee, 149-50.

<sup>18</sup>Possible propositions include: we must declare war on division or we must possess a sweet spirit of fellowship which is appealing to the world.

And so, as the normal pattern for Paul when dealing with the problems in the church at Corinth, he will start out by stating the problem and then by going straight to the answer. Verses 10-16 are a statement of the division at Corinth.

1. The desire of the Apostle Paul was that they would be unified (10). *I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.*

In verse 10, Paul earnestly appeals to the Corinthians by the authority of Jesus Christ that they should not be divided. Further, Paul grounds this appeal ***in the name of Christ***. He informs the Corinthians of the desire of his heart. Paul's fervent desire was for the Corinthians to be unified in three ways.

- a. He wanted them to be unified in voice (10).

Paul wants the Corinthians to be unified in voice. This means that they would say the same things. The phrase, *that you all agree* (ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ λέγντε πάντες), was used of political communities which were free from factions. This was a stock phrase which meant that they would agree with one another.<sup>19</sup> In other words, Paul says that "they ought to meet in a common confession."<sup>20</sup> This level of unity was apparently not the condition of the church at Corinth.

Ed Garland says that as a church "we are to be like a chorus singing from the same page of music, not a cat's concert."<sup>21</sup> Paul wanted a great unity to express itself in Corinth.

- b. He wanted them to be unified in deed (10).

Then he says that there is to be no divisions among you. The word for division (σχίσματα) is a plural noun that means splits, tears, or divisions. In noun or verb form this word is only used eight times in the entire NT. Paul uses it only three times and each time it is in 1 Corinthians (1:10, 10:18, 12:25). So, this is a word which he reserves for the Corinthians setting.

Paul's burden was that the Corinthian church avoid divisions. They were not to follow after different leaders and divide into different groups. However, the church was divided. This is manifested clearly in places like chapter 11. In 11, they were having a feast attached to their celebration of the Lord's Supper. They were to celebrate the Lord's body and blood by eating from one loaf and drinking from one cup. But, the rich were getting drunk and stuffed, while the poor in the assembly

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<sup>19</sup>Garland, 41.

<sup>20</sup>Funk, 283.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

were getting nothing. These sorts of divisions were beginning to show themselves in the church at Corinth.

- c. He wanted them to be unified in thought (10).

Not only did Paul want them to be unified in voice and deed, he also wanted them to be unified in thought. He says, *but that you be united in the same mind and in the same judgment*. The participle “united” (κατηρτισμένοι) means to be made complete and is a word which was used of restoring anything to its right condition. In Matthew 4:21 it is used when the disciples were restoring or mending their nets. In our passage, they were to be restored or rebuilt in their thinking so that they could present one clear opinion of their values.

- 2. The report from the house of Chloe shows that they were divided (11-12). *For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ.’*

Although Paul’s desire was for unity, it becomes quite obvious that the church at Corinth was not measuring up. As a matter of fact, the very first word in verse 11 (“for”) shows us that the grounds for Paul’s three-fold appeal for unity in verse 10 is a report that he has received about this church. Paul says that it was “declared” unto him by the house of Chloe that there were contentions in the church at Corinth. The word “declared” speaks of an irrefutable report. Notice also that Paul even names his source, which is a good counseling principle. There was irrefutable evidence from Chloe’s people (her servants, relatives, and household dependents) that the Corinthians were divided.

- a. There were contentions among them.

Now, the word that Paul uses for contentions (ἔριδες) is a different word than divisions that we saw in verse 10. This word speaks of hot disputes or quarrels. They were not just divided in mind, but their divisions were manifesting themselves in outward arguments or quarrels.

- b. There were divisions among them.

Ultimately, the church at Corinth was divided up into different groups. Paul gives substantial proof of this in verse 12 when he says that *everyone of you sayeth, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ*. It seems as if the church of Corinth was divided up along the lines of different ministers of the gospel. They all (“each one” – the problem was widespread) were claiming allegiance to one spiritual superhero against all the other leaders.

So, they divided up into different groups within the church, claiming to follow Paul, Apollos, Peter, or Christ. These were probably “Corinthian slogans.” These slogans “resemble political slogans.”<sup>22</sup>

Some were claiming allegiance to **Paul**. This means that they claimed to be Paul’s disciple. We have to remember that they lived in a culture where people often claimed to be some other person’s disciple. Now, this group might not have been very large. When one studies 2 Corinthians, it seems that Paul had some who were undermining his position and calling as an apostle (10:10). However, there were some in Corinth who were affirming his role as a father. Perhaps, they were loyal to the one that brought them to Christ.

Others were claiming to be loyal to **Apollos**. Now, remember that Apollos was a learned Alexandrian Jew who was eloquent in the Scriptures. I imagine that Apollos’ preaching was much more popular than Paul’s. Paul’s preaching was *not with enticing words of man’s wisdom*, but Apollos *mightily convinced people* with his teaching. Apollos came to Corinth with all of the gifts and graces of an impressive speaker. So, some might say, “Apollos, now there is a great preacher!” There may have been some sort of “rift” between Apollos and Paul or Apollos and members in the church at Corinth because 1 Corinthians 16:12 says that although admonished by Paul, Apollos would not return to the church at Corinth. Apollos may have been all heated up with his newfound knowledge of the Holy Spirit. The results of his eloquent **pneumatic** teaching might have been division, individualism, and showmanship. But we do not know the *exact nature* of this problem.

Still others claimed allegiance to **Peter**. We do not know much about this group. It is apparent from chapter 9 that the Corinthians knew that Peter travelled with a travelling companion (either wife or sister). Perhaps, Peter would be more appealing to the Jews in the group!?!?!?

Finally, some may have even been claiming allegiance to **Christ**. Now, it might be that some were saying this with proper intentions, but it appears from the context that Paul is saying being a member of this “Christ group” was not a good thing. It could be that Paul is using sarcasm or exaggeration at this point of his argument. As if they were divided up into different groups and following just about any leader of Christianity. It might also be that Paul is speaking about a pious group of believers at Corinth. This “Christ group” then was above the other believers there, at least in their own mind!

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<sup>22</sup>Sigurd Grindheim, “Wisdom for the Perfect: Paul’s Challenge to the Corinthian Church (1 Corinthians 2:6-16),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121:4 (2002): 691.

We cannot allow our primary allegiance to turn toward any one member or leader of our church. There must not be personality cults in this church. The “groupie-like” behavior of the Corinthians was damaging the church. We should treat *every* believer in our church with preference. Imagine the first conversation which occurred about these apostles! Someone would claim to like one apostle more than another and instead of responding spiritually another piped in with a fleshly response! It is too easy for us to respond “fleshly” in situations like this one.

***Have you responded properly to others when discussing one of the leadership of this church? Are there believers or leadership in this church who you go out of our way to encourage? Have you gone out of your circle of friends or your comfort zone to establish relationships with believers that seem different than you?*** It is only this type of unity in a church, which will accomplish all of God’s will in a community.

3. The answer for the church at Corinth is centered in Christ (13-16).<sup>23</sup>

Now, in what appears to be a parenthesis, Paul will give a quick, preliminary answer for the division in the church at Corinth. This answer will be expanded in the rest of chapters 1 and 2.

- a. The nature of Christ should keep them from division (13a). *Is Christ divided?*

First, he asks, *Is Christ divided?* Or another way to say this is *has Christ been parceled out?* Can each one of these groups claim to have Christ? The answer to this question is obvious, “no.” No, Christ was quite unified in his ministry and personality on earth. So, Paul seems to be asking, *Is there anything about the nature of Christ that would allow for a division of this nature?*

- b. The authority of Christ should keep them from division (13b-16). *Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else).*

Paul then asks if he was crucified for the Corinthians or if they were baptized in the name of Paul. The authority of an apostle was a great thing, but Paul goes beyond that for this important debate. **Look in verse 10.** He states that it is upon the authority of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that he states they should be unified. You see, the

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<sup>23</sup>Consider revising this section. Verses 13-17 set up like a chiasm (A-Crucifixion 13b, B-Baptism 13c, B1-Baptism 14-16, A1-Crucifixion 17).



Deity of Christ proves His authority. The meaning and significance of the cross separated the authority of Christ from the authority of Paul.

As Paul poses an answer for the church at Corinth, he does so by asking them about the nature and authority of Christ. In many ways, then he points to their lack of unity as being a contradiction to the nature of Christ.

Let me illustrate. Have you ever seen those headless framed paintings which you can stick your face into pose for pictures? Instantaneously, you can look like a muscle man or a clown or some odd couple. Many of us have had our pictures taken behind these paintings, and they are quite humorous because the picture does not match the head. Actually, I remember when Carissa and I were dating and we got our pictures behind one of these paintings. She was behind the cut-out of a lady and I was behind the cut-out of a larger man with very little definition. Well, of course, something definitely looked wrong with that picture (right?!?!). The body did not match up the head behind it. In a similar way, the Corinthian church, as the body of Christ, did not match up to their beautiful head, Jesus Christ. They were to be known as a group that would have a sweet spirit of fellowship. They were to represent Christ to the community of Corinth, but their reputation of division was actually harmful to the cause of Christ. May God allow our churches to wage a war on division and represent Christ in the right way!

Verses 14-16 are a brief digression from Paul. The mention of baptism seems to distract Paul momentarily. Garland suggests that the two men mentioned in this text (Crispus and Gaius) might be the men at the root of the controversies in Corinth. So, Paul does this to discreetly and delicately deal with this issue.<sup>24</sup> However, my theory is that some of the Corinthians had a 'magical view' of baptism as is evident in 15:29. It may be that they gave special recognition or honor to the one who baptized them. And, while Paul did not baptize many of them, perhaps, Apollos or Peter did. Stephanas is also mentioned as he was one of the men who travelled to Paul (oops!).

***Why did Paul baptize so few?*** 1) Perhaps he had an assistant. 2) Perhaps baptism did not immediately follow individual faith in this city. 3) Perhaps he wanted to keep his focus upon preaching the cross (evangelization).

B. The solution to their division (1:17-2:16)<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Garland, 54.

<sup>25</sup>Verse 17 or 18 might be a thesis statement for the whole section with the wisdom of the cross (1:18-2:5) verses the wisdom of the world (2:6-16).

Over the course of the next two chapters, Paul will give the answer to the division in the church at Corinth. The solution is the wisdom and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The cross directly addresses the issue of Christian unity.

1. The power and wisdom of the gospel brings reconciliation (1:17-2:5).

If you had to describe to someone what power was, how would you do it? What words or concepts would you use? What picture comes to your mind? How many of you would choose something small to describe power? Most of us would not choose something small, but we would choose something large! What extreme force of nature would you pick out to describe POWER?

There was a bridge builder who was asked to build a suspension bridge across the Niagara River, and of course we all know what is at the end of that river, the Niagara Falls! How many of you have been to Niagara Falls? One of the first problems that the designer faced was how to stretch his first cable across the wide expanse of raging waters. If he used a boat it would surely be swept over the falls. So the man thought of a simple idea. If a kite could be flown to the opposite bank using a light cord, a stronger cord could be attached and pulled across, than a stronger cord and so on until the cable could be attached and drawn across.

A kite finally made it across and the whole plan worked to perfection. One thin tiny string was the basis of that massive suspension bridge. In just the same way, what may seem small to the world, a cruel and insignificant cross nearly 2,000 years ago on a hill somewhere in Israel, that little event was the FINAL FRUITION of the contemplative and omniscient *mind of God*. The tiny word “GOSPEL” contains the power of God to convert the sinner. The cross of Jesus Christ has an amazing ability to reconcile two opposing forces. Paul shows the ability of the cross to bring reconciliation by focusing the reader’s attention on three related aspects of the gospel itself.

- a. It’s message: the message of the cross shows its power to reconcile (1:17-25).

Of our three studies involving the power of the gospel, the first is the message of the gospel. The very content of the Gospel is so important to appreciate the power of God. Intrinsically, it is “good news” which is able to bring reconciliation between God and man. Our text does not define gospel (Rom 1 and 1 Cor 15 do that well), but it does declare the importance of the cross to the gospel by providing both wrong and right views of it.

- 1) Wrong views of the gospel: an extended discussion of two wrong views (17-23)<sup>26</sup>. *For Christ did not send me to baptize but to*

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<sup>26</sup>Perhaps a good way to present this material in the future would be to focus on the two OT quotations that frame chapter 1. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah have words to boastful and “wise” people. Paul addresses their words to a

*preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom<sup>27</sup> of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.*

In verses 17 and 18, Paul probably intends a direct contrast between the "words of rhetoric" and the "word of the cross." In this contrast, Paul elaborates on different reactions to the message of the gospel. By appealing to different responses, Paul accents the content of the message itself.<sup>28</sup>

a) Some view the gospel as a stumbling block.<sup>29</sup>

One of the keys to understanding this passage is to observe the three questions that Paul asks in verse 20. Actually, Paul's point in this verse is to show that the Gospel has silenced each of these three types of people who represent the best of humanity. First, he asks, ***Where is the wise?*** By this Paul means, where is the philosopher or the one who prides himself in ***sophia***. Second, he asks, ***where is the scribe?*** This question is to confront the Jewish teachers of the Law. Even their teaching fails to consider accurately the wonderful provision of the cross. Third, ***where is the disputer of this age?*** Here Paul confronts the skilled orator or

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similar situation that he finds in Corinth. Thompson says, "Thus the Old Testament is a resource for understanding the folly of the cross and determining the behavioral norms for the church at Corinth" (Thompson, *Moral Formation*, 116).

<sup>27</sup>There is much debate about what σοφία means in this text. Drake Williams suggests that it refers to "the divine plan of salvation" (Drake Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise*, 203). God's wisdom in this text has to do with the cross as God's means of providing salvation to sinful man.

<sup>28</sup>Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14b in 1 Cor 1:19. This verse is introduced with "for it is written." The γὰρ demonstrates that verse 19 further explains what Paul says in verse 18. MORE STUDY SHOULD BE DONE ON THE STRUCTURE OF THIS PASSAGE AND THE CONTEXT OF THE ISAIAH PASSAGE. Heil gives a concise explanation of Paul's purpose in 1:19. He says, "1 Cor 1:19 aims to turn its audience away from worldly wisdom to the power of God" (Heil, *The Rhetorical Role of Scripture in 1 Corinthians*, 36).

<sup>29</sup>Thompson says, "Paul's imagery of the stumbling block and *skandalon* is derived from Leviticus 19, which has played a consistent role in his moral instruction. The Levitical statement, 'You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind' (Lev. 19:14 NRSV), provides the imagery for Paul's counsel" (Thompson, *Moral Formation*, 179).

public debater.<sup>30</sup> Although these three types of people were perceived as “professional experts” in their day, they all fail to consider the splendid provision of the cross.<sup>31</sup> Within this three-fold confrontation of the professional experts, Paul listed the Jewish teacher and that is where he goes in verse 22 as well.

In verse 22 Paul says that *the Jews required signs*. They were continually asking Jesus to show them more signs of his **power**. (JOHN 2 – What sign showest thou? - AUTHENTICATE YOURSELF – and he did on several occasions). They wanted to see his CREDENTIALS. They wanted him to VALIDATE his ministry. They wanted to see a spectacular sign to verify the gospel. But Christ gives them the sign of Jonah—his death and resurrection. The cross did not part the Red Sea; it did not create a pillar of fire above their heads; and it did not cause the walls of Jericho to come crashing down. It did tear the veil of the temple in two, but they somehow missed the importance of that event!

So, to the Jews the cross was a “stumblingblock.” Now, the word stumblingblock is not a word that you probably use every day in your normal speech. ***Hey, did you see that stumbling block over there?*** It comes from a Greek word σκάνδαλον which sounds very much like our English word scandal. “It is the picture of a trap that kills its victim or an obstacle over which someone stumbles.”<sup>32</sup>

One scholar translates the word σκάνδαλον as a deathtrap. *At times throughout this semester, I have taken the time to look at some of your cool cars. Have you ever heard someone talk about a car and make this statement, HEY, THERE IS NO WAY THAT I AM GOING INTO THAT THING, THAT CAR IS A DEATHTRAP!* I remember the olden days at Northland. I am convinced that most of the student body automobiles could be placed in the dictionary illustrating what a deathtrap looked like. I remember getting into some of my friend’s

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<sup>30</sup>There is an alternate view of the relationship of these three descriptions. The alternative view is that “wise man” is a generic classification which the other two words give specifics: “where is the wise man – whether scribe or debater?” See Godet and Hodge for this view.

<sup>31</sup>Garland, 65.

<sup>32</sup>Ronald Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Corinthians*, 60.

cars, and eyeing over the car and wondering and praying, sometimes fasting, about my fate in this car!

-SEATBELTS DID NOT WORK OR EXIST!  
-ONLY ONE HEADLIGHT AND IT WAS TAPED IN!  
-ONLY A FEW LUG BOLTS!  
-I HAD A CAR WITH A FUEL LEAK WHICH LEFT A  
VISIBLE TRAIL OF GAS ON THE GROUND!

If your friend showed up in a car like this, you might say, ***I am not going anywhere near that thing, it is a deathtrap.*** Your response is similar to the Jews response to the teaching of a crucified Messiah. THAT TEACHING IS A DEATH TRAP, A SCANDAL. This is why the whole book of Hebrews was even written. It was written to encourage Jewish believers not to abandon the message of Jesus Christ crucified. It was written to inform the Jews that Jesus Christ is better! The Jews just could not understand how a SAVIOR would be crucified. To them this teaching was a contradiction in terms. I mean you can have a crucifixion and you could have a Messiah but you could not have a crucified Messiah!

A Messiah meant power, splendor and triumph, but a crucifixion meant death, defeat, and the curse of God. ***Why should they believe?*** Christ was “rejected by the very people he came to save, was deserted by his own disciples, was strung up by the proper authorities, and apparently was powerless to save his own skin.”<sup>33</sup>

b) Some view the gospel as foolishness.

While some viewed it a ***stumblingblock*** or a deathtrap, still others known in our text as Greeks viewed it as ***foolishness*** (μωρία). This word simply carries with it the meaning of madness. It is nonsense. Dr. Tim Jordan stated that the Greeks were seeking after PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENT or SCIENTIFIC RATIONALE. To these sorts of people, the message of Christ was complete madness (UTTER INSANITY).

Corinth, as a First Century Greco-Roman city, was known for its love of wisdom. Greek cultures could not accept this foolish message. Let me ask you to turn to Acts 17 for similar encounter that Paul had with the Greco-Roman city of Athens. Athens, as a Greek city, also loved

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 61.

philosophy and scientific rationale! READ ACTS 17:22-32. Dr. Ollila, our chancellor, likes to ask the question: *When did the dust fly at Athens?* Another way of asking this is: *what caused the Athenians to mock?* THE RESURRECTION! The teaching of a crucified or resurrected Savior was complete nonsense to the educated Greco-Roman mind that wanted wisdom!

We do not fully understand the stigma of the cross in our modern times. Today, in our culture for the most part, the cross is anything but a symbol of shame. (MOVING EXPERIENCES) We hang crosses on our walls, we put these on our steeples, we get little ones of these and put them around our neck or in our ears and wear them for jewelry. Imagine if I were to come into class today with a little gold electric chair around my neck. What would you think of me? Or if I had a little gold needle in my ear and explained to the class that it was a lethal injection needle and that I wore it as a token of good luck. What would you think of me if I wore a little replica guillotine around my neck? Or a gas chamber?

The cross was not yet “sentimentalized” on marble altars, stain-glass windows, or golden chains. To the Greeks of the first century, this concept was complete insanity. The Romans devised archaic ways to avoid saying the word *cross*.

- 2) A worthy view of the gospel (24-25) – *But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

Now, let’s momentarily look at a worthy view of the gospel. The message of the gospel is the **power** of God to us. God called us and allowed us to understand the significance of the cross. According to verse 21, God did this through the foolishness of preaching because the world did not know God through His wisdom.

The cross is the clear demonstration of God’s ability to deal with human sin and bring salvation. The *Jews* were looking for a **powerful** sign and a **powerful** Messiah, but they missed God’s power in the death of His Son.

Not only is the cross the power of God it is also the **wisdom** of God.<sup>34</sup> When sin entered the world, mankind was utterly depraved—thoroughly sinful, separated from God, and completely helpless! But, in the incarnation, the sinless sacrifice, and the atoning work of Christ, God's wrath was appeased. It is at Christ's cross that this wise plan of God was accomplished. The *Greeks* sought for wisdom, but they missed the crux of God's wisdom.

But we, as new covenant ministers, proclaim the gospel as the wisdom and power of God. It is a pure message to which we must add nothing and from which we must not take anything away. For those who mess with the truth of the gospel, nullify its power (see 1:17 – *lest the cross be emptied of its power*).<sup>35</sup>

- b. It's object (audience): The objects of the gospel's effectual work show its power to reconcile (1:26-31).

So, we just saw the amazing inherent power and wisdom which is found in the gospel of a crucified Savior. But another way that you can emphasize the splendor of the gospel is to look at the ones who were the target of the gospel. The make-up of the Corinthian community is Paul's second way to illustrate the wisdom of the cross. They might not actually appreciate that Paul reminds them of their background. There is nothing intrinsically valuable in those who become the object of the gospel. So, in verse 26, Paul begins by saying something like this: **Look at Yourselves!** Paul specifically wants them to consider three things about themselves.

- 1) Consider what God has done with you (26-28). *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.*

The Corinthians were to consider their calling. But what about their callings were they to consider? The Corinthians were to

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<sup>34</sup>Find quote by MacArthur. He sees no need for a Christian to study or familiarize himself with secular philosophy.

<sup>35</sup>What is your theology of the cross? What should the cross mean to believers? It should do the following for us: 1-It is the basis of our atonement. 2-It should produce worship and praise to God for the fulfillment of all OT prophecies about salvation. 3-It brings joy amid trial (no trial compares with it). 4-It brings motivation for Christian service. 5-It brings humility amid outward signs of success. 6-It brings accountability amid physical or fleshly temptations. 7-Finally, it also should provide encouragement to forgive others of offences (this one is most relevant to our passage).

consider the circumstances of their calling. They were lowly, but God called them and used them.

a) You were lowly.

God did not use angels to communicate the gospel, but he chose man. And God did not choose the best of mankind, but let's notice what type of mortals God chose as targets and messengers of the gospel. In verses 26-29, we see many different descriptions which show that God delights in making salvation available to men of lesser talent. He says, *not many wise men according to human standards, not many mighty, not many noble, but the foolish, and the weak, and the low, and the things which are not* ('havenots'). These were people who were no better than if they were not. "It is not that they do not exist, but that they are regarded as if they do not exist."<sup>36</sup> They were worse than an after-thought! Basically, God delights to use weak tools, so that men would know that He did it.<sup>37</sup> God delights in using nobodies. The summary of all these descriptions results in a class of people "so little valued that they do not count as individuals."<sup>38</sup> This is similar to describing the victims of a mass slaughter as 'the body count'!

I can remember a time when I was a teenager after I had just surrendered to ministry at camp. We were actually on our way back from the camp in a bus and I had not yet take the opportunity to tell other people what God did in my heart. So, my youth pastor (for whatever reason!) decided to play a little game. He tried to predict what different teens in the group would do with their lives. Now, my youth pastor and I were and are still today very close, so do not get the wrong idea here. Well, he first went to my friend John. He said that John was going to be a pastor and by all external considerations it appeared that he was right. Then he went to my friend Brandon. He said that Brandon was going to be a youth pastor. Once again, not too many people would think that he was way off the mark. Now, when he came to me, what do you think that he said that I would do with my life?

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<sup>36</sup>Garland, 77.

<sup>37</sup>Richard Hays suggests that 1:26-31 is an echo or allusion of Jeremiah 9:24. He says, "The threefold reference in 1 Cor 1:26 to the Corinthians' lowly status before their calling ('not many wise [σοφοί] . . . , not many were powerful [δυνατοί], not many were of noble birth [εὐγενεῖς]') mirrors the threefold warning against boasting in Jer 9:22 LXX: 'Let the wise man (σοφός) not boast in his wisdom, let the strong man (ἰσχυρός) not boast in his strength, and let the rich man (πλούσιος) not boast in his riches' (Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination*, 15-16). See also G. R. O'Day, "Jeremiah 9:22-23 and 1 Corinthians 1:26-31: A Study in Intertextuality," *JBL* 109 (1990): 259-67.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 76.



My youth pastor said that I was going to be a “used car salesman.” Really!!! He said that! Anyway, here you had the testimony of a godly man’s evaluation of those in his youth group. However, God had a different plan. Why? Well, because God uses the weak things of this world as messengers of his Word so that when anything good happens, everyone knows that the power is in the message, not the messenger.

- b) But God used you to shame and nullify the most gifted of humanity.

Paul says that the Corinthians were selected to shame or dishonor the wise of this world. The worthlessness of humanity’s thinking is made known through us.

God also selected the Corinthians to reduce to nothing those who had weight in society or thought that they were something. God’s method of using lowly, weak vessels to proclaim the Gospel, strips the prominent of our society of their power and glory!

- 2) Consider why God did this with you (29). – *So that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*

Verse 29 gives the ultimate or final purpose of this section. It is a key summary statement which gives us God’s main purpose in this section. Right before this verse you can see a series of subsidiary (supplementary/secondary) purposes, but this one is the ultimate one. Thus, this section could be stated this way: “God chose the foolish in order to shame the wise; God chose the weak in order to shame the strong . . . God chose the nothings in order to nullify the things that are, his ultimate purpose being that all flesh might boast in his presence.”<sup>39</sup> Thus verse 29 almost becomes the result of all of the other purposes! God did all of this in and with you so that all flesh would be silenced before Him!

- 3) Consider our new proclamation (30-31). *And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”*

Paul’s ultimate goal in this text is not to discourage the Corinthians. His ultimate goal is to exclude any human boasting. So, in verse 30 he reminds the Corinthians of their new

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<sup>39</sup>Trail, 72.

proclamation. His point is that now they have new membership in Christ because of what God has done in calling them. God's call has resulted in Christ becoming wisdom (*Sophia* –a major theme of the first chapter so far), righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to us. Now, we identify him as wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

I think that the thought of verse 30 is something like this: we cannot even speak of these wonderful theological concepts without speaking of "Christ." Christ became wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to us in order that boasting is done in the Lord ("about"). We are lowly people and there is nothing inherently valuable in us.<sup>40</sup>

The purpose of Christ becoming all of this for us is found in Paul's use of Jeremiah 9:23 and 24 in verse 31. God did it this way ***so that the one boasting, might boast only in the Lord.*** "In Jeremiah, this warning occurs in the context of a series of judgment oracles: because the people are caught up in lies, iniquity, oppression, and idolatry, God's judgment is coming upon Jerusalem and Judah (Jer 8.3-9.26)."<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to all the wrong sources for boasting (human wisdom, strength, or riches), Israel must boast in knowing and understanding the Lord! With this quotation Paul articulates one last statement against boasting in visible human achievements. Human resources must not be our source of confidence or arrogance. We must boast in this, that we understand and know the Lord!

- c. It's Proclamation: the nature of Paul's proclamation of the cross shows the power of the cross to bring reconciliation (2:1-5).

As we consider 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, I would like to discuss some preliminary things with you:

**-THE POWER OF WORDS?-** Sometimes, there can be power in the words which we use. Words, even simple words, often determine people's perception of who we are. Words cannot only reveal who we are, words can also greatly affect others around us. If I used the following words with you today, how would you respond?

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<sup>40</sup>Illustration of a diamond displayed on a black velvet cloth

<sup>41</sup>Richard B. Hays, "The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians," *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999), 405.

***I love you/You're important to me/You look really nice today/I like your new haircut/This place would not be the same without you/You are irreplaceable.***

Those words might make your day! But how would you respond if I chose to use some of the following words with you?

***I hate you/You disgust me/I wish you had never been born/I wish you were dead/You make me sick/Nobody cares about you!***

Words can be powerful conveyors of meaning! However, Paul says that the Corinthians' faith did not rest upon the words that he used while he was with them, but upon God's Spirit and power. Thus, our words must be with grace, seasoned with salt. But they do not possess ability as a foundation for saving faith.

***-A Different Evangelistic Strategy?-*** When Ken Ham was here this past year, he talked about using Paul's evangelistic strategy from Athens as we appeal to those in our post-modern world. His main point was that people in our culture might not be prepared for the preaching of the cross because they are largely unaware of what the Bible says. He stated that we should start with creation and take people through to the cross, similar to what Paul did with those in Athens. ***What do you think about that?***

Yet, Paul did not do that in Corinth. It does not appear that Paul started with creation in this pluralistic city. "Instead, he began on a dark and gloomy note: the crucifixion of Christ."<sup>42</sup> And he was perfectly content to keep this topic as the sole focus of his message at Corinth!

Now, let's notice ***three qualities*** of Paul's preaching at Corinth.

- 1) The content of Paul's preaching (2) – ***For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.***

First, let's notice the content of Paul's preaching. Paul's determination was to involve himself in Christ-centered communication with the Corinthians. Verse 2 says, that *he determined not to know anything about them, but Jesus Christ and him crucified*. Paul just informed the Corinthians that we are to only boast in the Lord (1:31), and that is what he did in Corinth. Perhaps, his Athens experience caused Paul to be determined to communicate one simple message: Jesus Christ crucified for sins. So, Paul deliberately refused to know anything except where they stood with Christ and his crucifixion. The

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<sup>42</sup>Ray C. Stedman, *Letters to a Troubled Church: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 35.

cross was the turning point for Paul and is the true turning point for any genuine act of faith.

“When the Scripture texts from Isaiah that are found in 1 Corinthians 1 are kept in mind, one can make sense of Paul’s statement that he did not come with persuasive words of wisdom (1 Cor. 2:1). He did not preach with human wisdom since human practice and human wisdom are not neutral.”<sup>43</sup>

***What can we learn from Paul’s Christ-centered communication?*<sup>44</sup>**

One might wonder how much of our preaching today is actually “cross-centered?” Remember, we are not to be inventors, but we are to be explorers. We should simply ***mine the depths*** of the gospel and distribute that to those under us. Are you ministering the gospel to those around you? All the power is “in the gospel.”

- 2) The method of Paul’s preaching (1, 3-4)- *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.*

“Among the public celebrities of Paul’s day, were the orators, called ‘sophists’ (a term derived from the Greek word for ‘wisdom’).”<sup>45</sup> These men were known for their dynamic presentations. Harden says, “After arriving in the city with much fanfare, a sophist would invite the city’s inhabitants to hear him speak on a given topic. After his presentation, wealthy citizens would flock to register their children for private lessons.”<sup>46</sup> These lessons were essentials for future leaders of their society.

Yet in verse 1, Paul says that he did not use ***lofty speech*** or ***wisdom*** with the Corinthians. Leon Morris says that Paul used a “plain, unvarnished, setting forth of the simple gospel.”<sup>47</sup> Paul did not rely upon a ***quick step and a clap!*** Paul did not resort

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<sup>43</sup>Drake Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise*, 150.

<sup>44</sup>If preaching, use the illustration of the surprise party for the little baby.

<sup>45</sup>Justin K. Harden, 151.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>47</sup>Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 50.

to theatrics and techniques as he proclaimed the gospel. Thiselton says that “Paul renounced the seductions of spin.”<sup>48</sup> He did not rely upon excellent logos or Sophia. He did not come with eloquence or logic.

As a matter of fact, 2 Corinthians 11:6 might show us that some at Corinth saw Paul “as an *idiotes*, a rank amateur in public rhetorical performance.”<sup>49</sup>

Later in verse 3, Paul also says that he came in weakness when he came to Corinth. This weakness might include . . .

- a-awareness of his own physical presence – felt inadequate
- b-sickness
- c-anxiety about what Timothy/Silvanus will say
- d-Timidness about venturing into strange surroundings

So, when Paul remembers Corinth, he remembers weakness. As a matter of fact, near the end of the Corinthian Correspondence in 2 Corinthians 10:10 Paul states that his letters they say are weighty, but that his bodily presence is weak and his speech is contemptible. Actually, Leon Morris gives a description of Paul taken from an early church father:

*He was a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked.*

Paul’s physical presence was weak and he was not eloquent. However, the next phrase might add more to our understanding of him as well. In verse 3, it says that he also came with **fear and trembling**. How should we understand this phrase? There are a few possibilities:

- a-Fear of failure
- b-Awareness of personal limitations causes insecurity
- c-A humble response to the awe-inspiring God (see Phil. 2:12). So, although I was in weakness, I only feared God.

Without much to go on, I would favor the last phrase. In his preaching, Paul had great confidence in God that went beyond his own human limitations. Finally, Paul also says that his **speech and preaching were not in plausible words of**

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<sup>48</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, 51.

<sup>49</sup>Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 123.

***man's wisdom.*** I do not believe that Paul is giving a difference between types of speaking here, but is using near synonyms to describe all the words that he used with the Corinthians. Paul did not use tactics which reflected the wisdom of the world in his preaching.

Alternatively, Paul's preaching ***did*** come ***in demonstration of Spirit and power.*** Ronald Trail suggests that this means that "the Spirit powerfully convinced the hearers that Paul's preaching was true."<sup>50</sup> The word "demonstration" means ultimate manifestation or final proof. It speaks of a setting forth, an exhibition of proof. Therefore, the method of Paul's preaching involved the Holy Spirit manifesting Himself through his preaching.

Drake Williams suggests that Paul is alluding to the night visions of Zechariah the prophet with this statement about the Spirit and power.<sup>51</sup> Specifically, Zechariah 4:6 says, *Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.* In this particular text, the Israelites were despising the day of small things (smaller stones being used for the Temple), yet God tells them that this new Temple will contain more glory than the older one. If Paul is alluding to this text, he intends to point to the profound work that God wrought through His Spirit in Corinth. The Corinthians should not despair in the day of small things either—what God did through Paul during the church plant was supernatural—it was spiritual! The weak, little man with a simple message of a crucified Messiah was the conveyor of divine power. This should remind us of the fact that we are engaged in a *spiritual* battle when we minister the gospel in our communities. We cannot rest in human device or pragmatic programs, but must have the Spirit do something in our communities for the honor and glory of God!

Charles Spurgeon made this very powerful and bold quote regarding the Holy Spirit:

*The power that is in the gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher, otherwise men would be the converters of souls, nor does it lie in the preacher's learning, otherwise it would consist in the wisdom of men. We might preach until our tongues rotted, till we exhaust our lungs and die, but*

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<sup>50</sup>Ronald Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Corinthians 1-9*, 87.

<sup>51</sup>Drake Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise*, 136-39.

*never a soul would be converted unless the Holy Spirit be with the Word of God to give it the power to convert the soul.*

- 3) The reason for Paul's content and his method of preaching (5)-  
*That your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

Finally, we come to the reason why Paul preached the way that he did. He did this that the faith of the Corinthian believers might not rest upon human wisdom, but upon the power of God.

The proof of the power of God is not the human response of applause or feel-good moments of praise and worship, but the proof of the power of God is true conversion and the production of changed lives! Genuine, life-transforming faith is what God gives.

Can we make a few applications for this section for our modern ears?

1-The goal of preaching is for people to look in awe at the cross, not to look in awe at your sermon or your powerpoint.

2-A preaching of "only Christ, only the cross" does not offer approval for sloppiness in presentation or laziness in sermon preparation (BLESS GOD!).<sup>52</sup>

2. God's gift of the Spirit enables believers to attain Christ-like harmony with each other (2:6-16).

In the first 5 verses of this chapter, Paul said that his words did not come with eloquence or wisdom (1), but in demonstration of the Spirit and power (4), in order that the faith of the Corinthians **would stand** in the power of God and not in man's wisdom (5). If Paul left his argument at this point, it might appear that he is against all wisdom. How would that sort of *anti-wisdom* philosophy mesh with the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament and the words of Christ about the wise man and the foolish man?

Obviously, Paul is not against all wisdom! So, in verse 6 he shows that he does not believe in an ***all-out rejection*** of wisdom; he even speaks wisdom. However, he qualifies the wisdom which he proclaims as being wisdom from God, a hidden wisdom in mystery form. Further, Paul only proclaims this wisdom to a certain type of people, i. e. the mature ones.

\*\*\*But let's **read the whole passage** to better understand what Paul is saying here.

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<sup>52</sup>Thiselton, 53.

In verse 6, the word *yet* or *howbeit* is Paul's means of introducing a contrast. And in the rest of this passage, there is a contrast between wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. Verses 6-9 talk primarily of the world's wisdom. Verses 10-16 start out with the significant shift: **But God**. These verses show an entirely different type of wisdom which is given by God through his Holy Spirit to the redeemed. This observation can help us to understand the flow of the argument for the end of chapter 2. So, let's look at the wise of the world and the spiritually wise people.

- a. The wise of the world: an examination of the "best" intellectuals in this world (2:6-9).

In verses 6-9, Paul describes the wise of this world as being weak. There are two descriptions which help us see this.

- 1) The wise of this world are not mature (6-7) - *Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.*

There are three critical questions that we must ask in the first line of verse 6:

- 1) Who are the "mature"?
- 2) Who is "we"?
- 3) What does "impart" mean?

Let's take these in order. The word mature means complete. But to whom does the word "**mature**" refer? There are two basic views on the identity of the mature. Some say that this is in reference to **all Christians**.<sup>53</sup> Others say that this refers to **some Christians**.<sup>54</sup> It seems to make the most sense of the entire context for the mature to represent all Christians. In chapter 2, Paul is only concerned with speaking of the differences between saved and unsaved people. It is only later in the argument that he will discuss a problem that he sees with the Corinthian babies.

So, Paul says that among the mature (i. e. believers), we impart wisdom. But to whom does he refer when he says "**we**"? This probably refers to Paul and his fellow apostolic ministers or

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<sup>53</sup>Charles Hodge, Leon Morris, Louw and Nida, Anchor Bible Commentary, Expositor's Bible Commentary.

<sup>54</sup>Godet, Conzelmann, C. K. Barrett, Meyer, Bruce, International Critical Commentary.



preachers. In other words, Paul is speaking about the apostolic preachers as ministers of God's revelation.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, we also have to deal with what Paul means by *impart* (λαλέω). To me it is of importance here that Paul does not use the word γράφω ("to write"). Paul is not talking about the writers of Scripture, but instead about the apostolic ministers who spoke God's revelation to the mature (i. e. believers).

So, Paul has a hidden wisdom which is in mystery form of which he can speak. The word **mystery** means that the wisdom is in the form of a riddle or mystery. This mystery is a secret which the world is unable to penetrate. The wise of this world lack the spiritual perception necessary to understand the things of God.

How many of you like murder mysteries? I have to confess a little interest in shows like Matlock and Murder She Wrote. You know how these shows work. Whoever is on the witness stand with 10 minutes to go in the show is the one who committed the murder. Typically, you are introduced to approximately 5-6 characters and you know one of them committed the crime. Now, how would you respond if, at the end of the show, they introduced a new character who committed the crime? You would say that this is not right because you did not even know that person existed. In this text the word mystery is a descriptive way of Paul saying that the world is not able to understand God's wisdom. It is hidden from them. It is like trying to solve a mystery, without all of the pieces- you cannot solve this puzzle without the Holy Spirit.

Paul shows that the Corinthian believers that they are mature, but the wise of this world do not classify as the mature. Paul won't speak of deeper wisdom to the world.

2) The wise of this world are not able (8-9).

Not only do the wise of this world lack maturity, they also lack ability. They are not able to understand the things of God. This fact appears through two different strands of proof.

- a) This is proven historically: a description of the princes of this world's involvement in the crucifixion of Christ (v.8) - *None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

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<sup>55</sup>Verse 6 is definitely about Paul and the apostolic preachers. Later, in 4:1, Paul says specifically that the apostolic preachers should be regarded as stewards of God's mysteries.

In verse 8, Paul gives historical proof which illustrates that the wise of this world are not able to understand God. He appeals to the example of the princes of this world who crucified the Lord of glory. Now, ***who are these princes?***

One view is that they are demonic powers. As early as Marcion and Ignatius, men have submitted that these rulers are Satan and his host. So, God outsmarted the wisdom of the Devil at the cross of Christ. Another view is that these princes are the human rulers who were in power at the time of Christ's crucifixion. This would then speak of either the Roman or Jewish authorities who had Christ crucified. There are several compelling proofs of this view:

- Paul's quote in verse 9 points to the intellect of mankind as being limited to understand these things of God.
- The word **αρχωντων**, while at times referring to demonic beings, often refers specifically to the human rulers who crucified Christ (Acts 3:17, 4:5,6,26, etc.).
- The Scriptures also explicitly state that the human rulers were ignorant as to what was really going on at the crucifixion of Christ. For instance, Acts 13:27 says,

*For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they know him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.*<sup>56</sup>

- So Leon Morris says,

*To introduce now the thought of the wisdom of demonic powers is to bring in an extraneous concept, and one that is out of harmony with verse 9, which clearly refers to humans.*

Thus, we conclude that these princes must be the human leaders of the crucifixion of Christ.<sup>57</sup> And for all of their power, prestige, position, and wisdom, the rulers of this age did not know that Christ was God's Son or they would have never had a part in his crucifixion. ***The crucifixion is historical proof that the rulers of this age do not have wisdom.***

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<sup>56</sup>See also Acts 3:17 and John 16:3.

<sup>57</sup>Rosner and Ciampa disagree. They believe that this refers to both human and demonic leaders. They say, "Thus, with Scroggs and Bruce, it is best to take the rulers of this age, as a reference both to the world's organized opposition to God's wisdom and to the pernicious spiritual forces behind them" (125).

- b) This is proven Scripturally: an appeal to the Old Testament (9) - *But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him".*

The words in this verse resemble Isaiah 64:4, but are probably not a direct quote. Paul does use a formal introductory device however. This loose quote from Isaiah says that men are not able to see, hear, or even understand in their heart (not the seat of the emotions, but the seat of the intellect) what God has prepared for them that love Him. Now, what are these things that mankind is not able to understand? Often these verses are used to describe the heavenly inheritance which believers are not able to understand or even imagine. But is that what this section is actually saying? No. In its original Isaianic setting the hidden things is God's salvific activity—mankind is not able to understand God's salvific activity. In 1 Corinthians Paul is not talking about believers at this point. He is talking about the lost. He is saying that mankind in general does not understand God's wise plan, but God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit. He is speaking of the fact that the lost are not able to understand the wisdom of the cross of Christ or God's wonderful plan of salvation! And Paul appeals to his ***strongest proof*** to verify this idea: the Scriptures!

***Do you like secrets?*** Your answer to this question probably depends on which side of the secret you find yourself. Are you on the inside, or are you on the outside? Well, the meaning of this passage is that unbelievers are not in on the secret. The world just can't get it. However, Paul is just about ready to show that Christians have been let in on the secret. We are ***"in the know"***.

- b. The spiritually wise ones: an examination of the work of the Holy Spirit in revealing God's wisdom to spiritual people (10-16).

In verse 10, Paul changes the subject by saying that things are different with God! Now, Paul changes subjects from the wisdom of men to the wisdom of God. In verses 10-16, Paul will ***present the case*** that God's wisdom is available to the ***spiritual*** man. Paul's case is simple when one sees two principles which Paul makes in this section.

- 1) Principle 1: The Holy Spirit fully understands God's hidden wisdom (10-11) - *These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that*

*person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.*

The first part of his argument is that the Holy Spirit fully understands God.

- a) The disclosure of God's hidden wisdom is through the Holy Spirit (10a) - *These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.*

In the first part of verse 10, Paul shows that although the intellect of mankind is not able to understand the things which God has prepared for those who love him, **we** do understand it because God revealed it to us through the agency of His Holy Spirit.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the disclosure of God's hidden wisdom is only **through** the Holy Spirit. Drake Williams says that the Spirit of God is "the divine revelatory vehicle of his σοφία."<sup>59</sup>

- b) The content of God's hidden wisdom is the full possession of the Holy Spirit (10b-11) - *For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.*

Then, Paul proceeds to show us that the content of God's hidden wisdom is the full possession of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit knows God's wisdom because . . .

- He examines God (10b).

The Holy Spirit scrutinizes or searches all things. He is even able to examine the deep things of God. The word for **deep things** is often reserved for the mighty depths of the sea. The Holy Spirit is able to understand the unfathomable areas of God, things that are impossible for mankind to probe or research!

- He knows God (11).

You see, the Holy Spirit examines God and knows Him. In verse 11, Paul appeals to our own human bodies and he

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<sup>58</sup>Paul is talking again of the apostolic ministers in verse 10 here because of the parallel passage in Ephesians 3:5-6.

<sup>59</sup>Drake Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise*, 207.

asks a question that has an obvious answer to all of us. ***Who knows the thoughts of a man? Who can tell me what I am thinking about right now?*** The answer is that no one can do so with absolute confidence. Paul's answer is that only man's spirit can know this. Now, the word spirit is a very flexible word in Greek. Here it means something like "the 'interior' of a human being, the 'inmost part'."<sup>60</sup> Thus, the spirit of man in this passage is the near equivalent of our mind.

However, Paul's point with this human illustration is not to give us a lesson on anthropological terms and their meanings. Paul uses this illustration to tell us that the Spirit possesses full knowledge of God and His wisdom. Thus, his point is that the Spirit knows God from the inside-out! So, argument number one is that the Spirit understands God.

- 2) Principle 2: Christians receive the Holy Spirit who enables them (12-16).

Principle number two is that Christians receive the Holy Spirit. This reception of the Spirit is stated clearly in verse 12. The Spirit enables believers to do three different things.

- a) The Spirit enabled the apostolic preachers to know God's things (12) - *Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.*

In verse 12, we can see the reason why the Spirit of God is given: *that we might know the things which are freely given to us of God.*

Now, who is the "we"? Well, this is a controversy in the interpretation of this passage. Some say that this is reference to the apostolic preachers. Others, like D. A. Carson, would say that the "we" refers to Paul and his readers, i. e. believers. This might then refer to something like the illumination of the Spirit upon the mind of the believer. Again, I think that it is best to take this as the apostolic ministers, primarily because of verse 13.

- b) The Spirit enabled the apostolic preachers to speak God's things to us (13) - *And we impart this in words not taught by*

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<sup>60</sup>D. A. Carson, 54.

*human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.*

Not only did the Spirit empower them to know God's things, He also enables them to speak about God's things. Verse 13 says that we speak or impart these things in words taught by the Spirit and not by human wisdom. Thus, as a result of the Spirit's work, the apostolic ministers can speak of the things of God. To me it is extremely important to realize that this is the same pronoun and verb that we have seen in verses 6 and 7 above and in both of those passages it clearly referred to the apostolic ministers.

And they could do so by ***explaining spiritual truths*** to ***spiritual people***. Or, perhaps it means by ***explaining the Spirit*** with ***spiritual truths***. Either way, they talk about God's things because of the Spirit.

c) The Holy Spirit enables us to appraise all things (14-16).

So, apostolic ministers are enabled to know and speak of God's things. But ***we*** (believers) are also enabled through the Spirit to appraise all things. Now, in order for Paul to explore this concept, he first has to discuss the natural man before proceeding to the spiritual man.

- The deficit of the unsaved man (14) - *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

The unsaved man does not receive the things of God for two reasons. First, the unsaved man does not receive the things of God because the things of God are foolish to him. Second, the unsaved man does not receive the things of God ***because*** he cannot understand them ***because*** God's things can only be spiritually appraised. The word ***discerned*** actually is used three times in verses 14 and 15. It is also used three times<sup>61</sup> in 1 Corinthians 4:3 and 4. It is a difficult word to translate, but it means something like appraised or evaluated. Thus, the natural man is not able to understand the things of God because God's things can only be discovered through a spiritual appraisal. Without the Spirit of God, the natural man is at a deficit which cannot be overcome.

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<sup>61</sup>This word is used six times in ch. 3-7.

How much of the Bible can an unbeliever understand apart from the Spirit? There are two evangelical answers to this question that merit our attentions. The **naturalist** view is that mankind apart from the Spirit of God can possess both an **intellectual knowledge** and a cognitive knowledge. In other words, man can identify certain historical or scientific knowledge of facts and relationships. The naturalist also claims that mankind can also process the importance and implications of those facts, i. e. **understand** them on his own. However, the naturalist claims that mankind is dependent upon the Holy Spirit for **reader receptivity**.<sup>62</sup> The only way that one can receive the truth is as a result of the work of the Spirit. The **super-naturalist** claims that men are only able to come to an intellectual knowledge on their own. Anything more than this, is a work of God's Spirit in the life of an individual.

- The assessment of the saved man (15-16) - *The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*

Two statements summarize Paul's view of believers.

- No one appraises him (i. e. No one can properly evaluate him)

Now, look at the end of verse 15. It says, *yet he himself is judged of no man*. This phrase refers to the fact that the spiritual man is not properly appraised by anyone. The world is incapable of properly appraising or evaluating the believer. John Heil says, "Believers cannot be examined or judged by those who are informed or enamored with merely human wisdom rather than the wisdom of God in Christ crucified (1:13, 17, 23; 2:2, 8)."<sup>63</sup>

Why do believers go to church on Wednesday night? The world just cannot make sense of this sort of wisdom. "The person without the Spirit cannot properly access" the values of the spiritual man.<sup>64</sup> It

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<sup>62</sup>The following formula represents the three component parts: Intellectual Knowledge + Cognitive Knowledge (understanding) + Reader Receptivity. Dan Fuller holds a naturalist position and Millard Erickson holds a supernaturalist position. Find the names for these articles and read them again.

<sup>63</sup>John Paul Heil, *The Rhetorical Role of Scripture in 1 Corinthians*, 72.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 59.

is like a man born blind trying to talk about the colors of the rainbow!

- But he appraises all things (i. e. we have the mind of Christ which empowers us to give proper evaluation of all things)

Although the saved man is not properly appraised by anyone, he is able to appraise all things. We have the mind of Christ which empowers us to properly evaluate all things. We can understand the wisdom of this world **and** the wisdom of God. Gordon Fee says, "the profane cannot understand holiness, but the holy can understand the depths of evil." This is further understood as one realizes that we have the mind of Christ as Paul says in verse 16. Now, let's look at verse 16 since it is a little difficult to understand.

The first two phrases of verse 16 are actually a quote from Isaiah 40:13. In this passage, Isaiah defends the sovereignty and transcendence of God. Who could possibly understand the mind of God in order to teach him? Isaiah cannot imagine anyone being able to grasp God's mind enough to enable that man to instruct God. However, Paul gives some clarification to this idea for NT believers. The last part of verse 16 is some sort of bold claim by Paul. Actually, the word "we" is emphatic in this last phrase.<sup>65</sup> So, if we asked Isaiah who could understand the mind of God, he would say; **no one**. But if that question is asked of this text to the Corinthians the answer is: **we**. We have the mind of Christ, i. e. the Spirit of God.<sup>66</sup> There is a very close connection between mind and spirit in this text and so, the Spirit of God seems to be the mind of Christ in verse 16. Through the Spirit of God, we can understand the very thoughts of Christ! John Heil summarizes it well. He says, "The Corinthians can thus eliminate the divisions among them and be united in the same 'mind' (1:10), because they know and have the 'mind' of Christ."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>The word "we" is put in an emphatic position.

<sup>66</sup>Future exploration is necessary regarding the Hebrew text of Isaiah 40:13 and the LXX text of the same passage. The Hebrew text uses the word, *ruah*-spirit. The LXX and Paul use the word *nous*-mind, when they could have used the word *nooma*-spirit. Why? Robertson and Plummer believe that in God, *nous* and *nooma* are identical. Robertson, 51. However, it appears as if they press the connections too far.

<sup>67</sup>Heil, *The Rhetorical Role of Scripture*, 74.



In a moment of praise and application, listen carefully to D. A. Carson's comments on chapters 1 and 2.

*What a great God we have! Not only does he redeem us through the ignominious crucifixion of his much-loved Son, but he sends us his Spirit to enable us to understand what he has done. So obtuse and blind are we that we would not have begun to grasp "what God has freely given us" unless God had taken this additional step.<sup>68</sup>*

The following chart might help you see the way that I interpret the pronouns throughout this section:

Apostolic Ministers  
All Believers

Gordon Fee	Rosner and Ciampa	My View
<p><sup>6</sup>Yet among the mature <b>we</b> do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. <sup>7</sup>But <b>we</b> impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. . . <sup>9</sup>But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"-- <sup>10</sup>these things God has revealed to <b>us</b> through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup>For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> Now <b>we</b> have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that <b>we</b> might understand the things freely given <b>us</b> by God. <sup>13</sup>And <b>we</b> impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. . . <sup>16</sup>"For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But <b>we</b> have the mind of Christ.</p>	<p><sup>6</sup>Yet among the mature <b>we</b> do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. <sup>7</sup>But <b>we</b> impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. . . <sup>9</sup>But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"-- <sup>10</sup>these things God has revealed to <b>us</b> through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup>For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> Now <b>we</b> have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that <b>we</b> might understand the things freely given <b>us</b> by God. <sup>13</sup>And <b>we</b> impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. . . <sup>16</sup>"For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But <b>we</b> have the mind of Christ.</p>	<p><sup>6</sup>Yet among the mature <b>we</b> do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. <sup>7</sup>But <b>we</b> impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. . . <sup>9</sup>But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"-- <sup>10</sup>these things God has revealed to <b>us</b> through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup>For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> Now <b>we</b> have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that <b>we</b> might understand the things freely given <b>us</b> by God. <sup>13</sup>And <b>we</b> impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. . . <sup>16</sup>"For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But <b>we</b> have the mind of Christ</p>

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 55.

Now, before we leave this text, I want to ask you two questions of application and consideration.

1-What does this text teach us about **UNBELIEVERS**? How much of God's things can an unbeliever understand?

- ***He does not receive them.***  
-Paul proves this in verses 8-9 by appealing to history and the Scriptures. He also states it clearly in 14.
- ***He has a deficit*** which keeps him from properly evaluating God's things or the spiritual man. Actually, this is a huge theological controversy. Theologians do not agree concerning what an unbeliever can understand apart from the work of the Spirit.

2-What does this text teach us about **BELIEVERS** and the privileges which we have now?

- We **appraise all things** (15-16) because we have the mind of Christ, i. e. the Spirit of God. Although this is true, something was wrong with the believers at Corinth.

III. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Problem: an analysis of the sin of carnality in the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:1-4:21).

Summary: In 1 Corinthians 3 and 4, Paul deals with carnality in the church at Corinth. In chapter 3, he starts by clearly expressing the issue in verses 1-4. He states that they are full of envy and strife, which proves that they are functioning in merely human ways. After Paul states this, he takes the greater parts of chapters 3 and 4 to give two further characteristics of carnal people. First, ***carnal people exalt human leadership beyond their true worth***. Paul explains that these leaders are simply slaves of God who cannot produce spiritual fruit if left to themselves. He also reminds the Corinthians that each human leader will be held accountable for what he does in the church. Some leaders will receive reward, while others will be devastated with both a physical, earthly punishment and a lack of eternal reward for their abuse of the church. Further, Paul challenges the Corinthians to respond by rejecting human wisdom, by failing to boast in men or to pronounce premature evaluations, and by remembering the source of all spiritual giftedness. The second characteristic of carnal people is ***an unwillingness to endure much suffering for the cause of Christ***. Paul illustrates this characteristic by contrasting the host of apostolic ministers who have gone through Corinth with the church itself. Carnal people are not willing to suffer and Paul confronts their carnality in four different ways. Paul is not willing to allow this church to remain in their carnality!

A. A statement of their carnality (3:1-4)

As we come to chapter 3 in our text, we come to a place where there is a contrast between two different types of Christians. Chapter 2:6-16 contrasted the saved and the natural man, but chapter 3 speaks of those believers who are controlled by the Spirit of God and those who are not controlled by the Spirit.

I want to suggest that the carnal brothers and sisters at Corinth were having dialogue with the natural man. So, Paul is not able to address these believers as spiritual ones, but he has to address them as fleshly ones. They were unduly influenced by secular attitudes and values, and were blindly doing what their own flesh demanded of them. They were carnal. Carnality is devastating in its spiritual impact upon a local assembly. It cripples us. As a matter of fact, I like to compare the sin of carnality to the physical disease of cancer. Carnality is a powerful disease for which we have yet to find a cure. Carnality is just as devastating to the health of a church or the spiritual well-being of individual believers. Carnality will eat away at our church until the church is stripped of all its spiritual power (4:19).

Now, let's imagine the day (only a few months or years from now) when you are a minister of the gospel. ***How are you going to help the typical apathetic American couple identify and deal with their own carnality?*** What type of help are you going to give to the ones that come to your church whose lifestyle contradicts their profession of Christ as Lord of their lives? Well, after describing and characterizing the carnality of the Corinthian church, Paul lays out different ways to deal with this sin. We must learn Paul's strategy to deal with the sin of carnality!

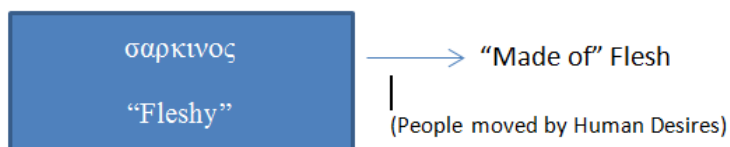
1. Descriptions of their carnality (3:1-3a) – *But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not ready. For you are still of the flesh.*

Paul describes the sin of carnality in two different ways in the first three verses of chapter 3.

- a. Carnality is a lack of spiritual maturity (1-2a). *But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it.*

The word *carnality* that is used in 3:1 means that they were made up of the flesh. They were fleshy. The word that is used here is **σαρκινος**, which speaks of their material relation to the world.

DIAGRAM-



So, Paul says that he could not address the Corinthian believers as spiritual people, but he had to address them as carnal people. ***Now, of what time is Paul referring with the first phrase of chapter 3?*** Well, Paul speaks of the time that he was at Corinth during his church plant visit or when he wrote the previous letter. They were fleshy people before their conversion and even directly following their salvation Paul had to limit the depth of his communication with them. They were infants in the Lord, so Paul had to feed them with ***milk***.

In verse 2, Paul tells them that he has to feed them with milk because they were not able to bear it. ***What is this milk teaching?*** This might be a figurative way of referring to basic Christian teaching. Paul would rather be speak to the Corinthians on a different level, but he could not do so. He would rather give them solid food. ***But what is this meat teaching?*** Meat teaching is teaching to convinced and obedient Christians who can handle discussing God's wisdom. This "solid food" is "more complex matters which require greater understanding."<sup>69</sup> Paul wishes that he could talk deeper spiritual truths, but he was forced to cover the ABC's of the Christian life.

- b. Carnality is a lack of spiritual purity (2b-3a). *And even now you are not ready. For you are still of the flesh.*

In the last part of verse 2, Paul says that the Corinthians are still not able to discuss the deeper truths of God's Word. Paul says that by now they should have been able to handle these things. And in verse 3, Paul gives the grounds for their inability. The reason that they are unable to digest solid food is because they are still carnal. Actually, Paul uses a different word to convey this idea of carnality. Paul uses the word ***σαρκικός***,<sup>70</sup> to show an ethical relation to the world. This is the real problem. Simply being built of fleshly things is not the problem that Paul is targeting. But the problem is that although they have been saved for a few years (some of them for 3-4 years); they are still carnal. The following diagram might help you understand the meaning of this word:

DIAGRAM-



So, I suggest that "carnality" (spiritual infancy) is not the normal condition of believers. Paul expected the Corinthians to be

<sup>69</sup>Ronald A. Trail, *An Exegetical Summary: 1 Corinthians 1-9*, 119.

<sup>70</sup>This distinction is based on context rather than *only* the word ending.

beyond this which suggests that they had been overly influenced by the world. Imagine a man who walks inside from the cold, although the forces of heat are decisive the influence of the cold may still influence him.

2. Evidence of their carnality (3:3b-4) – *For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely humans?*

After giving a description of their carnality, Paul proceeds to give different evidences of it within the local assembly at Corinth. He is like a great prosecuting attorney who lays out different exhibits to prove the guilt of this community.

- a. Exhibit A: they are full of envy.

The word *jealousy* means something comparable to envy or rivalry. Jealousy in its simplest form is wanting what someone else has. These are the inner feelings of envy. The Corinthians were more concerned with personal rights and advancement than they were the spiritual growth of other believers in the church.

- b. Exhibit B: they are full of strife.

They were also full of strife. The word *strife* means quarreling or disputes. This word speaks of the outward response of envious feelings. Whether this is face to face encounters or behind the back grumblings, the Corinthians must not allow disputes or quarrels to impact their Christian community.<sup>71</sup>

- c. Exhibit C: they are full of divisions (4).

They were also full of division. Some versions might actually have the word *division* in this text, but it is probably best not to have this word in verse 3. However, the concept of division is clearly implied in verse 4, when Paul says that some say that they follow Paul and others say that they follow Apollos. This church had divided into different groups following their own different spiritual super heroes. This is what merely human people do! They divide into different groups following after their own gooroos.

One day someone told Martin Luther that his followers were called “Lutherans.” When asked about this, he responded:

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<sup>71</sup>Where envy and strife are in evidence, Paul is reluctant to use the word “Spiritual.” But the actual situation at Corinth makes triumphant claims about being “people of the Spirit” look out of place and rather foolish. Thiselton, 286.

*Why would I be happy that they follow a maggot like me?*

Ironically, it was John Calvin who said,

*Those that extol men above measure, strip them of their true dignity. For the GRAND DISTINCTION of them all is . . . they gain disciples to Christ, not to themselves.*

B. The characteristics of their carnality (3:5-4:13)

After the clear statement of their carnality, Paul will give further characteristics of carnality. ***What does carnality really look like? What does infantile spiritual adulthood look like? How does a childish mindset express itself?*** Paul answers this question in two ways in our text.

1. Carnal people exalt human leadership to “icon status” (3:5-4:7).

Paul spends most of his energies to show the Corinthians that carnal people exalt human leadership to positions that they do not deserve. The Corinthians lacked spiritual discernment. People who function in a merely human way exalt human leaders to “icon status.” Some people in our modern world follow leaders as if they offer infallible leadership. Carnal people place undue value or emphasis upon the style or rhetorical performance of preachers. Have you ever talked with someone who boasted in a certain preacher? (ex. John MacArthur, John Piper) As Paul responds to demonstration of carnality, he gives the Corinthians several reminders before he demands a proper response from them.

a. Two Reminders about Human Leaders (3:5-17)

- 1) Reminder #1: All human leaders of the church are servants of God who cannot produce spiritual fruit without His blessing (3:5-9) – *What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.*

The first thing that Paul says about leaders in the church is that they are simply servants. I divide verses 5-9 into four different parts.

a) The insignificance of human leaders in the church (5)

There are two indications that Paul is now talking about the function of the Apostles and not the groups anymore. First, he uses the word “then” as a mark of transition.

Second, he uses a neuter interrogative instead of a masculine one. Instead of “who,” it is “what.” By referring to someone in this room by “what” (i.e. “What” is that?), I might offend him. But Paul is not refusing to recognize their existence as humans.

The neuter interrogative focuses attention on the function of these men, not their personality. Paul’s clear point in verse 5 is that Paul and Apollos are simply *servants*. This word is used to describe deacons in other passages, but the word simply speaks of their insignificance.

The idea of servant leadership is a vital part of the emphasis of this school. I love the fact that when you graduate (if you graduate!), you are given a towel that says, “Be great, serve.” Over the years, the concept of selfless service has been demonstrated to me by many of the faculty, staff, and administration at Northland. *Have you ever heard the story of Dr. Ollila and the elderly lady who had a tree down in her yard?* One day, Doc O was on his way to teach Sunday School at church. On his way he noticed that a large tree had fallen down across the driveway of an elderly woman’s property. So, what did Doc O do? He turned around and got his chainsaw. Then, he cut the tree in pieces and stacked the pieces up and put them along her driveway. He did all of this in his suit!

Doc O is not guilty of trying to build his own empire! He recognizes that he is a simple servant of a great God! We are all insignificant!

b) The differences among human leaders in the church (6a, 8b)

- There are different ministries which leaders perform within the church (6a).

After establishing the insignificance of these leaders in the church, Paul proceeds in verse 6 to describe the differences between them. He says, *I planted and Apollos watered*. Planting is a figurative description of proclaiming the gospel in evangelism or establishing a local assembly. Watering is a figurative term for assisting in the growth of another by instructing them. This word speaks of Apollos’ ministry to oversee the early growth of a sprout.

Each servant is given a job to do. Later in the semester, we will talk about the different spiritual gifts which have been given to believers to help them in their ministry. Each one of us is equipped to edify other believers within in the church and to glorify God. So, 1 Corinthians shows us that there is great diversity within the body of Christ.

*I believe that in our fundamental churches, we often shoot ourselves in the foot by rejecting those who have different gifts. Often when someone is not like us, perhaps even gifted like us, then we shy away from them. One example of this is when a pastor is not comfortable with evangelists. Sometimes this might be for doctrinal reasons, but often this seems to be more of a personal preference. Consequently, some pastors in our circles purposefully limit the influence of the evangelist in their assembly. We must be careful how we discriminate within the local assembly!*

- There are different rewards which leaders receive for their ministry within the church (8b).

Not only are there different kinds of ministries within a church, there are also different rewards which leaders receive for their ministry. In the last part of verse 8 it says that *every man will receive his own reward according to his own labor*. This means that according to or in proportion to our work here on earth, we will be rewarded. Some of us may be empowered by God to accomplish impossible things for his own glory. Others may not do much for the cause of Christ. Paul says that there is a legitimate difference in rewards according to our work on this earth.

c) The unity of human leaders in the church (8a)

In verse 8 it says, *now he that plants and he that waters are one*. This might mean that they are of the same source. Whatever the specific meaning, generally Paul wishes to articulate the great unity that leaders should enjoy in the church. Paul and Apollos were allies and friends, not rivals. They are colleagues. They are to work together to see souls saved and disciplined for the glory of God. This beauty of God's plan is that He calls different men and women with different abilities to minister to the same people in different ways.



- d) The empowerment of human leaders in the church (6b-7, 9)

Finally, we must also discover the empowerment of human leaders. This is definitely the main idea of this text. Paul repeats the concept that *God is the one who gives the growth* in verses 6 and 7. The word *God* is also mentioned three times in verse 9. Paul is emphasizing God's part in producing the increase within the body of Christ. Two ideas make Paul's argument.

- God is the source of spiritual growth (6b-7). *But God gives the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.*

While the Corinthians loved to exalt other humans, Paul clearly reminds them that God is the one who all along the way has produced the blessing in Corinth. Although Paul and Apollos were faithful, God was the one to provide the growth. To stick a plant into the ground and water it does nothing. It takes a work of God for there to be any physical or spiritual growth.

- Believers belong to God (9). *For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.*

While there is definitely much that one might emphasize in verse 9, it is first important to see that Paul and Apollos were faithful co-workers with God. He says that they were co-workers, but that the church at Corinth was God's field and God's building. The field imagery portrays the church at Corinth as a fertile piece of land that is awaiting the blessing of God. This image might bring to the minds of the Corinthians the fields located on the plain just below Corinth. The city itself was a dry Mediterranean city, but the fields outside of Corinth were famous for their wonderful production of grapes.

The church is also God's building. This imagery is probably expanded in the discussion of the temple of God that we will see in our very next passage.

However, there is one great emphasis of verse 9. Let me literally translate this verse and see if you are able to pick out the emphasis:

*We are fellow-workers of God, you are a field of God, you are a building of God.*

The main emphasis is “of God.” Everything is “of God” in verse 9. Apostles were simply servants who cannot produce fruit if left to themselves. God is the one who much produce growth!

Tragically, when we attach great importance to one leader within the body of Christ, we normally neglect and undermine the ministry of God.<sup>72</sup>

- 2) Reminder #2: God will hold all human leaders accountable for how they minister in the church (3:10-17).

Not only are all human leaders simply servants of an almighty God, they will also be held accountable for what they do in the church.

There is some question as to whether this passage directly speaks to the bema judgment of ordinary believers, but it might be helpful as a resource. Actually, there are **four major NT passages which approach this topic** (Rev 4-5, 2 Cor. 5:1-10, Rom. 14, and 1 Cor. 3:10-17). First Corinthians 3 describes the future judgment of those who minister within the church. Have you ever wondered what the **Bema Judgment of believers** will be like?

- Some say that it will be a time of mourning. I call this view the **movie screen** view of the Bema judgment. These people believe (and preach!) that all of the actions and motives of a believer will be manifested at the Bema judgment in front of all the other believers. This will produce shame and sadness to those who have continued in sin while on earth. They state that God will **manifest the hidden counsels of the heart**.
- Others say that the Bema will be a time of rejoicing. This is the **party** view of the Bema. They state that only the good things that believers do will be brought up at the Bema since Jesus Christ paid for all our sins and believers are **under no condemnation**. They also state that there are **no tears** in heaven and they might even quote

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<sup>72</sup>Thiselton, 290. Carnal people have an “infantile obsession” with point-scoring rhetoric in their preachers.

the promise of God: *as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed my transgressions from me.*

But which of these views is right? Or is there another view of the Bema which better reflects the judgment of believers? Let's look at 1 Cor 3 to learn more of God's judgment on the apostles. This passage teaches us to examine how Christian ministers live their lives. Verses 10-17 give the outcome of two different types of leaders. Some will experience reward, while others will experience painful retribution.

- a) Worthy leaders of the church experience reward in heaven (3:10-14). *According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled masterbuilder I laid the foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw- each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.*

Verses 10-14 describe the *authentic ministry* of worthy leaders. There are three aspects of authentic ministry which Paul describes in these verses.

- The nature of authentic ministry (10-11)

The nature of authentic ministry is God-given, Christ-centered, and people-powered.

- It is God-given.

Paul says in verse 10, *according to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder.* Paul here acknowledges the fact that his ministry was a direct result of the enablement and empowerment of God. This functions as an indirect personal defense of the apostolic ministry of Paul the Apostle.

So, he admits that it is only because of God's undeserved favor that he is able to do anything which lasts in ministry. One interesting observation of this paragraph is

the fact that there are no specific names mentioned. Once again, Paul is not concerned with personalities, but he is ultimately concerned to stress the role of God in ministry.

- It is Christ-centered (11).

The second quality describing the nature of an authentic ministry is Christ-centeredness. The very first word of verse 11 reveals the grounds or reason why Christian ministers should be careful. Let each man take heed how he builds in the church, because the foundation is Jesus Christ.

**Christ** is both the starting point and the ending point of true Christianity. He is to be the very center of our worship to God. An apostolic example of keeping Christ as the center of our preaching is found in the book of Acts. In Acts 3-4, Peter is given a great opportunity to preach because of the praise of the leaping, lame man. This man was healed by the apostolic team and then began to shout praise to God. As a result of his spontaneous praise to God, a large crowd gathered around. So, Peter takes advantage of this situation and begins to preach to them in the name of Jesus Christ.

Notice in Acts 3:16, near the beginning of his sermon, Peter speaks of Jesus Christ.

*And HIS NAME through faith in HIS NAME hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.*

Later, near his conclusion, Peter says,

*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).*

So, Christ is both the starting point and the ending point of Peter's preaching in the temple. We also need to keep Christ as the true foundation of our ministry and teaching in the church.

- It is people-powered.(Empowered by People)

In verse 11, Paul describes the fact that he worked as a wise master builder. Paul was an architect (chief carpenter or mason) who was concerned with proclaiming Jesus Christ as the foundation. *Paul's specialty was foundations.* Do you remember 1 Cor 2:2? Paul says, *For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.* Paul was very concerned with Christ, his crucifixion for sins and his resurrection. He was evangelistic.

Alternatively, there were others who built upon that foundation. However, Paul reminds them that every person must be careful as to how he builds upon that foundation. His point is that people are also a part of the ministry of the church.

- The deeds of authentic ministry (12-13)

In a time in which churches feel free to use any method or motive to reach the lost, this passage is crucial because Paul makes the bold point that ***not all work done*** in the name of God will last. There are ***two points*** which Paul makes in this text about our motives or deeds in ministry.

- Deeds are important.

Look at verses 12 and 13. Paul briefly gives six different types of materials which could be used in building a real building. He says, ***GOLD, SILVER, PRECIOUS STONES, WOOD, HAY, STUBBLE. If you had to break these six materials for building up into two groups, how would you do so?***

This is where this passage can be a little controversial. Some people believe that all six are legitimate ingredients to a building and so must represent six good types of building materials. They even go back to the OT Scriptures and argue that the 1<sup>st</sup> four elements were used in the building of Solomon's temple. But they have a hard time explaining the last two, unless they make some sort of weak reference to the buildings which were constructed by the Israelites in Egypt!

However, it is best to divide this group up into two groups because of the fire which is mentioned in this text. These materials will be tested by fire and the fire will try every man's work of what sort it is. So, the best interpretation of this passage is that the first three—gold, silver, precious stones—represent ***non-combustible*** things, whereas the last three—wood, hay, stubble—represent ***combustible things***.

So, it appears that the good elements are a metaphorical way to describe teaching in its content and delivery which rejects worldly wisdom. In some form or another, the word wisdom is used twenty-seven different times in the first six chapters of 1 Corinthians. So, I propose to you that these building materials represent two different ways of ministering in a church. The Corinthians were emphasizing ***cultural sophia***; they were drawn to ***oratorical invention*** instead of the cross of Christ.

THE SUBSTANCES UNDER EXAMINATION THEN ARE DEEDS WHICH ARE DONE WITH THE WORLD'S WISDOM OR PHILOSOPHY.
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Specifically – how they teach.

- The Day will be revealed.

When you get to verse 13 in the text, we learn that something will be revealed.

There are two different options as to what will be revealed. Either the word *it* speaks of the works of different ministers or *it* speaks of the Day. While either might be in Paul's mind here, it is probably best to see that the Day will be revealed by fire.

2 Thessalonians 1 speaks of a day when angels will come with flaming fire inflicting judgment upon those that oppose the Thessalonians. That passage *may or may not* speak of this same day, but it is at least helpful to see that the coming of the Lord is revealed with fire. The word *fire* is probably speaks of the consuming ability of the examination of Christ. Notice also that the fire will try or test the nature of each one's work.

***But what does this mean to us presently?*** Well, it means that the some of the wisdom of this world which has crept into our churches will not be revealed or manifested until that time. This also means that some of the wood, hay, and stubble which is used in ministries presently are not ***outlandish denials of Christ***, but might be more like subtle sinful things. This means that we cannot allow our own opinion of ministry or the status quo in American churches to dictate what we do. We must be quick to compare our teaching to the Scriptures in order that we might enjoy authentic ministry.

- The reward of authentic ministry (14)

Finally, Paul speaks of the rewards which ministers receive. I want you to notice that there are "three 'if' statements" which start three of the next four verses. These are conditional statements which imply that some will do this and some will not. Some men's work will abide and some will not. Some men's work will be burned and some will not. Some will defile the temple of God and some will not.

In verse 14, there is a promise of reward to those who are faithful in their ministry. Specifically, the

text says *if anyone's work abides, he shall receive a reward*. At the Day of the Lord in the future, all work will be exposed and tested and those whose work remains will receive wages. This might be in reference to the crowns which faithful believers will be able to inherit and cast at the feet of Christ.

***Is it wrong to motivate believers with the promise of future blessings?***

- b) Unworthy leaders will be dealt with by God (15-17). *If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

By the time that we get to verse 15 in our text, Paul's ultimate purpose for this paragraph becomes clear. All human leaders will be held accountable for what they do in the church. Some will receive reward, but others will suffer from a different fate. Actually, there are two ways in which unworthy leaders will be dealt with by God.

- Unworthy leaders will experience a lack of reward in heaven (15).

First, they should expect to experience a lack of reward in heaven for their ministry on earth. It says in verse 15 that some will suffer loss for their unfaithfulness: *If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss*. In English we often express this idea by saying that something will be **burned up**, however the Greek concept might be that these things will be **burned down**. It was very typical for the ancient Greeks to talk this way, because of the charcoaled ruins of buildings or in some cases entire cities which were hazed and burned down to the ground.

The word for **suffer loss** comes from the Greek word ζημιόω. This is not the normal word for punishment, but means "to deprive someone of something."<sup>73</sup> It also speaks of a form of judgment which takes away privilege. This loss then will be

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<sup>73</sup>Anthony Thiselton, 314.



the loss of reward or perhaps the loss of watching your works be destroyed by fire.

However, as bad as it gets for this Christian minister, ***he himself will be saved as through fire.*** This phrase is an idiom which means “to escape with difficulty, to have a narrow escape.”<sup>74</sup>

Summary:

So, it is best to see the bema judgment not as a movie screen reenactment of all of our sins or a time of utmost rejoicing, but as a time when the works of Christians will be judged. **Our sin will not be on the table.** The claims and condemnation of my unregenerate past will not be on the table. This is not a judgment of sins, past, present, or future. Christ’s blood covers all that! So, if Satan would ask God: ***Do you know what Brent Belford did when he was on earth?*** God would say, ***No, I will not remember his sin!***

**But, works done for Christ will be on the table.** Our works will be passed through the fire and some will survive, while others are burned up! The works which survive the judgment will bring reward that we are able to dispense at the feet of the one to whom it is all due. Since ***any good work which a believer is able to accomplish is faith-inspired, Spirit-empowered, and God-enabled*** we will rightly cast these rewards at the feet of our Savior. The worst part of this judgment will not be a painful reliving of all of my sinful actions, thoughts, and motives since conversion, but the ***lack of rewards*** to offer my Lord! When in the presence of our wonderful Lord, a lack of reward will be judgment enough!

Any Questions?

- Unworthy leaders will also experience Divine retribution (16-17).

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<sup>74</sup>Ronald Trail, 144.

However, a lack of eternal reward is not the only fate which an unworthy minister of the gospel should expect. Paul takes it a step further to discuss the type of Divine retribution which this sort of teacher should expect.

To develop his idea, Paul quickly transitions (without a conjunction) to a form of a rebuke. He says, “don’t you know.” What Paul uncovers in verse 16 should be painfully obvious to the church at Corinth. They are the temple of God and God’s temple is to be holy. This should be common knowledge to them. In chapter 3, Paul explains that they collectively are the temple of God. Sometimes, people confuse this idea and passage with chapter 6 which also talks about the temple of God. However, in chapter 6, the temple of God is the individual body of a believer. In chapter 3, Paul describes the universal church as God’s temple.

Now, the word which Paul uses for temple is not the ordinary word for temple in the Septuagint **ἱερόν**. That word was used to describe the temple with all of its precincts and courts. In our passage, Paul uses a more precise way to describe the church. He uses the word **ναός** to describe the church. This word was used to denote God’s special dwelling place on earth in the OT. This word was used to describe the *Holy of Holies*. While the city of Corinth boasted of over twenty-six different temples, there was one particular sanctuary for God Almighty in Corinth, and they were it!

The Old Covenant was calculated to keep men at a distance from God. Yet, now the Holiest is open and we are it! Hebrews 7:19 says, *For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh to God. **God desires Holy of Holy Worshippers*** and He devised a way in Christ for us to enjoy intimate fellowship with Him.

Now, having developed the idea of the sanctity of the church, Paul proceeds in verse 17 to establish his main emphasis. He says, *if anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him*. The words for ***destroys*** and ***destroy*** come from the same root

word, only with different tense and number. If anyone presently, actively destroys God's house, then God will ultimately, actively destroy them. The same word is used to show the justice in this retribution. In the OT, if one was to defile the holy sanctuary of God, He took it very seriously. And the truth is that God still takes it personally, when one would defile His temple!

b. Responses (3:18-4:7)

After laying out two reminders for the church at Corinth, Paul continues by declaring four responses which he expects from the Corinthians. These responses will lead the church away from making "icons" out of their human leaders.

- 1) Response #1: We must purposefully reject mere human wisdom (18-20). *Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."*

Paul's first reminder occurs in verses 18-20. He states that they must purposely reject mere human wisdom. In these verses, Paul challenges those who believe that they are truly wise but evaluate their own wisdom according to a worldly measuring stick. These believers are wise by the standards of this age. So, Paul says: ***let no one deceive himself***. There were some at Corinth who thought that they were wise, but they were actually foolish.

One of the great tragedies concerning those who think highly of themselves is that they are often completely blind to their own arrogance and foolishness. So, Paul directly appeals to any Corinthian who was adhering to the wisdom of this world. The very first word in verse 19, "for" indicates "the reason for renouncing the world's wisdom is because it is folly in God's eyes."<sup>75</sup> It is not a neutral thing to accept insights of the world and adopt them in the church! It is folly in God's eyes to do so.

Paul actually uses two passages to illustrate the ability of God to catch the wise in their own scheming. The first quote from the OT is taken from the book of Job (Job 5:13 – in the speech of Eliphaz): *He catches the wise in their craftiness*. In this text, Eliphaz begins to question the integrity of Job and reminds him

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<sup>75</sup>Ronald Trail, 151.

that God is able to catch those who think that they are wise in their own craftiness. Although, Eliphaz had not properly diagnosed the situation with Job and was ignorant of the scheming of Satan, he was still correct in his opinion of God's ability! Ironically this quote comes from Eliphaz who is himself discredited because of his human wisdom.<sup>76</sup>

The second quote is taken from Psalm 94:11: *The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile*. This Psalm is a declaration about the "apparent prosperity" of the wicked. Paul uses this Psalm to show that the thoughts of the wise are fruitless or without results ***even when it is not immediately apparent***.

These two quotations prove a similar point. As a matter of fact, this combined quotation is joined with the words "and again," which indicates that the second quotation further proves the point of the first. Paul appeals to these quotes in order that the Corinthians would reject the wisdom which comes from this present evil age even if it appears to be successful.

- 2) Response #2: We must not boast in men (3:21-23). *So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future- all are yours, and you are Christ's and Christ is God's.*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> response which Paul expects from the Corinthians is that they would choose not to boast in men. The word "so" at the beginning of verse 21 indicates a conclusion to Paul's powerful arguments thus far. Paul says they should not boast or glory in men since all things were actually the church's possession. The entire universe is the full possession and inheritance of the church.

With the first three of these descriptions, Paul shows how the Corinthians had the wrong priorities. ***Why does he mention Paul, Apollos, and Peter again?*** Well, it is because the Corinthians claimed that they belonged to Apollos or Paul or Peter. The Corinthians boasted in these men like they were servant to them. Yet, Paul says that all these men are the servants of the Corinthians.

The following diagram represents the way that the Corinthians thought about apostles:

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<sup>76</sup>Richard Longenecker suggests that by combining these two quotes together, Paul is able to suggest that the words of Eliphaz are "authoritative, whereas the context of Job suggests otherwise" (Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 100).



However, a proper view might look more like this:



You see, the church is not property of the apostles, but the apostles are property and ministers of the church.

The transition to the second group of five is a rather rough one. Paul says that the *world, life, death, present things, and future things* are all servant to the church. The word **world** speaks of the entire created order. The words **life** and **death** are mentioned to show that “Christians are not slaves to the whims of chance or the pressures of life and death.”<sup>77</sup> Then Paul includes events in the **present** or in the **future** as a servant to the church. It is as if Paul unfolds his impatience with this problem. These five things sum up all that a man may cling to or fear. This deliberate piling up of terms shows the comprehensive possession of believers because of their vital union to Jesus Christ.

However, he is not finished. Paul sets up a chain. While all these things are the full possession of the church, this is only true because they belong to Christ. “From the beginning of the letter Paul is adamant that the Corinthians belong to God and not to anyone or anything else, having been consecrated or set apart from himself.”<sup>78</sup> Paul is concerned all throughout the book that the Corinthians demonstrate holiness.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Ronald Trail, 156.

<sup>78</sup>Bill Salier, “Holiness in 1 Corinthians,” 61.

<sup>79</sup>(Locate the different occurrences of holiness throughout the book.) This theme was important for Paul and should remain so for us today! Sadly, however, one of the challenges of ministering in our generation is to figure out how to talk about holiness without being immediately censured and marginalized.

***They belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.*** They must not boast in men, but should alternatively boast in Christ!

- 3) Response #3: We must not pronounce premature verdicts (4:1-5). *This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that they be found trustworthy. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.*

The third way which Paul expects the Corinthians to respond to their leaders is that he does not want them to pronounce premature evaluations. In making this declaration in the first five verses of chapter 4, Paul talks about the quality that is important in ministers and the evaluation of them that matters most.

- a) Faithfulness in ministry is important (1-2). *This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that they be found trustworthy.*

***What do we often focus on when we speak of great preachers or teachers in the church?*** (Popularity, personality, style of preaching – expositor verses applicational preacher, degrees) ***But what is the most important quality that God looks for in His ministers?*** (Faithfulness in the stewardship of the gifts given to them)

In the 1<sup>st</sup> two verses of chapter 4, there are two different words which Paul uses to help us understand his role as a servant of the Lord. First,<sup>80</sup> Paul says that others are to look at him as a ***servant*** of Christ. This is the Greek word υπερετες, which is not the normal word for servant. The word was originally used of under-rowers who did their work in the gallery of a ship, but it came to mean something like an underling by the time Paul uses the word. When Paul uses this word to describe himself and some of the apostolic team, he means to emphasize the type of menial, unenviable,

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<sup>80</sup> "To use servile language to refer to leaders, instead of using the regular vocabulary of leadership may have startled Paul's leaders." Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 126.

and difficult service that they provide to the Lord. This word implies a more intense form of service than the other words which Paul could have used here.

Second, Paul also says that he is a **steward**. This word simply means a house manager or person who is in control of another's estate. A steward would oversee a large estate. He was a manager or administrator. Specifically, Paul says that he was a steward of the mysteries of God. Paul was entrusted to dispense God's Word to man. God decided to convey His revelation through these stewards.

So, Paul was a slave in relation to his master, but he was given a very precious task of administering the revelation of God to man. However, to be a steward was not enough! Ultimately, Paul shows that a steward must be **faithful** in order to please the Almighty God. This is a very common Greek word, **πιστος**, which means trustworthy. It could be translated-"full of belief." In some passages this word speaks of an on-going belief in God which enables one to please Him (Heb. 11:6). In our passage, the faithfulness under consideration involves the servant's ability to obey God's words and to teach in a way that is true to what He said. So, faithfulness in stewardship is the single-most important quality that God looks for in his servants.

- b) The Lord's evaluation of ministers is coming (3-5). *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.*

This leads Paul into a discussion of the evaluation of his stewardship. In verses 3-5, Paul speaks about three different ways in which he might be evaluated in ministry. These represent three different levels of evaluation.

- Human judgment has minimal value to Paul (3a). *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court.*

In verse 3, Paul says that it is a very small thing to be judged of men. Human court is then of little value to Paul. Man's opinion of his stewardship meant very

little to Paul. Paul's status is independent of human opinion.

Yet, this is the type of examination that so often consumes us! We are so concerned with how others perceive us! Paul says that human evaluation is of little value.

It is also important to remember that in chapter 6, some were insisting on their right to be tried by a human tribunal. Some of the Corinthians were obsessed with temporal wealth and thus were insistent upon their right to be properly evaluated by human officials. However, Paul tells them to rather be defrauded.

- Personal inspection is limited (3b-4a). *In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted.*

The second level of judgment which Paul describes is his own personal evaluation of his ministry. He moves beyond the judgment of men and moves toward his own opinion of his ministry. ***Here Paul says that he does not even judge himself, but later in chapter 11, he says that we are all to judge ourselves (read 11:27-29). Paul also says in chapter 5 that we are to judge those within the church (read 5:11-13, 3). How can we explain his logic in these passages?***

Well, Paul wishes to do a few things in our text. First, he wants to know the limited value of our declarations of the integrity of our ministry. What I say cannot lead to my own acquittal. Second, Paul also wants us to realize that our own inspection can be dangerous, in that we can be wrong! We are to examine ourselves and judge blatant sin in the lives of others, but ***we must never take the place of Christ as the ultimate judge of life.*** Personal inspection and evaluation are good, but pronouncing a final verdict is foolish.

- The Lord's judgment is reliable (4b-5). *It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.*



*Then each one will receive his commendation from God.*

Finally, Paul moves to the type of judgment which is crucial for a steward of Christ. Paul says at the end of verse 4 that *it is the Lord who judges me*. Later, in verse 5, Paul describes the judgment of the Lord upon ministers of the gospel as a judgment which is true. Two things are necessary for a proper evaluation.

First, one must have **complete knowledge of the facts of a case**. Second, one must have **full insight into the motives involved in a case**. For instance, let's talk about a mother who is guilty of killing her baby, but claims that she did so as a mercy-killing. Let's suppose that her child was suffering with some sort of terminal respiratory disease or some type of terminal cancer. Perhaps, the mother states that she took the life of her baby, because she could no longer stand to watch the child suffer so much! Why are these types of cases difficult for a human judge and jury? Well, because we cannot fully know her motives (love, fatigue, frustration, bitterness, etc.).<sup>81</sup> Paul says that there is a coming a time when the Lord will judge and ***bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the heart***. The Lord's judgment is reliable and upon his Day of Judgment, every minister will have praise of God. This implies that every servant will have something to offer to God.

However, the main point of verse 5 and this whole passage for that matter is found in the very first part of that verse. Paul says, *Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time*. Faithfulness is the expectation of ministers and the Lord will launch a full inspection of them one day, so we should not pronounce premature judgment on them.

- 4) Response #4: We must remember that God is the source of all spiritual giftedness (4:6-7). *I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If*

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<sup>81</sup>"As hypocrites, humans camouflage their evil intentions from others with shows of piety to deceive, and often end up deceiving themselves in the process." Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 128. What are your motives?

*then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*

Finally, Paul encourages the Corinthians to remember the true source of all spiritual giftedness. In verse 6 we learn that Paul has recorded these things to protect against a lofty view of the apostles. Paul has used figurative language about fields and houses and house managers to teach the Corinthians the lesson that apostles should not be lifted to “icon status.” I wonder how Paul would feel about the Roman Catholic tradition of lifting some of the apostles up to the status of a ‘saint’?

In verse 7, Paul asks three rhetorical questions of the Corinthians. ***Who gives us these gifts? What do you have that God did not give to you? Why do you pretend that you are the original source of your own giftedness?***

In typical Pauline fashion, he concludes this section by asking obvious questions. The Corinthians do not need a lofty view of the apostles,<sup>82</sup> they need a lofty view of God. He is the source of ***all spiritual giftedness***, and He is the source of ***all spiritual growth***, and He is the source of ***all spiritual fruit***.

2. Carnal people are unwilling to endure much suffering for the sake of Christ (4:8-13).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> characteristic of carnality is an unwillingness to endure much affliction for the sake of Christ. In verses 8-13, Paul reveals that the Corinthians are well-liked by the world around them instead of enduring affliction. Paul is also forced to speak frankly about his own ministry so that the Corinthians might see the need to be a public picture of Christ to this world.

There is a poem which has meant a great deal to me over the years. The poem is entitled, ***Hast Thou No Scar?*** It is written by Amy Carmichael. Listen carefully to the words of this poem with special attention to the middle section which talks about what Christ had to go through being wounded, hung on a cross, and encompassed by a cloud of demonic forces.

*Hast thou no scar? No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?  
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land. I hear them hail thy bright  
ascendant star;  
Hast thou no scar?*

*Hast thou no wound? Yet, I was wounded by the archers, spent!  
Leaned me against a tree to die, and rent*

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<sup>82</sup>Boasting in human leaders “not only divides and destroys communities,” it also strips God of His Glory. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 125.

*By ravening beasts that compassed me, I swooned  
Hast thou no wound?*

*No wound, no scar. Yes, as the Master shall the servant be  
And pierced are the feet that follow me,  
But thine are whole!  
Can he have followed far, who has no wound, no scar?*

Our text speaks of the need for believers to become a picture of the suffering Christ to the world around us. Paul explains to the Corinthians that they must become a public picture of Jesus Christ, but carnal people are not “quick” to pay this high a price. Let’s do a case study in two very different types of Christians.

- a. A striking contrast between Paul and the church at Corinth (4:8-10) – *Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.*

The first three verses of this passage give us a striking contrast between Paul the church at Corinth. As we study these two different models, we must decide which one relates more to our present condition. ***Which one of these two (Paul or the Corinthians) is a closer picture of your approach to the world?***

- 1) Paul was not glamorous.

In my youth, I always thought that it would be so glamorous to be like Paul. But I think that we will find out from these verses today that it was not like that at all. Some of us may have even looked down on Paul for his harsh approach to life. Paul gives four specific descriptions of himself at this point.

- a) He was a public spectacle.

First, we see that Paul was a public spectacle to the world. Of course, a spectacle is something that is not glamorous. It is repulsive. It is lowly and embarrassing. Verse 9 states that *God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.* When Paul says that the apostles were like men ***brought out last***, and men ***sentenced to death***, and men ***who were spectacles***, he may have a vivid picture in mind. Some suggest that Paul is speaking here in reference to those who would be brought

out last in the barbaric Roman gladiatorial games. These men would face brutal warriors or ferocious animals. Others suggest that this picture is of a Roman triumphal procession.<sup>83</sup> When Rome was successful in a single battle to kill more than 500 men of the opposing forces, they would have a victory parade in either the city of Rome or the host city. At this procession, the victorious general would be honored and given a place in the middle of the procession. At the very end of the parade, some of the most infamous captives would be chained and drug through the streets. These men would either be executed or would be sold into a life of slavery.

Whichever, picture Paul has in mind, the point is that the apostles were seen as a spectacle. They were sure to die! We would look down at such a picture of weakness and affliction today, but how did Paul approach his position?

Paul loved it. For him it was nothing more than Philippians 3:10: *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS.* Paul wanted to be like Christ and that meant that he was a spectacle. Isaiah 53 describes the Messiah as one who endured much affliction. Notice the powerful prophecy concerning what Christ faced in ministry:

*He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

***Surely Christ knew what is meant to suffer and to be viewed as a spectacle!*** I must stop here and ask you: *What is your approach to the world?* Some of us will not even share one word with another about Jesus Christ. Some of us will not even give out one tract in the course of a year, unless someone else prods us to do so. Maybe you are not much like a public spectacle, but are more like a powerless

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<sup>83</sup> See 2 Cor 2 Notes

mute for Christ! We must be a picture of Christ to the world around us even if that means that we suffer.

b) He was a fool.

In verse 10, Paul states that the apostles were fools for Christ. Here he says that the world perceived them like morons! This word comes from the Greek word, *μωροί*. To the world, Paul's life and testimony were a waste.

So, although Paul was a fool, a failure, and a flake in the eyes of the world; he looked an awful lot like Christ.

c) He was weak.

He was also considered weak. He was not a good speaker; he was not a tower of a man. He not a picture of stately strength, but was weak!

Yet, in his weakness, he won more souls for Christ than probably all of the Corinthians believers put together.

d) He was despised.

Finally, Paul was also despised. With this description, Paul reveals that some people looked down upon him. This is definitely true concerning those in the lost world around Paul, but it is probably also true that some in the church did not appreciate what Paul was doing. They were not of his group! Paul's group was probably quite small!

So, Paul was a public spectacle; he was considered a fool; he was looked on as weak; and many people despised him. Basically, then ***Paul lived under the sign of the cross*** (see 2 Cor 4:10). It was not glamorous to be like Paul as he boldly confronted the strategy of this world!

2) The church at Corinth was comfortable and deceived.

Before we jump forward into verse 11, let's take a few minutes to contrast the condition of Paul with the position of the church at Corinth. Paul was not glamorous, but the church was comfortable and deceived.

a) They were comfortable materially.

The comfort that the Corinthians rejoiced in was material comfort. In verse 8, Paul says that they ***had all they want***. This speaks of their abundance of food; they were full. They

were **rich** which speaks of their abundance of wealth. They had it made financially compared to Paul. They were comfortable!

There are dangers to material comfort! One danger involves complacency in our Christ walk and in our prayer life. Another danger involves a lack of dependence or trust upon God because we have full checking and savings accounts. Truthfully, what do you trust more- a thousand dollars in savings or a night in prayer before God who owns all of the riches of this world?

b) They were deceived mentally.

Not only were they comfortable materially, they were also deceived mentally. I have interpreted the next phrase in verse 8 to teach this. It says, *Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!* The Corinthians truthfully thought that they had it made both materially and spiritually. They were acting as if the kingdom of God had already arrived and that they were it. So, Paul says he wishes that were true because they will only be kings after Christ returns and then Paul will rule with them.

So, it appears that Paul is rebuking them with this statement. A few verses later, he will also critique them by saying that if there is any present demonstration of the kingdom in this world it includes supernatural power and is not all about words. Thus, Paul wanted the Corinthians to realize that they were deceived spiritually. They thought that they were reigning, but that was not the case at all.

Gordon Fee gives two wonderful applications to the modern church in his commentary on 1 Corinthians. He states,

*Application 1-Perhaps we are much more like the Corinthian church than any of us would dare admit!!! We ARE rich, we ARE well-filled, and too often we are blind to our own desperate needs.*

*Application 2-Perhaps also if we were a little more like our Lord and Paul, we too would know what it means to suffer ridicule for his name.*

Some of you might say that all of this talk about persecution and suffering is for Paul and for Christ in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. Certainly, we do not need to endure suffering in the 21<sup>st</sup>

Century. Well, what does the modern church in America today do with 2 Timothy 3:12? It says,

*Yea, all that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*

- b. A startling description of genuine followers of Jesus Christ (4:11-13)-  
*To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.*

Now, let's leap forward to verse 11. We do not have time to look at these verses in much detail, but we will at least see three important qualities of the follower of Christ. The one who will model his or her life after the supreme example of Christ will exhibit these three characteristics.

- 1) A genuine follower of Christ is persecuted.

First, a true follower of Christ is persecuted. "Where did Paul get this idea? Was he just paranoid because of his own history of persecuting Christians? No, he got idea from Jesus. Jesus himself had said, 'If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also' (John 15:20)." <sup>84</sup>

In our text, Paul gives ***six descriptions of his own ministry.***

1-He hungered.

2-He thirsted.

3-He was poorly dressed (naked).

4-He was buffeted. This word speaks of "unprovoked, vulgar, physical mistreatment." <sup>85</sup> It means to be cuffed or beaten to inflict pain. It was also used when someone was hit with the fist or with the palm of a hand.

5-He was homeless. (a traveler)

6-He worked with his own hands. This is not the normal word for work, but implied toilsome labor.

These six descriptions declare that Paul was persecuted for the cause of Christ. As a matter of fact, tradition declares that both

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<sup>84</sup>Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament: Promise Made*, 394.

<sup>85</sup>Louw and Nida.

Peter and Paul were killed for their faith at the hands of the Roman ruler, Nero. A true follower of Christ is persecuted.

2) A genuine follower of Christ is patient.

A true follower of Christ is also patient. We can notice this idea by observing the three responses of Paul in ministry.

a) He blesses those who revile him.

Although Paul was *railed at* or *cursed*, he blessed others. Although spoken, verbal abuse was heaped upon him, he blessed men. How hard is that to do? Where do you suppose Paul learned this response? Christ could have called twelve legions of angels to destroy the world and set him free, but instead he chose to die quietly. Paul blessed those who persecuted him.

b) He endures through suffering.

Paul also suffered through persecution. Being persecuted, Paul endured, or bore it patiently.

c) He answers kindly in the face of public defamation.

Finally, we learn that Paul answered kindly in the face of the public defamation of his character.

Can you see that Paul was patient? He did not lash out at his attackers to preserve his own credibility, but he continued on. *Will you suffer patiently as a follower of Christ?*

3) A genuine follower of Christ is not popular.

So, a follower of Christ is persecuted, patient, and also not popular. Finally, Paul uses two word pictures here to describe himself and the other apostles. These word pictures are not very flattering at all.

a) He is made as the filth of the world.

The word scum could be translated filth. In the opinion of the world, Paul was filth. This word was used to describe the filth that would be scraped off the floor of a building or the polluted streets of a city.

b) He is made as the refuse of all things.



The word for refuse is a word that would be used to describe the waste from a human or animal. Many considered him like animal or human refuse.

Paul was not well accepted of the world, whereas the Corinthian church was dangerously well-liked and accepted by the world. Will you give up your dreams of being admired or well-respected by the world? This will mean that you do not act like the world, or perhaps even dress like the world. This will certainly mean that you do not party like the world and drink like the world. I am afraid that many of God's children in our world today have so "dumbed-down" our call to be the **salt of the earth**, that the salt has definitely lost its savor. We have so dimmed our role as the **light of the world** that we are at best a night-light or flicker for Jesus! We must be a public picture of Jesus Christ. We must be willing to bear our own scars and wounds for Christ! Carnal people avoid suffering and persecution because of their fascination with comfort and achievement.

C. The solution to their carnality: loving confrontation (4:14-21)

Now that we are approaching the end of this section, Paul finally gets to the solution to their carnality. His solution is loving confrontation.

***How do you feel about confrontation? What are some of the feelings that you have about confronting someone else?*** Although many of us do not like the idea of confrontation, the Scriptures have much to say about it. In our text, Paul's answer to their carnality is confrontation on different levels. In this discussion Paul articulated three truths about confrontation.

1. The means of loving confrontation (4:14-17) – *I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.*

First, we will see the means of confrontation. We often think that confrontation is a direct face to face encounter, but Paul uses four different means of confrontation to warn the believers in Corinth. ***What are they?***

- a. Paul used a letter to confront them.

In verse 14, Paul says that he **writes**. His writings were with such deep feelings and emotion, because he needed to warn them. He did not want to simply shame them. Shame meant that only their feelings would be touched. But he needed to warn them. This is a very strong word

(*νοουθετεω*), which was directed at their heart. Paul knew that something was wrong with the church, and so he writes to correct their behavior.

Perhaps you have a friend or a relative who is making wrong choices and running away from God. It may be that God would have you sit down and write them a letter or email expressing your concern for them. Paul used a letter to confront them.

- b. Paul used his example to confront them.

In verses 15 and 16, Paul shows that he uses his own example as a means of confronting his children. He says, *I have begotten you and be ye followers of me*. Thus, in these verses Paul appeals to his Fatherhood of these believers. He makes the point that he spiritually birthed those in Corinth and that they should be loyal to him. So, he says – *imitate me*. This represents the height of presumption or it may reflect one of the most profound insights of all time on how to reproduce Christians!

He also contrasts his relationship to them as a father with the ten thousand instructors which they have in Corinth. This instructor (*παιδαγωγας*) was a slave who had the responsibility for the son of a wealthy family. These sort of servants were a dime a dozen. Paul speaks this way to stress the nature of his own relationship to the Corinthians.

- c. Paul used his friend to confront them.

In verse 17, Paul explains why he sent Timothy to the Corinthians. Personally, this is my favorite method of confrontation: send in my friend to confront them! Paul sent Timothy to Corinth so that they might be reminded of Paul's ways. Paul was a spiritual mentor of young Timothy. So, Paul sent his understudy to the Corinthians because he wanted them to follow him.

By the time that Paul wrote this letter to them, Timothy was already on his way from Ephesus to them by land. Actually, this letter probably beat Timothy to Corinth. However, Timothy is another "gentle nudge" to remind them of the need for change.

- d. Paul used "face to face" confrontations as well.

Paul was also willing to use personal confrontation with the Corinthians. He says that he will come "face to face" if necessary. In verse 19 he also exclaims that he will soon come to Corinth, despite the report from some in the church that he would not come. Paul will come and say all that needs to be said! He will speak the truth in love!

This reminds me of a story that I heard recently about the need to speak the whole truth! There was a kindergarten teacher who had to help a little boy get ready to go home. It had been a long day and the teacher was frustrated. The boy needed help with his boots. So,

1-She struggled to put the boots on.

2-The boy said, ***but they are on the wrong feet.***

3-So, the teacher managed to get the shoes off again.

4-She worked hard to them on again and the boy exclaimed: ***These are not my boots.***

5-After she got them off again, the boy explained that these were his brother's boots and that his mother made him wear these boots today.

6-She finally got them on again and asked him where his mittens were.

7-he said that ***he had stuffed his mittens into the toes of his boots so that he would not lose them!***

2. The reasons for loving confrontation (4:18-20) – *Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.*

Now, Paul zeroes in on some of the other reasons for his confrontation in Corinth. There were two other related reasons why Paul is willing to confront them.

- a. Paul will confront their arrogance.

First, some in the church were arrogant as if he was not going to come back to Corinth. The letter and Timothy were only indirect means of confrontation, but Paul himself would soon come to them, in spite of what Paul's opponents were saying. There are some interesting clues regarding the identity of his opponents.

Paul says that this involved ***some of the Corinthians***. Specifically, some of the Corinthians were ***proud***. This reveals that Paul is speaking of a non-defined, smaller group in the church. Although this sin involved only some of the Corinthians is willing to confront the whole church and keep them all accountable for what they do with these people. Gordon Fee says that "Paul is pointing the HEAVY GUNS at the church itself, not the wrong doers." This will not be the only time when Paul calls the whole church to live a life which reflects God's grace. In chapter 5, Paul confronts the church not only for immorality, but also for corporate pride of this situation. In chapter 6, Paul rebukes the entire church for the sin of a few who were selfish.

This is why I love Doc O's statement about the evaluation of a ministry. He says, ***a ministry is not evaluated by what it preaches, as***

***much as by what it tolerates.*** The trouble in this passage is within the church. Some there were arrogant or proud. They must have made statements like: ***Paul is not coming to us; He knows better than to come to us.*** Some in the church were full of pride.

- b. Paul will confront their lack of power in the gospel.

Not only were they proud, but they also failed to actually have any power of God on their ministry. Paul assures them in verse 19 that he will come to them. And when he comes, he will not even regard what they say, but will find out their *dunamas* level. Paul will find out if they have any of the Holy Spirit's power upon their ministry. But why would he do this? Well, because God's kingdom is not a matter of talk! God's kingdom is a matter of power. Whatever God chooses to do in this world today, whatever He gets involved in now is accompanied not merely by words, but power. It does not simply consist of talk: talk is cheap! If there is any aspect of God's kingdom seen in the church today, it has at least the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals. The naked truth was that their own carnality had stripped them of all their spiritual power.

Some commentators trace Paul's thought all the way back to verse 8, where Paul says that some of them thought that they were reigning as kings. Some at Corinth may have believed in an over-realized eschatology. They thought that they were already reigning and were quite able to present their position in great human talk. But Paul says that he wants to know of their power, not their talk!

3. The choice of loving confrontation (4:21) - *What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?*

Finally, Paul comes to the choice of loving confrontation in verse 21. In this verse, Paul's ultimate reason for this section is revealed. Paul will come and confront their over-emphasis on words if necessary. So the question is not ***if*** he will come, but ***how*** he will come.

***Will he need to come with a rod?*** The rod is a figurative way of saying severe chastisement. Paul asks if the Corinthians want him to bring a staff or a stick when he come to them. Paul explains here that he is willing to be harsh with the Corinthians so that he can rid them of their sin. Another way to describe the rod (*rabdos*) is ***the timeless, universal motivator***. It transcends the time gap and still speaks volumes today!

Or should he come in love and in a spirit of meekness? This means that he could come in comfort and not in harshness or rudeness. The choice is theirs'.

***By the way, what choice did they make?*** (They chose the wrong one – i. e. the painful visit)

IV. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Problem: a confrontation of the immorality and arrogance of the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:1-6:20).<sup>86</sup>

Summary: Paul deals with two different sins in this section: immorality and insolence. These sins are introduced in chapter 5 and further illustrated and rejected in chapter 6. Regarding immorality, this church is tolerating a man who is involved in an illicit union with his close relative. Paul focuses on immorality again with his strong words of warning to the entire church about the dangers of temple prostitution in 6:12-20. Regarding arrogance, these believers boast in the freedom of the immoral brother in chapter 5 and they are also insistent upon their own rights in the Corinthian Lawcourts (6:1-11). These two chapters illustrate the epic failure of this church to properly relate to both “insiders” and “outsiders.”

A. An initial description of the sins in the church at Corinth (5:1-8)<sup>87</sup>

Paul deals with two specific sins in this initial description.

1. God’s judgment on fornication (5:1, 3-8)

I want to ask three questions of this text to help us better understand the fornication which Paul calls the church at Corinth to discipline.

- a. Question 1: What sins demand church discipline? (5:1). *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife.*

You may ask yourself, what does a sin that is worthy of church discipline look like? Well, Paul answers that by telling the Corinthian church to look into the mirror. Now there appears in the mirror of the church at Corinth another problem that will add to the difficult divisions in this First Century Church.

Paul uses the very strong Greek word πορνεία to describe the problem at Corinth. He only uses this word six times in the whole New Testament and five of them are found in chapters 5-7 of 1 Corinthians. This is the problem of immorality.

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<sup>86</sup>Before proceeding into a discussion of this section, it is best to discuss the following questions. 1) How many of you have seen church discipline done in a church? 2) Why was it done? 3) How was it done? 4) Did you agree with the way that it was handled? (Also share my testimony about being a twenty-four year old pastor)

<sup>87</sup>John Heil gives a wonderful discussion of the structure of chapter 5. “First Corinthians 5:1-13 subdivides into four units—5:1-2 (first unit), 5:3-5 (second unit), 5:6-8 (third unit), and 5:9-13 (fourth unit)—each of which contains an expression or expressions in one form or another of Paul’s command to the Corinthian community to discontinue fellowship with an erring member” (Heil, *The Rhetorical Role*, 92). “Paul’s implicit command that the sinful individual ‘should be removed’ (ἀρθῆ) in 5:2c employs the third-person singular aorist subjunctive passive of ἀρῶ without an expressed agent of the action and therefore leaves it rather vague as to the one who is to perform the necessary removal. The scriptural injunction in 5:13b employs the same verbal root, ἀρῶ, but with an intensifying prepositional prefix (ἐξ), in the second person plural aorist imperative active to directly address Paul’s Corinthian audience” (Heil, *The Rhetorical Role*, 93). In the second unit, Paul says to deliver the one over to Satan. In the third unit, the Corinthians are to expel or remove the old leaven. In the fourth unit, they are not to associate with him and not even to eat with him.

But notice that this type of immorality is not even tolerated among the Gentiles (they knew about πορνεία, but even they thought it was wrong), because this man was having an ongoing relationship with his *father's wife*. I believe Paul uses this precise phrase here to show us that this man was committing sin with his stepmother. There is some speculation concerning whether this woman was divorced from that father or if the father had died, but I would tend toward the thought that the father was still alive and that he was wronged in this whole ordeal.

Regardless of the specific case, God considers it a sin. For instance, the Law testifies to this point in Deuteronomy 22:30. In Deuteronomy 27:20 this sin stands in the middle of the twelve curses of that chapter. In Leviticus 18:8 and 29 to *have your father's wife* brought the death penalty.

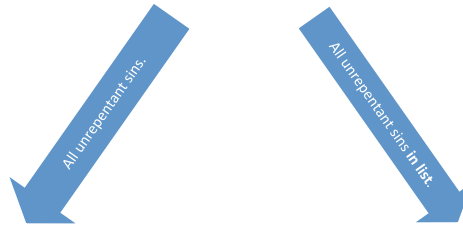
And when Paul uses the word “has,” it indicates a continuous ongoing relationship. This was not a single incident.

When the mirror was held up to the church at Corinth, it was not a very flattering image that they saw. ***Have you ever looked in the mirror before at the end of a day, only to find an ugly blot? Well, that blot affects the appearance of more than just my face, it affects my whole appearance! This was an ugly moral blot that affected the entire image of the church.*** But Paul showed them what they really were like. A church that was to be known for its purity and sincerity and truth was now known as a church with major sin problems. This wasn't just a problem with an individual, but it was a problem with the whole community.

It is an imperative that we see that Paul and the Scriptures are very concerned with the exercise of discipline to restore the church. Paul deals with church discipline at least four times in the New Testament and so we can see several different reasons for church discipline.

- |   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| 1. For fornication  | 1 Corinthians 5        |
| 2. For list of sins in  | 1 Corinthians 5:11     |
| (Sexually immoral, greedy, idolater, reviler, drunkard, swindler) |                        |
| 3. For walking disorderly (idleness)                              | 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 |
| 4. For doctrinal heresies   | Romans 16:17-18        |

At this point there is a “Y” in the trail begins to appear.



It is best to discipline according to these lists. These lists give the types or categories of sin which demand church discipline. These sins may have come from OT Law, but it is better to see them as sins dealt with in Corinth (see my paper for a fuller discussion). Paul takes a different approach to the sin of pride in this text. That type of sin must be confronted, but it did not demand the final phase of church discipline.

- b. Question 2: What procedures should we follow? (5:3-5). *For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.*

How then were the people at Corinth to handle this man? Another relevant passage might help us at this point. Matthew 18: 15-17 gives a wonderful approach to confrontation.<sup>88</sup>

*If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

In this passage, we have universal principles that deal with the procedure for confrontation. From the mouth of Christ we have some of the clearest steps to lovingly confront a believer in sin. He first shows us that we are to get involved with the individual **personally**, by confronting him or her of their sin to their own face. Then if they will not hear, you go to them with two or three others and confront them **plurally**. Finally, if they still will not admit to their sin, you are

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<sup>88</sup>Christ might have developed this approach as an extension of the Mosaic Law. Specifically, Lev 19:17 and Deut 19:15 require private confrontation and different numbers of witnesses (2 and then 3). Forkman believes that Christ was dependent on these two passages (*The Limits of the Religious Community*, 124-28). He also demonstrates how Christ used many of the same words found in the LXX in these passages.

responsible to bring this up **publicly**. And if that approach does not work then we are to treat them like a **publican** or tax gather. <sup>89</sup>

However, it does not appear that Paul is not content to deal with the fornicator at Corinth in such a gentle and deliberate method. He says in verse 3 that he has already pronounced judgment on this sinner.

This action was to be performed at an official church meeting or service as is clear in verse 4 when it says, *when ye are gathered together*. They were to take this man out of their assembly (this would have a much more devastating effect on a 1<sup>st</sup> century believer. WHY? - there is no 2<sup>nd</sup> Baptist Church at Corinth). He was to be excluded from their church, until he was willing to deal with his sin.

Further they were to *deliver such a person into the custody of Satan*. Not only were they to remove him from the church, they were to give him over to the realm of Satan. But what is the custody or realm of Satan?

- Satan does have some power to influence believers. Notice in the Corinthian Epistles all the other ways that Satan is allowed to impact believers.

2 Corinthians 12:7 – afflicts the physical body of a believer

1 Corinthians 7:5 – temptations

2 Corinthians 11:14-15 - undercover agents

2 Corinthians 2:11- unforgiving spirit in the church

- But the **custody of Satan** is something much worse than any of these other things.

Why was he to be delivered? It was for **the destruction or ruination of the flesh**. But what does that mean?

- “HIS FLESH”- This view believes that this is in reference to his own physical body. That Satan would be allowed to start destroying the general health of the believer mentally and physically (even possible death).<sup>90</sup>

So this refers at least to physical suffering, and most likely to death itself. The method of church discipline for an impurity in the church is never a fun or easy process, but it must be done. It is very important to see that we must not tolerate sin. We cannot compromise the situation

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<sup>89</sup>Some question whether this method should be applied to church discipline in the church, but Tit 3:8-10 seems to take this practice or a similar one and apply it to how Titus would deal with a false teacher.

<sup>90</sup>Anthony Thiselton spells out these three views in his commentary on 1 Corinthians in the New International Greek New Testament Commentary series.



of our church.

- “THE FLESH” - some believe that this is in reference to the sinful attitudes of the whole church. (See my paper)
- “HIS FLESH” - the fleshly impulses (lusts) of the offending brother. The use of “flesh” would be similar to the word *sarkikos* in 1 Corinthians 3:3. This is in reference to the fleshliness of the carnal believer or his *inclination to do what the flesh will want*. But why would Satan attempt to destroy the fleshly impulses of the believer?

Notice also that *the woman* is not even addressed here. Why? Probably because she was not saved (5:12-13). They were not responsible to judge outsiders as is clear in the phrase, *anyone who bears the name brother*, in verse 11. They were to discipline professing believers for these types of ongoing sins.

A hindrance to a healthy church is the filth of fornication. We cannot allow this to occur in our church. We must protect our pure relationship with the Lord.

- c. Question 3: Why do we get involved in this process? (5:5-8). *You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

Why were the Corinthians to worry about following through with church discipline? There are two reasons for church discipline that are found within the New Testament which must be followed.

### 1. For the restoration of the erring believer.

The first reason for church discipline is the restoration of the erring brother. This passage states that our motivation should be for the welfare of the erring Christian. The little phrase “so that his spirit may be saved,” is a phrase that gives some hope. Satan does possess power; but it is limited. All that Satan can do is affect our physical bodies. He may be able to bring about disease or suffering or perhaps even death; but he cannot touch the spirit of a true believer. He has no right to the spirit of a believer even if he is sinning. So, as bad as it gets, they will not lose what they have.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Gal 6:1 is an even clearer passage which emphasizes the need for strong believers to restore fallen ones.

I was reading about an attack on one of Rembrandt's well-known paintings, the "NIGHTWATCH" that was slashed with a knife. They did not throw it into the trash but they brought in the best experts and made every possible effort to restore the treasure. This should be our approach to Christian brothers who have fallen into a sin that demands church discipline. Maybe there is someone that you know that has fallen. Is there someone that God would have you contact to give a word of encouragement? Perhaps, there is someone back home who you should send a letter or email to them, appealing for them to return to the Lord? We must be concerned with the restoration of erring believers.

## 2. For the purity of the church.

Not only is church discipline for the guilty party but it is also for the purity of the church. In verses 6-8, Paul explains the reason why their boasting in this situation is not good. To aid understanding of his thinking, Paul uses an analogy of leaven to describe the way this sin had infected the whole community. They were to get rid of the old leaven so that they would become what they really were "a new batch of dough." In the New Testament leaven often symbolizes how evil or wickedness would spread in the church. And here Paul states that at all costs they must remove this wickedness from their life so that they can become what Christ has already made them. Paul appeals to the Jewish custom of removing all leaven from a house during Passover. That was to be a picture of searching the recesses of the heart for sin. The punishment for even eating a small amount of leavened bread at Passover was a brutal scourging or whipping.<sup>92</sup> Thus, by using the analogy of the lump of dough, Paul emphasizes the "importance of retaining careful boundaries" in the church.<sup>93</sup> By exercising church discipline and removing the sin from our church we then proclaim the absolute purity of Christ and also preserve the integrity of the church of Jesus Christ.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>See Exodus 12.

<sup>93</sup>Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 112.

<sup>94</sup>"The word ζυμην refers to "leaven" (RSV, NASB), not "yeast" (NIV, NRSV, HCSB). Leaven referred to a fermented portion of past dough (usually dough from the previous week). The Israelites added this fermented portion to the current week's dough, which worked its way through the batch and produced a light "sour dough" texture and taste. God commanded the Israelites to purge their homes of all leaven once a year (Exod. 12:14-20), presumably against the year-long fermentation process. The Israelites would bake only unleavened bread during the feast. They would take this new batch of dough and start the whole process against after the feast." Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 49.

Not only will this practice allow us to preserve the integrity of the body, it will also maintain our reputation before the lost world! One of the main excuses of my grandfather regarding salvation was because of all of the ***hypocrites in the church***. He would not get saved, because he knew members of my grandmother's church who would go to the bar and sit right alongside of him. He knew some that had ongoing immoral relationships. Perhaps, if church discipline was performed more often, we might prevent lost men and women from expressing these excuses.

One final note needs to be made. We have given two different reasons for church discipline: ***the restoration of the brother and the purity of the church***. Which one of these two reasons do you see as being more important or more foundational?<sup>95</sup>

2. God's judgment on pride (5:2, 6a) *And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. Your boasting is not good!*

There are two particular points that I want to make about verses 2 and 6.

- a. Paul deals with their tolerance of this issue.

Paul shows that this fornicator is "among them." This church allowed this man to continue to worship with him, although he was guilty of a sin which even pagan cultures rejected. It is absolutely ridiculous that a church like the one in Corinth should be indifferent to moral scandal. ***How could a church allow for or justify the ongoing worship of a man like this?*** Perhaps, some in the church at Corinth felt that it would be a proper demonstration of ***Christian love*** to allow this man to continue. After all, aren't we all sinners in some way or another? Perhaps, others felt that this man's use of *his own body* was a proper demonstration of ***Christian Liberty***. It is quite possible that some of these former pagans felt that the body was just immaterial and that its baser functions were completely amoral. Either way (or perhaps even for some other reason), this church continued to allow a fornicator to fellowship with them.

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<sup>95</sup>The best answer to this question is the preservation of the testimony of Jesus Christ. While this is definitely a difficult scenario, zealotness for the testimony of Jesus Christ compels us to follow through even if the restoration of the erring brother or sister appears threatened. One pastor tells the story about a woman which, after having been confronted by a plurality of believers within her church, declared that if the report of her infidelity was given to the church as a whole she would *never* return there! Consequently, the pastor explained that 1 Corinthians 5:4 demanded that they take this unrepentant sinful practice before the entire assembly.

Dr. Les Ollila often says that the true measure of a ministry is not necessarily what it says, but what it tolerates. By allowing this man to continue to worship within their assembly without any type of censure the church was sending mixed signals to the community and to other believers as well.

- b. Paul deals with their arrogance regarding this issue.

But the sin of this church went beyond mere tolerance. The text says that the church was arrogant about all of this. Notice, it does not say that they were proud **in spite of** this sinner, but that they were proud **because of** it. This arrogant boasting was definitely not good, because it had begun to corrupt the church and its effects were already being felt.

- B. A clarification regarding their previous response to a similar problem (5:9-13) *I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people- not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of this world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler-not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."*

So, some of the Corinthians refused to deal with the fornicating brother and were even arrogant about his presence within their assembly. This refusal to deal with the immoral brother is strange in light of how the church had previously responded to the "immoral people" of the city. A few things become apparent when one reads verses 9-13. Paul had already sent a letter to this church which explained how to treat sexually immoral people,<sup>96</sup> and at least some within the Corinthian assembly had misunderstood Paul's original counsel; responding to it by separating from all of the fornicators of the city! This radical commitment to separation was a problem because of the "immoral character" of the city. A believer who refused to have any social interaction with immoral people would fail to make any sort of impact within a city like Corinth. Thus, Paul writes this letter to make sure to clarify a few things for them, especially because they now have an offender within their church. So, perhaps it would be wise for us to question the "double standard" of the city. Paul actually instructs them that they have this all wrong. Having said this, let's look to Paul's counsel to this church about how to deal with fornication—two points deserve consideration!

### 1. God will deal with the immoral of this world.

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<sup>96</sup>The phrase, "I have written unto you," indicates that Paul had already composed a letter to them (the "Previous Letter"). While this phrase could be taken to describe 1 Corinthians itself, it is better to see this as a reference to a former letter because there are no admonitions about immorality in this letter previous to 1 Corinthians 5, there would be no time for misunderstanding of this admonition and verse 11 says "now" which seems to point to a letter previous to Paul's current instruction about fornicators.

Paul's first point of clarification is that the church is not responsible to judge the immoral people of the city. God deals with the wickedness of evil people.<sup>97</sup> Actually, Paul anticipates that the believer will have social contact with sinners!

2. The church must deal with disobedient believers.

Paul's second point of clarification is that the Corinthian church must be responsible to judge "insiders." The point here is not so much that God refuses to deal with disobedient believers Himself, as much as it is that the church also has a responsibility in these sorts of issues. Specifically, they must expel any person who claims to be a brother or sister and is guilty of ongoing immorality, idolatry, revelry, drunkenness, or greed.

a. The nature of the sins which must be disciplined

This list of sins is a representative list. Three lists of this nature are found within 1 Corinthians (5:10, 11; 6:9-11). It is interesting to note that the four sins mentioned in verse 10 are found in all three of the lists. So, these particular sins could be seen as being trouble areas within the church at Corinth. Although some commentators believe that Paul got his list from the Law. Of course, one can easily see the prevalence of immorality and idolatry in this church, but perhaps greed (ch.11) and swindling (ch.6) are also transparent as one continues to read through this book. Verse 11 provides the most comprehensive list of six sins which demand church discipline.

a. The sin of immorality

This sin is Paul's main concern in chapters 5 and 6. He has already described a type of immorality in this chapter.

b. The sin of greed

Greed is "the [insatiable] desire for possessions."<sup>98</sup> This might have been easier to see within the 1<sup>st</sup> Century church where they held all things in common than it is in our culture today. It is interesting, however, that this sin does not often result in church discipline today.

c. The sin of idolatry

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<sup>97</sup>There is a dispute over whether the verb *krinei*/ should be taken as a future or present tense verb. Ultimately, it does not matter as much because God's judgment is the sure fate of the wicked whether that is present or future judgment, whether it involves earthly or eternal punishment - God is the judge of the wicked.

<sup>98</sup>Robertson and Plummer, 106.

Of course, we know that many of these believers were saved out of idolatry. It might be quite difficult for Westerners to understand the grip that idolatry (also the superstition involved in idolatrous worship) might have on some people. Some believers must have felt that idolatry was just a normal part of life.

d. The sin of revelry

This word can be translated “slanderer.” The idea here is of one who is highly abusive in his speech. This person is absolutely ruthless in his speech. This sort of sin can be devastating to the testimony of Christ.

e. The sin of drunkenness

Believers should not be known for being drunkards (i. e. heavy drinkers). This admonition is not against drinking per se, but against one who becomes intoxicated. There are all sorts of theological and Scriptural reasons why believers should not get drunk.<sup>99</sup> One such reason is the threat of church discipline for one who consistently damages the testimony of the church by getting drunk.

f. The sin of swindling

This word is mentioned in verses 10 and 11. In verse 10 it is connected with the greedy indicating a close relationship with that word. The word “swindler” means “thief or robber.” Believers must not be guilty of taking someone’s things by force or trickery.

b. The nature of the treatment which must be used with these disobedient brothers

a. Do not associate with them.

Paul says that the Corinthians are not to associate or “mix themselves up with” these sorts of disobedient brothers. This means that we are not to mingle with them or to use modern English – “hang out” with them.

Notice that Paul says that we are not to mix with professing believers who commit these sins, but we are to do this with

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<sup>99</sup>Eph 4 provides the best reasons to avoid drunkenness. A believer should avoid drunkenness because it is commanded and because it prevents the Holy Spirit from having complete control over the believer. Of course it must be admitted that it is very dangerous for any person to function while in a drunken stupor.

unbelievers. We must mingle with the sinners of this world, but if these sinners claim to be believers and are disciplined, then we must no longer hang out with them.

- b. Do not even eat with them.

Many scholars believe that this admonition has to do with religious ceremonies alone. Thus, believers are not to allow sinners of this nature to join with them in their religious meals of fellowship or at the Lord's Supper. However, some more recent exegetes believe that this admonition has to do with any meal.<sup>100</sup> A mediating position might be correct. Perhaps, Paul forbids any church fellowship or social meal with this command.<sup>101</sup> This might not be a surprising move (at least at corporate meals) considering the importance of communal meals to Judaism.<sup>102</sup> In light of all the OT imagery in ch. 5, Paul probably intends the exclusion of the brother from communal meals like the Lord's Supper.

The ban here must be at least placed on official meals of fellowship or worship within the church. This restriction is the bare minimum.

- c. Expel them from your church.

In the last phrase of this chapter, Paul does something very interesting to make a point to the Corinthians. Paul quotes from the Mosaic Law to inform the Corinthians what they should do with any believer that continues in these sorts of sin: "Purge this evil person from among you." This quotation occurs on six separate occasions within the Old Testament where it functions as a command for the Israelite people to remove (or execute) the offender. These references are found within Deuteronomy.<sup>103</sup> "With three quotations and numerous allusions, Deuteronomy is second only to Isaiah in

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<sup>100</sup>Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2010), 218. They continue, "If Paul had meant only the Lord's Supper, there would not have been any need for these words." See also Robertson and Plummer.

<sup>101</sup>This is my current position in light of the importance that the first century Greco-Roman might place on public, social meals. This action would be quite difficult for the Corinthian believers. See Gordon Fee for a defense of this position.

<sup>102</sup>I remember talking to one man at a former church who was trying to determine the ramifications of this statement for his relationship with his son. His son had been disciplined from a church and the father did not know if he should eat meals with him in his house or at family get-togethers. These sorts of questions are the type which you might face as you minister the Word of God to others.

<sup>103</sup>Consult my paper on 1 Cor 5 for a list of all references in Deuteronomy.

its influence on 1 Corinthians.”<sup>104</sup> This reliance on Deuteronomy is understandable since Deuteronomy contains Moses’ admonition to apply the Law to the ethical and practical lives of the Israelite people.

The word “purge” is only ever used here in the New Testament Scriptures which is another tribute to Paul’s reliance on the Law.<sup>105</sup> However, Paul’s idea of purging is different than the execution of the OT Law.

When you put all of these descriptions together with the command to “deliver this one over to Satan,” it becomes quite clear that Paul expects a severe break from this type of blatant sinner. When we disobey these commands, we are contaminated by the leavening influence of their sins.

C. An extended treatment of the arrogance and immorality in the church (6:1-20)

As you have already seen in the other major sections of this letter, it appears as if Paul offers a continued discussion the problems which he has just introduced. In 6:1-11, Paul addresses the Corinthians pride and in 6:12-20 he warns concerning their immorality.

1. A discussion concerning the Corinthian pride: the Corinthian lawsuits (6:1-11).

Have you ever wondered if a believer has the freedom to pursue justice when he is wronged in matters of finance? Or perhaps you have questioned if it is ever right for one Christian to sue another believer? Give me your advice and counsel in the following two scenarios.

- *There was a church that I heard of who attempted to sell their church van. They put it on their own lot and advertised that it was for sale while thinking that it might take several days or weeks to sell it. Well, that same day someone came by and offered to buy the van. The church was excited about this and worked through the sale with the agreement that the church would pay to have the name of the church removed from the side of the van. A few days went by and the church started getting complaints about how their drivers were behaving in public. The reports were that some of their drivers were cursing and swearing at the children in the van and even threatening to hurt them, although these reports were actually*

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<sup>104</sup>Brian S. Rosner, “Logic and Arrangement,” 27.

<sup>105</sup>Later in these notes, I will talk about the role of the Law in the life of a believer. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul appeals to the Mosaic Law not as a binding obligation. He does not give any reasons from the Law to excommunicate the offender. As a matter of fact, when Paul counsels to discipline the offender out of the church he actually departs from Mosaic legislation as such an offender would be put to death under the regime of the Law of Moses.



*about the new owners of the van. The church called the man back and offered to take the church name off the side of the van, but the man seemed quite reluctant as it would prevent him from having proper transportation for several days. In such a case, could the church sue in order for the right to take their name off the side of this man's van?*

- *A trucking company was negligent to properly care for their vehicles. This negligence led to an accident where a small metal part of the mud-flap of the truck fell off and shot into the gas tank of another traveler's van. Consequently, this van exploded in flames and took the lives of several children in the van. Further, this man and his wife were greatly burnt in the whole ordeal. If this trucking company was reluctant to pay for the medical bills or for any pain and suffering, would this man be entitled to sue for retribution?*

I believe that the following text will begin to answer some of these questions. As we go through this text, I will try to point out the principles from this text that can be applied to other similar situations.

- a. The situation at Corinth: Christians were suing each other (1-3).

The situation can be summarized in two ways.

- a. They went before unsaved judges at the law courts (1). *When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?*

Paul asks if the Corinthians would dare go to court against their brothers. It will be helpful for us to consider the typical law system in Greco-Roman cities. When Paul says "go to law" he is probably referring to something like our "small claims" (local municipal) court! These cases would be tried down in the main square of the city at the bema seat judgment. The bema was a large raised platform along one of the major roads of the city. It was a court where civil cases (cases related to finance, property, legal possession, breaches of contract, damages, fraud, etc.) would be heard.<sup>106</sup> This appears to be the case because of the following reasons:

First, the word "defraud" is a word which normally indicates monetary loss. Second, in 6:2 Paul speaks of the most insignificant courts. Third, in 6:4 Paul describes these courts as courts for matters of everyday life. Fourth, DIO CHRYSOTOM (100AD) explains that in the early period of the empire "minor civil matters were left in the control of local courts and could be tried by judges

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<sup>106</sup> What sort of matter went to Criminal Court in Rome?

and juries.” He also commented that there innumerable lawyers perverting justice in these lower courts.<sup>107</sup>

So, Paul does not encourage them to go to court. The wealthy, influential, and clever could often manipulate these rulings as is indicated in texts like James 2:6 – *But you have dishonored the poor man. Are the not rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?* While James might be referencing abuses which occur as a result of wealthy, Jewish people in Jewish courts, the point is that in lower judgments it was quite possible for the rich to influence the verdict to where the poor have no chance to get a fair hearing. Juvenal said that in a Roman civil court a man’s word was important as the size of his strong box (cash box).<sup>108</sup> Social status and rank influenced judges in lower courts in many Greco-Roman courts.

- b. They were neglecting their own ability to judge (2-3). *Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!*

Paul has several problems with the practice of suing your brother in the law courts of Corinth. First, for Christians to go before the unjust is to deny their position in Christ. Paul says “we are saints” – “we will judge angels” (Jude 6 and Revelation 19:14). The Corinthians were failing to allow their future eschatological heritage to influence them. Second, for Christians to go before the unjust is to bring shame to the cause of Christ. This was a terrible testimony to the lost. It torpedoes their witness. Instead of seeing believers who genuinely care about the spiritual well-being of others, the Gentile world would be exposed to the sight of believers obsessed with acquisition of property or of their rights.

- b. The Solution for Corinth: Christians should pursue other options (4-8).

Paul gives two recommendations to the Corinthians instead of insisting upon their own rights in front of unbelievers.

- a. They should handle this matter internally (4-6). *So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that*

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<sup>107</sup> First Century Roman Law Courts were not the exact equivalent of our law system in America. So, we must understand the First Century situation and then must make application to our own settings today.

<sup>108</sup>Juvenal, *Satire III*, 136-44.

*there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?*

Paul asks why the Corinthians pursue these cases. Paul just concluded the previous section by saying that they are not to judge those who are outside but those who are inside. So, Paul gives them another example where believers should properly execute judgment of other believers. There are some Christian litigation companies today which do this very thing. Perhaps a good alternative would be a board of multiple pastors/boards/etc.

“I speak to your shame” – This means that Paul’s purpose is to make the Corinthians ashamed of themselves.

- b. They should suffer the wrong (7-8). *To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!*

The best alternative is to take the wrong. To borrow from the words of Christ we should “turn the other cheek.”

“suffer wrong” - Our Christian life is not about money, riches, property, or wealth which all amount to nothing. In 1 Cor. 9:12, 19-23 Paul is willing to give up anything to win others. Paul would not air his dirty laundry. Lawsuits, among believers in civil cases, are an evidence of worldliness and carnality. The cross changes all of this for us. It is no longer all about justice, law, and personal rights. These things are turned upside down for the Christian because of the theology of the cross (Thiselton). By suing a believer in civil court both parties lose. (8).<sup>109</sup>

- c. The salvation in Corinth: Paul reaffirms God’s work in their lives (9-11). *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral,<sup>110</sup> nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,<sup>111</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor*

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<sup>109</sup>I like to illustrate the ironic twist in such a case by appealing to the example of the case of Solomon and the two women who fought over the baby. In such a case, both mothers would lose if they insisted on their own rights.

<sup>110</sup>James Thompson suggests that Paul’s vice lists normally divide into two different categories of sins. Paul starts with sexual sins and then turns to anticomunal vices like drunkenness, revelry, theft, greed and murder (Thompson, *Moral Formation*, 100).

<sup>111</sup>Interpreters normally agree that the term *malakoi* “refers to effeminate men who made their bodies soft and prettied themselves up” (James W. Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul*, 97).

*revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

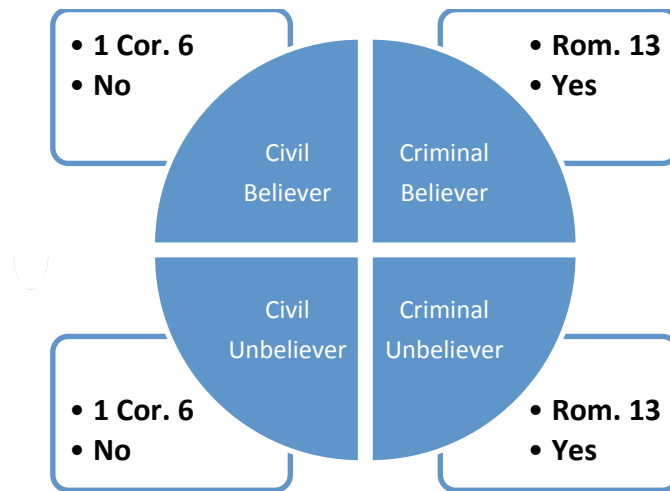
Verses 9-11 are not a warning but a reaffirmation of God's work in their lives. I do not take this passage like Fee. "He [Paul] warns him (and the church), that those who do such things are in danger of forfeiting their inheritance." This is not a warning of losing salvation but a call to Christian behavior. Paul uses a similar idea in 1 Corinthians 5:7 when he says that believers should act like the new batch of dough that God has created them to be. In verses 9-11, Paul says that the Corinthians should become as they are. They are to act in ways which reflect the transformation which God has produced in their lives. They have been **washed, sanctified, and justified** so they must not act in these ways. These three terms all refer to different aspects of the same act: their salvation.

Paul seems very unwilling to allow Christians to try their cases before civil courts. If this is the case and if believers should expect manipulation in the lower courts, what is his attitude toward the criminal courts of Rome?

There are four passages in Acts that apply to Paul's attitude toward human government and the criminal courts of Rome: 1) Acts 16:35-40-Paul beaten in Philippi without a hearing. Paul sought after justice and would not be released until he gained an apology. 2) Acts 22:24-29-Paul appealed to Roman citizenship so he would not be scourged. Paul defended himself against charges made against him. 3) Acts 23:12-24-Paul appealed for governmental protection from those would kill him. 4) Acts 25:11-Paul appealed to his right to be tried by Caesar in Rome.

So, Paul believes that human government has been given to man by God for such cases (see also Rom 13). Let's attempt to make application to our own situations by listing out Biblical principles on a diagram.

DIAGRAM-



**Final Conclusions:**

- 1) It is not right for a Christian to sue another Christian in civil matters.
- 2) In certain situations it is permissible and practical for a Christian to take an unbeliever to court (especially in criminal cases).
- 3) The ultimate consideration must always be the testimony of Jesus Christ.

2. A further discussion concerning immorality: the temple of the Holy Spirit challenge (6:12-20)

In this section of chapter 6, Paul returns to a discussion of the believer's responsibility in moral areas. Although Paul could have used the Mosaic Law to motivate the Corinthians to obey, instead he uses grace principles to motivate them. Within these verses, Paul presents his plan for sexual purity while in the midst of a sexually-saturated society by making an introductory statement and declaring three grace principles.

Men and Women, today we must have a serious conversation! This text is about joining with a prostitute. We might not be confronted by her on the streets, but perhaps we are in our mind! While she might not attempt to allure us in an idol temple, she spins her seductive, damning web in our homes, at our workplaces, and through every possible type of media in our culture. As a man, I feel a strong burden for sexual purity for myself, my spouse, and my children. ***What is your plan for sexual purity in the midst of a sexually-saturated society?*** May I encourage you to take notes and ask God for wisdom as we face this issue and this text together today.

- a. An introductory statement regarding immorality (12-14) *"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food" – and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual*

*immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.*

- a. Paul qualifies and rejects Corinthian slogans about Christian freedom with grace principles (12-13).

In verse 12, Paul qualifies a statement from the Corinthians. It appears that the Corinthians or Paul were known to have said “All things are lawful” for the believer. This phrase is actually used four times in 1 Corinthians (6:12 [twice]; 10:23 [twice]). ***But what does this phrase mean? What do you think that it might mean?*** Three answers seem most probable. Some believe that Paul gives an open appeal to moral license in this phrase. However, that would seem to be counter-productive to his purpose in this whole section. Others believe that Paul is restating a Corinthian slogan only to then reject or qualify it. Paul does not agree with the “All things are lawful.” So, it might be translated, “You say, ‘all things are lawful,’ but I say, ‘all things are not expedient.’”<sup>112</sup> This might be the case and Gordon Fee presents a good case for this view of verse 12.<sup>113</sup> However, there is another way to take this phrase. It seems best to see the first phrase in this text as an indication that believers are not under the Mosaic Law. So, either Paul or the Corinthians were known to state that the Law of Moses held no obligation for the believer. This is probably a “Corinthian Slogan” in which Paul agrees with their premise about being free from the Law, but qualifies it later.<sup>114</sup> So, Paul says that although they were not under the Law of Moses, this does not mean that they are without restraint.

Because the Corinthians felt that they were free from the Law or because they felt that the body was merely physical, they felt that they could do whatever they wanted with it. It appears that this sin of immorality which Paul addresses at the end of this chapter is not simply a “carryover from their pagan habits but [is] rooted in theological error.”<sup>115</sup> But let’s look closer at two principles which Paul establishes in this church in order to drive them away from moral failure.

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<sup>112</sup>This is actually how the NEB translates the verse.

<sup>113</sup>Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 251-52.

<sup>114</sup>In 6:12-13, the Corinthians were arguing that all things are lawful so we can have illicit affairs. In 10:23, they argue that all things are lawful so they can eat idol meat in the idol temple. This sort of conviction might also explain the attitude of the church toward the fornicator of chapter 5.

<sup>115</sup>Garland, 225.

- a) We must not do anything to hinder the cause of Christ (12a). *But not all things are helpful.*

Paul's statement about not all things being beneficial begs the question "what specific things are not helpful?" Part of what it means to be in union with Christ is a genuine concern for the well-being of others. The word helpful could also be translated beneficial or to do good to someone. If I love as Christ, I would never use someone else as a means of self-gratification. I would not look in lust on another, but instead see their lost soul!

- b) We must not be enslaved to anything in this world other than the Lordship of Christ (12b-13). *But I will not be enslaved by anything. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food" – and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*

The best interpretation is to see that the first part of verse 13 is a "Corinthian Slogan." There is a dispute about this slogan however. The question concerning the slogan has to do with where it ends. Many people believe that it should end where the quotation marks end in the ESV, but it is probably better to say that the Corinthians also made the statement which directly follows the quotation marks in the ESV. Hence, the Corinthians said, "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food – and God will destroy both one and the other."<sup>116</sup> The Corinthians were saying that God gave them stomachs for the enjoyment of food and that God gave them other features of their anatomy for their own sexual pleasure. They were basically suggesting that having sex was just as natural and physical as eating food.<sup>117</sup> In other words, they were equating the desires for food and sex.

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<sup>116</sup>This minority position is held by both Gordon Fee and Ben Witherington III.

<sup>117</sup>Possibly consult James Dobson's advice to parents about boys in *Bring Up Boys*. He suggests that masturbation is completely natural for young men and that parents should not make a big deal about it with their kids. He fails to address the "lustful" thoughts that almost always accompany such self-gratification. His advice seems to be similar to the Corinthian argument about the mere physical nature of the sex drive.

In the very first part of verse 12, Paul qualifies their statement, but in verses 12b & 13, he contradicts it. This contrast is reflected by the conjunction “but” right after the Corinthian statement. Paul reminds them that their bodies<sup>118</sup> are not for sexual immorality, but are for the Lord.

- b. Paul corrects misconceptions about our physical bodies with the promise of a future resurrection (14). *And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.*

Paul might be saying that the Corinthians were **right about food** not lasting beyond the great upheaval, but they are **wrong about bodies**. This point is the main emphasis of chapter 15 – the bodies of believers will be resurrected for the eternal state.

- b. Three further arguments for believers to control their bodies for the glory of God (15-20)<sup>119</sup>

All three of these arguments are introduced with the question: “Do you not know?” This question is used ten times in the book and it expects a positive answer. These questions allow Paul to respond with strong statements against immorality. If you mark in your Bible, you might want to mark these statements in the text (15,16, 19 – highlight the text).

- a. Our union with Christ forbids immoral acts (15). *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!*

- a) Question –

In verse 15, Paul’s question confirms the very important doctrine of the believer’s union with Christ. *Do you not know that our bodies are members of Christ?*

- b) Explanatory Note –

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<sup>118</sup>Is there some sort of dual meaning for the word “body” in this section? Perhaps, Paul would have us see that immoral sins are not just sins against our physical body, but that they also harm the church of God.

<sup>119</sup>David Garland’s outline of this section is exceptional and forms the basis of verses 15-18 in my notes. See Garland, 224.



After establishing our union with Christ, Paul asks whether we should then take the members of Christ and join them to the members of a harlot.<sup>120</sup>

c) Response -

Paul could not give a stronger response to answer this question! He says, “never” or “may it never be!” His overall point is that our union with Christ forbids affairs.

- b. All physical relationships create lasting unions (16-18). *Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “the two will become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.*

a) Question –

Verses 16 through 18 are quite difficult to understand! Paul suggests that the Corinthians know that a physical union brings some sort of lasting bond. The idea might be that after the physical act of fornication, neither person is free of the other.

b) Explanatory Note –

At the end of verse 16, Paul reminds them of the creation narrative of Genesis 2:24. *For as it is written, “the two will become one flesh.”* Paul then explains that our spiritual union with Christ is even more profound than any union of flesh.

c) Response –

Verse 18<sup>121</sup> presents Paul’s powerful conclusion to this section. He states strongly that believers are to

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<sup>120</sup>We might not face the prostitute in the streets today, but she attempts to allure us in many different places in our culture.

<sup>121</sup>6:18b is probably a Corinthian slogan. This would mean that Paul finishes his response with “Flee from sexual immorality.” He then starts a new section by quoting a Corinthian slogan—“Every sin a person commits is outside the body”—before contrasting that with his own counsel—“but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.” See article in my electronic files by David Woodall for further explanation (“The Presence of a Corinthian Slogan in 1 Corinthians 6:18b”).

flee. After this admonition to flee from immorality, Paul gives another explanation which I take as a reason to flee. He says that we should flee because this sort of sin is a sin against our own physical body. David Garland says, “sexual sin is deemed particularly destructive because it creates the greatest damage to a person.”<sup>122</sup> John Calvin says, “Other sins do not leave the same filthy stain on our bodies as fornication does.”<sup>123</sup> This text speaks of some type of lasting impact upon a person’s body. This is then a self-destructive sin which believers are admonished to flee.

- c. A believer’s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (19-20). *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

a) Question –

This is the only place in the letter where the adjective “holy” is attached to the Spirit – and what an appropriate spot to do this! *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?*

b) Explanatory Note –

Paul explains here that we are not our own. Not only did God create our physical bodies, he also redeemed us. Christ’s death purchased us!<sup>124</sup>

c) Response –

Paul’s final response to this idea is that we are to glorify God with our bodies. We are to assign dignity or worth to God through the appropriate use of our bodies. Paul’s three responses are quite strong: ***Never, Flee Immorality, Glorify God!***

One of the observations that I have begun to make recently is all of the material in this book about the

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<sup>122</sup>Garland, 236.

<sup>123</sup>Calvin, 131-32.

<sup>124</sup>Youth group illustration of a marker.

body. Paul's theology of the body is well-developed in 1 Corinthians.<sup>125</sup>

Please listen to the words of William Garnell in his 1200 page commentary on Ephesians 6:10-20. He encourages his reader to root out the sins of the body.

*A Christian must prosecute an irreconcilable war against BOSOM SINS. (He continues the next part of this address as an appeal from God to us to mortify our flesh) Soul, take thy lust, thy only lust which is the child of thy dearest love, thy Isaac. The sin which has caused you the most joy and laughter, from which thou hast promised thyself the greatest return of pleasure or profit. If ever you look to see my face with comfort, lay your hands upon it and offer it up. Pour out its blood before me. Run the sacrificial knife of mortification right into the heart of it. And do this freely and joyfully. For it is not a pleasing sacrifice to me that is offered with a countenance cast down.*

*Truly this is a hard saying and flesh and blood cannot bear it. For our flesh will not die so patiently on the altar as Isaac did, or as a lamb that is brought to the slaughter is dumb. Our lust will rear and shriek, yeah it will shake our heads with its hideous outcries.*

**Men and Women, What's your plan for sexual purity in the midst of this sexually-saturated society?** Would you type out one page addressing your needs in this area and then another addressing the needs of your family? This is not an area which we should neglect or censure within our families. We must be open and honest in our evaluation of ourselves and our culture. If you have not done this, I strongly advise the men and women of this church to develop a plan this week for sexual purity. Ladies, perhaps you should mention this idea

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<sup>125</sup>Paul's theology of the body – 1) As a believer, God created and redeemed my body, so I cannot use it in immoral ways. I am in union with Christ, so I must avoid immoral failure (6:12-20). 2) As a married believer, my body is the property of my spouse (7:1-7). 3) As a believer, God will resurrect my physical body and transform it into a glorified body – so, it matters what I do with it (ch. 15). 4) Paul's testimony – "As a believer, I am involved in one important contest, so I discipline my body and bring it under [make it submit] lest I become disqualified." (9:24-27). We have a responsibility to bring our bodies in line and discipline ourselves (sleep, food, sex, etc.) for the glory of God!

to your husbands. Men, take the leadership! Don't be passive about this issue! Be a godly man who is willing to tackle even the most difficult of issues for the glory of God!

We need pastors who, like Paul, will be willing to engage in difficult and awkward conversations about sexuality, if we hope to "possess our bodies in sanctification and honor."

V. The 1<sup>st</sup> Question: concerning marriage relationships (1 Corinthians 7:1-24).

Summary: Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> answer to a question posed by the Corinthian Assembly concerns the relationship between men and women in marriage (7:1-24). Some of the Corinthians argued that it brought spiritual advantage to refrain from their spouse in marriage. Other believers, involved in marriage to an unbeliever, wondered if divorce or separation was to be preferred to union with an unbeliever. Evidently, the culture around the Corinthian believers had polluted their understanding of the sanctity of marriage. Ironically, it is the single apostle Paul who reminds the married believers at Corinth of God's calling and blessing on their family.

In the introduction to 1 Corinthians, I identified the different occurrences of the phrase *peri de* which function as an identifying marker of the questions that Paul intends to answer. There are six different large questions that the Corinthians had asked Paul that he proposes to answer in the second half of this book. While the presence of *peri de* in this letter does not necessarily indicate questions from the Corinthian letter, it at least indicates a shift in topic to a new issue.<sup>126</sup>

In chapter 7, Paul continues his discussion of sexual ethics. However, in this section he is most concerned with marriage and singleness. These matters concerning marriage and singleness follow directly from his admonitions about immorality and prostitution in chapter 6.

A. Paul answers three questions concerning marriage (1-16).

The first question that Paul answers in chapter 7 has to do with marriage. At this point, Paul raises three related issues.

1. Question 1: Is intimacy within marriage forbidden (1-7)?

There are three significant movements in verses 1-7.

- a. The Corinthian problem in marriage: some were avoiding intimacy in marriage for the "cause" of Christ (1-2). *Now concerning the matters about*

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<sup>126</sup>Margaret Mitchell's treatment of *peri de* demonstrates its flexibility to be used as a simple transition from one topic to another. She also has proven from secular Greek literature that this marker does not always introduce a quotation even if that is Paul's intention in 1 Corinthians.

*which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.*

For some this will be a wake-up call. Here Paul states it negatively that the Corinthians that were married cannot simply go out on a whim and do whatever they want. One of the major problems that Paul has been dealing with in chapter 6 is that these people were all proclaiming their own rights in life and before the law courts. But here the trial does not involve a judicial court but it takes place in their marriages.

It says in verse 1 that "it is good for a man not to touch a woman." What does that mean? Does it mean that every time I accidentally brush up against someone of the opposite sex, that I am touching them, so I am in sin? Of course not! Gordon Fee says, "the idiom 'to touch a woman' occurs nine times in Greek antiquity, ranging across six centuries and a variety of writers, and in every other instance, without ambiguity it refers to having sexual intercourse."<sup>127</sup> Thus, it appears that the words used for touching a woman were a figurative way of referring to sexual relations.

There are two basic ways to interpret verse 1. First, Paul might be making his own declaration here that, as a general rule, men should not be touching women. This is every youth pastor's favorite verse to say that the girls should not touch the boys on the activity, but that is not what it means. Then there is the second interpretation that has attestation all the way back to Origen.<sup>128</sup> I believe that this phrase is Paul repetition of their slogan or question, *You say, "It is good for men not to touch [their] wives."* Let me give you some reasons why I believe that he repeated their slogan.

- 1) The first reason I believe Paul is repeating their slogan is because of the immoral situation in Corinth. Sexual license was prevalent in the city. Everyone was doing it! Paul's admonition comes while he was dealing with a live situation at Corinth. Our knowledge of the history and culture of the city then enhance our ability to know this book. Maybe some of the Corinthians had rebelled against sex even in marriage, because the act itself was thought to be defiling. It would not be too abnormal for religious people to withdraw from sexual relations because of a perceived threat to holiness in the First Century. For instance, according to Josephus, "Marriage itself was viewed as second best by the Essenes as a concession to the lower (baser) instincts."<sup>129</sup> The history of the Roman Catholic tradition and sexuality is also very telling. They have argued for years that celibacy is superior to the

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<sup>127</sup>Fee, 275. Contra to Fee, Rosner and Ciampa suggest that the term is found twenty-five times, although they do include two other related terms in their investigation. Rosner & Ciampa, 273.

<sup>128</sup>Text in Jenkins (ed.), "Origen on 1 Cor," *JTS* (1908): 500.

<sup>129</sup>Josephus, ?.

married state and even require their priests to take vows of celibacy. R. Kent Hughes says,

The dominant attitude of the Catholic church throughout the Middle Ages was that sexual love itself was evil and did not cease to be so if its object were one's spouse. The early church fathers, Tertullian and Ambrose believed that the extinction of the human race was to be preferred to the sexual relationship within marriage. Ambrose wrote that "married people ought to blush at the state in which they are living." Augustine argued that the sexual relationship was innocent in marriage, but that passion that accompanies it is always sinful. He frequently counseled married couples to abstain. Albertus and Aquinas objected to marital intimacy because it subordinates the reason to the passions. The church fathers are virtually unanimous in praising virginity as superior to marriage. This culminated in the Council of Trent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which denounced those who denied that virginity was superior to the married state. The Roman church kept adding days in which marital intimacy was prohibited until more than half the days in the year were excluded. No wonder there was a reformation!<sup>130</sup>

There were other more important reasons for the reformation, but these positions make my point.

While there is much debate about who or what influenced the church at Corinth about their views on intimacy in marriage (Stoics, Jewish background, gnostics, etc.),<sup>131</sup> it appears that some were refraining in light of the wicked culture at Corinth. Evidently, some believers had "holiness concerns" which impacted how they treated their spouses in marriage.

- 2) The second reason I believe he is repeating their slogan is because the rest of scripture establishes the validity of marriage. If Paul said that men should not touch their wives it would appear to contradict the rest of Scripture. The scripture says to be fruitful and multiply. It also states in Genesis that it is good for a man not to be alone. Hebrews tells us that marriage is honorable in all the bed undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. The scriptures also state that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. (Paul will later address the gift of singleness that God gives to some) So, to say that it is more morally excellent to refrain while in marriage is not Paul's point.

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<sup>130</sup>R. Kent Hughes, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, 100-01.

<sup>131</sup>David Garland gives a wonderful discussion of various possible influences on the church of Corinth about this issue. The most popular positions that he articulates are the following: repudiation of the wickedness of the culture, the influence of gnostic dualism, the influence of Jewish theology, holiness concerns within the church, or some sort of mixture of these influences. Garland, 263-66.

- 3) The third reason that I believe that Paul is repeating their slogan is that the rest of the passage reveals Paul's determination to correct this statement. It appears that Paul repeats their slogan, only to offer his own "serious disagreement" with it.<sup>132</sup> Paul says in verse 2, "on the contrary" (*de*), each man is to avoid fornication by participating with his spouse in the physical aspects of marriage. The Corinthians must realize that the bed does serve a purpose of preserving the purity of one's spouse. This might not be the main reason for marriage, but it is a legitimate safeguard which comes within marriage. Other reasons also exist for sex within marriage like reproduction and pleasure. On this last reason, Scripture nowhere forbids intimacy for pleasure and the Song of Solomon actually "idealizes it."<sup>133</sup> For some to withhold from their partners for reasons like tiredness, resentment or bitterness actually sets up one's partner to resort to *πορνεία*, whether fantasy or real. Spouses must not withhold sex from their partner as a means of manipulating them.
- b. Paul's challenge that they have responsibilities toward their spouse (3-6). *The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. Now as a concession, not a command, I say this.*

Paul's challenge can be summarized in two ways.

- 1) You must fulfill your obligations to your spouse because you do not have exclusive rights to your body (3-4).

Marriage is all about giving rather than getting; responsibility rather than rights! There are some who spiritualized their marriage. They claimed to be beyond intimacy with each other and only involved intimately with God. This is the strong reaction against sexual license that provokes individuals to swing completely to the other side of forbidding sexuality all together.

- 2) You can refrain from your spouse for a short time but only with mutual consent (5-6).

- a) The exception (5)

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<sup>132</sup>Thiselton, 499.

<sup>133</sup>Rosner and Ciampa, 275.

Temporary abstinence with mutual agreement is permitted. In the OT, there were some instances where abstinence in marriage was recommended for spiritual purposes as in Joel 2:12-16. In our text, Paul says that believers can do this to give themselves to prayer.

Paul's advice is not to withhold. In verse 5 Paul combines an aorist imperative with a negating particle to show that this situation was already occurring in Corinth. So, Paul says, "stop depriving each other."<sup>134</sup> Satan will get a hold on them. He deliberately concentrates much of subtlety in sexual temptations. Some of the vilest forms can creep into the sexual arena.

b) The disclaimer (6)

So, in a sex-saturated society, marriage partners should not refrain from their spouse unless it is temporary. However, in verse 6 Paul qualifies this teaching. One of the biggest questions about this portion of the text is what "this" refers to? There are actually two good views of this (5b or 7).<sup>135</sup>

Diagram –

"this" = temporary abstinence for spiritual purposes (5b)

"this" = Paul's declaration to remain single (7)

c. Paul's personal condition of singleness (7) *I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.*

In verse 7, Paul shows that God gifts each person differently: one person for singleness and another for marriage.<sup>136</sup> In Matthew 19, Christ reminds his disciples that "not everyone can receive this saying of yours." Christ recognized that many people are called to marriage and that few are called to a life of singleness. Paul's lifestyle was not conducive to a married person-itinerant travel, difficult work, constant danger, mocking/ridicule, beating, imprisonment, etc. Paul's gift of singleness involved his ability to suppress his sexual drives "with the result that his creative energy is poured forth into the work of the gospel of every level of consciousness to great effect."<sup>137</sup> The gift of celibacy then is a special gift which God only gives to certain believers and which enables one for devoted service to the

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<sup>134</sup>Anthony Thiselton argues convincingly for this translation on page 507 of his commentary.

<sup>135</sup>Thiselton gives a comprehensive discussion of five different views. Ibid., 510-11.

<sup>136</sup>Rosner and Ciampa have a strange view of this gift. They believe that Paul is speaking about some sort of positive attitude instead of the gift for singleness and marriage. Rosner and Ciampa, 286.

<sup>137</sup>Thiselton, 513.



kingdom of God. All that is left for each one of us is to discover what God's calling is for our lives and then be honest about the way that God has gifted us.

2. Question 2: If I am single or if I have lost my spouse should I get married (8-9)? *To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*

The second question that the Corinthians must have asked Paul is obvious when one considers Paul's counsel to this church in verses 8 and 9. Now, in order to discover this question one must identify who Paul means by the **unmarried and widows** in verse 8. Whoever this group is, Paul admonishes them to remain single as he is. The term **widows** is quite easy to determine. Paul instructs those whose husbands have died to remain single. He will give his rationale for this later in chapter 7. There is much dispute however about the identity of the **unmarried** (αγαμος) in verse 8. Let's briefly discuss the possibilities.

**First, some believe that this speaks of unmarried men.** This view is not very popular, but it is held because the actual Greek word used here is masculine. So, this would be in reference to both bachelors and widowers. **Second, others state the word unmarried is in reference to widowers in verse 8.** The natural contrast of a widow is a widower. The Greek language does have a specific word for "widower," but it is not used in the New Testament at all. So, Gordon Fee and Fitzmyer both state that Paul uses **unmarried** in its place in our text. This would seem to make the two words parallel. **Finally, others think that unmarried just might mean any unmarried person.** This view of the word believes that we must see Paul's counsel applying to any single person, either man or woman. This word technically can be used to speak of any unmarried person and many of the older commentaries take it this way. So, this word can speak of any single, divorced (used this way in verse 11), or widowed person. One of the objections to this view is the question why Paul would say any unmarried person and then also say widows. It might be that Paul's counsel to remain single is applicable to all unmarried people especially widows.<sup>138</sup>

So, Paul intends any single person to remain single. Again, we are not told why they should continue in singleness at this point only that their best choice is to do so unless they are incapable of remaining celibate (reasons are coming in verses 25-38). However, Paul does give an exception here to some because it is **better to marry than to burn**. The word for **burn** might speak of burning in hell, but it probably better to take this as an analogy for experiencing

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<sup>138</sup>Young single women and young widows needed to be especially cautious at this time. Single women might consider remaining single because of the low life-expectancy of women (20-30 yrs.) in the first century because of the "instances of death in childbirth." As a matter of fact, it has been estimated that one in five pregnancies during this time were fatal. Thiselton, 516-23.

intense sexual desires.<sup>139</sup> It is better to marry than to experience overwhelming sexual passions.

3. Question 3: Should I divorce my spouse (10-16)?

As we move into verses 10-16, we will consider divorce and remarriage. We all have been touched by divorce in some way or another in our society today. Let me take a moment and survey the class to see just how much exposure we have had to divorce.<sup>140</sup>

Paul will deal with the question of divorce in these verses. There are two different cases in which some at Corinth were wondering if divorce were possible. Let's look at these in closer detail.

- a. Case 1: Remain married even if someone becomes more desirable to you than your spouse (10-11). *To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.*

The overall point of verses 10 and 11 is that believers should not initiate a divorce. This admonition does not come directly from Paul but ultimately from the words of Christ. This formula is common in this chapter and it is not meant to degrade the words of Paul but simply informs us when Paul is aware of some form of Christ tradition and when he gives his own instruction (Mark these in your Bible).

Paul says that the wife is not to separate from her husband. This must be seen as a synonym for divorce as the same word is used of the man in verse 15. It is true that Jewish women according to Jewish Law could not divorce. But Roman law ruled the day in first century Corinth and women were allowed to seek divorce in Roman Law. "In the Greco-Roman world men and women could divorce their partners by enacting what has been called a 'divorce by separation.'"<sup>141</sup> This sort of divorce could be enacted by women or men.

It is also very important to observe the parenthesis (11) in the middle of this section. Paul discusses what one must do if divorce is initiated. When a believer initiates a divorce they have two choices. They can either remain

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<sup>139</sup>Louw & Nida, ?.

<sup>140</sup>At this point, I like to take an informal survey of the class: 1) How many of you have someone close to you that has been divorced? 2) How about Divorce/Remarriage? 3) How many of you have heard preaching on Divorce/Remarriage? 4) How many of you have studied this before? 5) How would you counsel a couple that came to you seeking a divorce? 6) Is Divorce and Remarriage the same thing? At times, I will also take two class periods to deal with "divorce" and "remarriage" from a Biblical perspective.

<sup>141</sup>Ciampa & Rosner, 292.

single or they can be reconciled to their spouse. Paul does not allow for a believer who initiates a divorce to pursue some other marriage. Paul is not endorsing believer's pursuing divorce, but he deals with the realities of real-world church life. Further, with this parenthesis, Paul seems to address a situation where a believer might be considering divorce so that they can marry someone more appealing. Seeking an upgrade of spouses is not an option for the believer!

- b. Case 2: Remain married even if you are married to an unbeliever (12-16). *To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?*

The second question of this section is whether it is permissible to divorce my spouse if he or she is an unbeliever. This situation attracts Paul's comment in verses 12-16.

- 1) A Principle: believers should remain married to their spouse even if they are married to an unbeliever (12-13). *To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.*

The better answer to this question is that believers should remain married to his/her spouse even if he/she is an unbeliever. Jesus did not address this sort of situation in his own teaching, but Paul gives his own Apostolic opinion while under the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

- 2) A Reason: believers should remain married for the spiritual well-being of their spouse and children (14). *For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.*

In verse 14, Paul tells us that believers should remain married to their unbelieving spouses because of the opportunities for the advance of the gospel in the lives of a spouse and children.

Rosner & Ciampa suggest that "in Corinth, wives who knew that their husbands had a history of sexual immorality may have wondered

whether or not Paul expected them to abandon their husbands.”<sup>142</sup> This concern may also explain why some believers were withholding from their spouse. Perhaps, the pagan status of their spouse had caused the Corinthian believers to question whether intimacy would contaminate, defile, or infect them with the sin of their spouse especially if their unsaved spouse had a pattern of unchastity.<sup>143</sup> This was a concern for holiness or sanctification in some of the hearts of the Corinthians. This is a legitimate concern as are other modern concerns about transmitted diseases, etc. So, Paul will continue to use this “sanctification” language as he answers their question.

In verse 14, Paul says that the husband and children are actually sanctified as the believer stays involved in the marriage. ***But in what sense are the husband and children sanctified?*** This sanctification is not salvific but seems to speak of some sort of spiritual advantage for these people. They are set apart for the gospel and will thus experience more opportunity to turn to Christ because of the ongoing influence of the believing wife. So, the most important point here is that those who are saved while married to an unbeliever may function normally within their marriage without any fear of contamination.

- 3) An Explanation: Believers should remain married unless your unsaved spouse demands a divorce (15-16). *But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?*

Paul says that when a believer is deserted or abandoned by an unbelieving spouse that he or she is not under bondage.<sup>144</sup> However, there is some confusion as to what this means. Some believe that Paul is teaching that this means that a believer is free to remarry in such cases. This idea is called the Pauline Privilege. Others believe that these two verses mention nothing about remarriage, but simply address the first marriage and divorce. So, most scholars agree that Paul gives a Desertion Clause in this text. Paul says that if an unbelieving spouse goes down to the law courts in Corinth and demands a divorce that the believer should not stop the process because God has called us to peace.

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<sup>142</sup>Rosner & Ciampa, 290-91.

<sup>143</sup>This sort of concern might exist in some contemporary marriages as well. Should a believing wife or husband engage in physical intimacy with their spouse if there is a pattern of immorality?

<sup>144</sup>Another important NT text about divorce and remarriage is Matt 19:1-12. The debate about this passage revolves around Jesus’ Exception Clause. DISCUSS VARIOUS VIEWS HERE. In this passage the Pharisees allude to an exception from the law which allowed for divorce in some situations. As far as I know this is the only place in the law which speaks about divorce, so it is obvious why they would feel that this text was important to Paul’s discussion.

It is important for us to realize that good people disagree on this issue. Having weighed all of the evidence, I believe that view 1 above is best and that a believer should not remarry in such cases. Many people would object to this view on emotional grounds. They might ask what the believer is supposed to do about his or her calling to marriage and the need for intimacy. I respond by suggesting that a relationship with God can be much more satisfying than any physical relationship. Others object because of the emotional needs of the children of this sort of divorce. Aren't the children entitled to a father or mother who cares for them? I respond again by saying that God can meet the emotional needs of the family even if they have been abandoned by a father or mother. It might also be important to respond by asking how long a woman or man should wait to allow for reconciliation. Should the believer wait one year, five years, ten years?

Perhaps, it is best to remind us at this point that a believer's relationship to his spouse is to be a picture of Christ's relationship to the church. Could you ever imagine Christ going up to a believer and saying, "This is not working out! This is not what I thought that it was going to be, I want out!" Aren't you glad that Christ would never say that to the church or to a believer? We must seek to represent the selfless love of Christ in our relationship with our spouse. Paul envisions no situation in which a believer would ever pursue a divorce.

Verse 16 then also presents another exegetical challenge as one can either take the verse in an optimistic way or a pessimistic one. The ***pessimistic view*** of this verse is that believers should accept the divorce in peace because there is no guarantee that the believer will be able to see their family come to Christ anyway. The ***optimistic view*** (the one that I like) of this verse is that the believer should avoid divorce when possible because they might be able to see some of their family come to know Christ. This last view seems to be more in-line with the main teaching of this text.

B. Paul defends the permanence of marriage with two illustrations (17-24).

Before we look at the specifics of verses 17 through 24 it is important that we notice the repetition of two key words in this text. First, the verb "call" (καλεῖν) is used eight times in this little section. Its noun form (κλήσις) is also used one time. This word speaks of someone or something being chosen.<sup>145</sup> "Paul's most frequent use of the word is an authoritative summons to salvation or service."<sup>146</sup> Here the term is applied to various stations in life to which God has called believers.

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<sup>145</sup>BDAG, ?.

<sup>146</sup>Ciampa & Rosner, 309.

Second, the word “remain” is also repeated in this text. It is used three times and helps to form the structure of this entire section. Believers must be content to remain as they are. The good news is that God has redeemed us where we are with our own peculiarities in order that we might serve him. Christians do not need to change their life situation to serve God; they can do so regardless of their status. In particular, Paul illustrates the need for believers to remain in their calling by looking at two different ethnic or social callings.

1. Ethnic status does not matter (17-20). *Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.*

a. Remain in your God-given status (17, 20). *Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. --- Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.*

Paul’s general purpose in all of his churches is that people abide by the calling that they have experienced. This general principle is then applied to one’s ethnic status whether they are Jew or Gentile.

b. Circumcision and uncircumcision do not matter with God (18-19). *Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.*

In particular, verses 18 and 19 speak about whether one is circumcised or uncircumcised when they come to know the Lord. Paul even states that “circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing.” Imagine a Jew who would hear this statement! They would be horrified and then mystified. This phrase is used three different times by Paul. He also uses this phrase in Galatians 5:6 and 6:15.

Notice as well that Paul states that while circumcision and uncircumcision do not matter in Corinth, keeping God’s commandments does. What does Paul mean when he says, “but keep God’s commands?” Some believe that this is a reference to the Mosaic Law. However, in the other texts in Galatians it is soon obvious that the solution “cannot be understood as the Law of Moses.”<sup>147</sup> It would also be quite confusing for Paul to repeal the

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<sup>147</sup>Ciampa & Rosner, 315.

circumcision rite and then say that believers have to obey the Law of Moses since this is one of the chief stipulations of that covenant. Other suggest that Paul means that believers are to keep the weightier matters of the Law or Moses or the moral aspects of that Law. However, again this would at best be unnecessarily confusing. So, perhaps another view can explain this in a better way. Some suggest that these commandments are actually something different than the Law of Moses, but perhaps something like teachings from Christ. One of the reasons is that Paul keeps explicitly referring to the teachings of the Lord in this chapter (7:12, 25). “He understands the Lord’s teaching to be the norm for all Christian ethics.”<sup>148</sup> This phrase might also allude to instructions found in some of Paul’s Epistles in the New Testament like the other mention of commandment in 1 Corinthians 14:37.

So, Paul’s point is that ethnic status does not matter to God, but obedience and proper function within one’s calling is most important. Just as there is no need to change one’s ethnic status, there is no need to change one’s marital status either.

2. Social standing does not matter (21-24). *Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.*

The second illustration of status that Paul gives is about one’s social standing.

- a. Being in slavery is not a disadvantage to one’s walk with God (21-23). *Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.*

“Some may have wondered, ‘Isn’t my ability to honor and serve God profoundly compromised by the fact that I live the life of a slave?’”<sup>149</sup> So, Paul’s answer is that your status at work does not matter to God. Your status in Christ far outshines your earthly status.<sup>150</sup>

In verse 22, Paul deals with a possible social opportunity for the slave. He says that slaves can avail themselves of the opportunity to become free if given the choice.

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<sup>148</sup>David Garland, 282.

<sup>149</sup>Ciampa & Rosner, 319.

<sup>150</sup>Consult Notes on 1 Peter 2 on slavery.

- b. Remain in the calling that God has given to you (24). *So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.*

In verse 24, Paul says that brothers and sister should remain content in the calling that God has given to them. This is possible since remaining there will involve “God at your side.”<sup>151</sup>

VI. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Question: concerning the unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:25-40).

Summary: In verses 25-40, Paul ends his discussion of marital status by describing a few situations where those who are single might be allowed to get married. However, the overwhelming emphasis in this section is that believers should remain single as an even better alternative. In answer to some questions about singleness, Paul gives at least three reasons for single people to remain that way in Corinth.

Paul answers another question related to marriage and singleness. Specifically, this question or series of questions concerns those who are single, separated, divorced, or widowed.<sup>152</sup> Should these single people seek to get married? Paul answers this question by giving several reasons for singleness and then giving them a few allowances for someone to get married.

A. Reasons for remaining single (25-35)

Paul gives three significant reasons for the single believers of Corinth to remain single.

1. Remain single because of the present crisis (25-28). *Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that.*

Paul's first reason for singleness is marked out in this first paragraph. Paul actually uses a rhetorical device called an *inclusio* to mark out his most important point. In verse 26a Paul speaks of a present crisis and in verse 28b he speaks of troubles in life. These two ideas are actually quite similar and mark out Paul's main point: the single believers at Corinth should remain single because of a crisis that had hit the church. There are three questions that must be asked at this point to bring greater clarity to this text.

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<sup>151</sup>This is Thiselton's translation of the end of this verse. Thiselton, 562.

<sup>152</sup>Gordon Fee believes that this entire section is a response to a singular question since Paul uses the word “virgin” all throughout the text (28, 34, 36-38). Fee, 322-23.



a. Who are the betrothed (25)?

The question of verse 25 has to do with the betrothed. There are three views regarding the identity of this type of person. Some believe that this word in our text speaks of single women. This would refer to any single girl. This idea was almost universally held by the Church Fathers. Some modern translations also take the text this way. However, there are some problems for the view like the actual noun that Paul uses. He could have used a word which would more readily indicate a single young women (γυνή) and the verb in verse 36 is a plural form instead of a singular one ("let them marry" instead of "let her marry"). Others believe that the "betrothed" might speak of the feminine partner in a spiritual marriage. Actually, several commentators have suggested this view throughout the history of the interpretation of the text.<sup>153</sup> These people suggest that some of the Corinthians had taken vows of celibacy in marriage and were married for the spiritual partnership and accountability. However, there is no strong evidence of this sort of practice in the Roman Empire. Finally, others believe that Paul is speaking about engaged young women in these verses. Perhaps, some single Corinthian believers were being pressured to remain single by some fellow believers. Thus, the question comes from the Corinthians about what to do in such cases. Should engaged couples get married in light of what was going on in Corinth? This is the majority view of most modern commentators.<sup>154</sup> So, Paul says that although he does not have any specific instruction from Jesus about how engaged couples should behave in the midst of a crisis, his instruction is sufficient because the Lord has made him trustworthy.

b. What is the present distress (26)?

I would like to discuss three possibilities related to the distress, which the Corinthians were facing in their First Century churches. At the end of the day, one will not find conclusive evidence in favor of any one of these three views, but exploring them for a moment will provide most helpful.

1) Famine

Bruce Winter builds an impressive case that the "crisis" in Corinth was one of a series of famines which swept through Achaia. He is not alone in this hypothesis, but he was able to find some support for a famine in this region around the time of Paul. Having said that, I find it highly questionable that Paul speaks of famine in this text, because later he asks the Corinthians themselves to give of their abundance for a famine relief project for the churches of Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-9).

***Why would Paul expect a famine-stricken people to give***

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<sup>153</sup>Hurd, Thrall, Murphy O'Connor, Seabolt.

<sup>154</sup>Thiselton says that "a clear majority of twentieth-century scholars" hold this view. Thiselton, 596.

*food to other famine-stricken people?* Further, Paul teaches in chapter 4 that at least some of the Corinthians were full and rich!

## 2) Persecution

Others suggest that when Paul says *crisis* he might be speaking of some level of persecution. We know that there was some persecution from Jews while Paul was planting the church. Martin Luther believed that the crisis involved persecution and the actual Greek work is elastic enough to speak of persecution.

## 3) Disease

The crisis might also be in reference to some sort of disease or health distress in the city of Corinth. Without be able to be fully confident, I suggest that this might be the best view. It appears much more likely that the small Corinthian house churches were being devastated with physical sickness, weakness, and death. Some of this epidemic in the church might even be traced back to their carnal practices at the Lord's Table (11:30).

Now, whatever the exact identity of the crisis, Paul counsels the young men and young women not to get married because of the great economic or physical distress that had hit the church. This present crisis did not make it a great time to start a family. Leon Morris says it this way, "When high seas are raging, it is no time for changing ships."<sup>155</sup>

The direct application of this text in our country today is difficult. In America today, believers do not endure much persecution and we live in the midst of much financial security. Yet, we are not driven by "what does this text mean to me" as much as we are by "what does this text mean." Having said that, verses 25-28 mean more to believers when they are in the midst of difficulties! These verses should also be considered by anyone who is going into missions work, which calls for them to endure suffering and persecution for the cause of Christ.

### c. What do Paul's questions mean in verse 27?

The last discussion which will bring clarity to our text is what Paul means with the questions that he asks in verse 27. Here it is extremely important that we allow the context to inform our decisions. The questions of verse 27 are intended to speak to betrothed (engaged) people who live in the midst of crisis. Paul asks just how serious the engagement is. Are you under a strong obligation? If you are then go through with the marriage. Are you free from an obligation to a young woman? If so, then do not get

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<sup>155</sup>Leon Morris, 113.

married. This idea will be difficult to remember and you might consider marking it in your Bible.<sup>156</sup>

2. Remain single because of the shortness of time (29-31). *This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.*

One of the most important initial considerations that we must make about this text is how it relates to the one before it. The opening words of this section might suggest that this paragraph is some sort of “explanatory digression” of what was just stated in verses 25-28. However, there is no clear indication of this in the text. The first phrase in verse 29, *This is what I mean* (τοῦτο δέ φημι), should better be translated, **but this I declare**.<sup>157</sup> Paul uses the present crisis as a means to talk about the shortness of time, but he does not state that he sees the crisis in Corinth as an eschatological event.<sup>158</sup> Further, the translation, *from now on* (τό λοιπόν), in verse 29 might also be misleading. Paul is simply making an inference from the shortness of time. It might be better to translate it, **therefore**.

Paul’s main point is that time has been compressed, which results in the married, mourners, rejoicers, retailers, and owners behaving much differently because (reason) this world in its present form is passing away. Paul says that the amount of time that believers have is very limited so they must serve Christ while they can. The end of the world demands a radical new standing toward the world, and believers must avoid preoccupation with earthly concerns.<sup>159</sup> Paul is not telling married men and women to abandon their obligations; rather, he wants them to keep the right perspective on life. Paul’s reasoning might be similar to Christ’s in Luke 14:26.

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<sup>156</sup>One of the reasons that I hold this view is that in verse 27, Paul asks is one is “free” from a wife. The word “free” is a technical term used for releasing someone from a contract. This word might speak of a divorce in some settings, but it was also used of breaking a formal engagement.

<sup>157</sup>This exact same phrase is only used in one other place in the New Testament (1 Cor 15:50). In that text, the ESV translates it: “I tell you this, brothers.” The translators also start a new paragraph in that chapter with this phrase. I am suggesting that a similar translation should be used here as well.

<sup>158</sup>As a matter of fact, Paul nowhere tells us that the end of this world will bring hardship for believers. He clearly shows that those who are outside of Christ will suffer great wrath, but he also explains that believers will be delivered from the great day of God’s wrath. Consequently, his point here is that the time before the return of the Lord is short.

<sup>159</sup>Leon Morris, 114.

*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*

Both Christ and Paul demand that our love for God far outshine any earthly, temporal relationship. When we get to heaven, ALL earthly relationships will be completely overwhelmed with the realization of God and Christ. For Paul, particular focus on serving the Lord is necessary in light of the shortness of time. Paul's preference for singleness is not on any moral grounds, but on eschatological grounds. Paul has such a great eschatological zeal that the things of this world will not distract him!

Perhaps, it would be best to make two applications of this idea to all believers here today regardless of their marital status. First, do you have great eschatological zeal? Is the coming of Christ the "unclouded object of your gaze?"<sup>160</sup> As Rosner and Ciampa suggest, has the "future squashed your present?"<sup>161</sup> This zeal will change the character and quality of your life. Second, are you overly concerned with staying current with fashions and trends in this world? Although believers should not do everything that they can to look out of touch with society, why is worldliness such an attraction to some believers? Worldliness in a believer is one of the greatest forms of foolishness imaginable because the present form of this world is passing away!

3. Remain single because of divided loyalties (32-35). *I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.*

The third reason for remaining single is so that your singular attention can be placed upon Jesus Christ. Paul articulates this idea by discussing some differences between single and married people before he further explains his own purposes for remaining single.

- a. A contrast between the physical existence of single and married people (32-34)

These contrasts are quite simple and easy to understand. A key concept will be the word *anxious* (μεριμνᾷ). This word is repeated five times in this text and Paul's plays off the meaning of the word to show that there is a good and a bad type of anxiety. Being anxious about or for the Lord is a

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<sup>160</sup>Peter Naylor, 203.

<sup>161</sup>Ciampa & Rosner, 348.

good thing, while being overly preoccupied with one's spouse can be counter-productive.

1) Unmarried believers can have a singular focus on pleasing God.

The single man or woman is in an excellent position to focus solely on pleasing the Lord. In verse 34 there is a little controversy concerning who Paul means when he says "the unmarried and betrothed woman." With the first word, he might mean all unmarried women except the betrothed (divorced, widowed, permanently separated). However, it is probably more consistent to say that he means all unmarried especially the betrothed woman.<sup>162</sup> Either way, Paul's point is to show the advantage that a single woman has to serving the Lord.

2) Married believers must focus on pleasing their spouse while also pleasing God.

Paul's says that the married man or woman is divided. They are both for the Lord and for their spouse.

b. The purposes of Paul's appeal to remain single (35)

In verse 35, Paul explains why he has appealed to the Corinthians in this way. He gives three purposes.

1) This will benefit you.

2) This will promote good order.

Paul does not want to "throw a noose around their necks," but he wants to promote good order in the church.<sup>163</sup>

3) This will protect your singular devotion to God.

B. Allowances for getting married (36-40)

When we get to verses 36-40 it is important to see two different exceptions that Paul gives to the idea of remaining single or remaining in one's present status.

1. In some cases it is appropriate to marry your fiancé (36-38). *If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry- it is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep*

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<sup>162</sup>Pragmatically speaking, what are some of the advantages for a believer to remain single? 1) Moving is easier, 2) Ministering in a dangerous setting might be easier, 3) Using evenings more for ministry might be easier.

<sup>163</sup>Fee, 347.

*her as his betrothed, he will do well. So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.*

Read the ESV and then read the NAS. The NAS actually interprets this text as a father considering giving away the hand of his virgin daughter. Again this interpretation runs into some difficulties. Why would a father not take advantage of giving his daughter to a young man especially in a moment of crisis? It seems much more natural to take this passage as advice to a young man who had been betrothed to a woman. Paul explains then that it is not a sin for the two to get married, especially if the man finds a marriage inevitable. Again though Paul's preference is for the young man to remain single and keep her as a virgin. In verse 37, *to keep her as his betrothed*, might mean that he is to keep her as a perpetual virgin or release her from the betrothal agreement.

2. In some cases it is acceptable to get married after your spouse dies (39-40). *A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. Yet, in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.*

When we get to verses 39-40, Paul shifts the discussion to the widow and widower. In the first part of this section, Paul demands the permanency of marriage. Death is the only thing that should break the marriage tie. Upon the death of one's spouse remarriage is permitted, but only to a believer. However, in Paul's judgment a widow or widower is happier if they remain single.

I take the very last sentence in verse 40 as sarcasm. Paul says that he too thinks that he has the Spirit of God. But who is Paul criticizing by this statement? Perhaps some of the Corinthians were claiming to be led by the Spirit in their call to celibacy in marriage or by their statement on marriage. Paul then also claims to have the guidance of the Spirit of God!<sup>164</sup>

## VII. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Question: concerning disputable things (1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1).

Summary: In chapters 8-10, Paul addresses the believer's relationship to meat offered to idols. The Corinthians asked Paul a simple but controversial question about whether a believer could eat meat offered to idols. Some of them claimed to know that idols and idol meat could not impact one's relationship with God. Paul responds to these questions with six different principles for them to consider before eating the meat. First, Paul says that believers must consider the impact that this choice might have on their weaker brother or sister in Christ. Some of the Corinthians were saved out of idolatrous backgrounds and Paul wants each Corinthian believer to consider the possible impact that this decision might make on other believers in the church. Second, Paul uses his own illustration of apostolic liberty to encourage the Corinthians regarding the necessity of promoting the gospel. How might this

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<sup>164</sup>A few personal conclusions from chapter 7 – 1) Just because someone is single does not mean that they cannot serve in a local assembly, even as a minister. 2) Singleness has advantages. 3) Marriage allows one to have a sanctifying influence upon their family.

choice impact the spread of the gospel in the regions surrounding Corinth? Third, Paul warns these believers about the need for personal discipline in their walk with God. Fourth, Paul instructs the Corinthians to be cautious in light of the failures of the children of Israel in the Old Testament Scriptures. Fifth, Paul instructs the believers how to be relevant and flexible in different social and private settings with their choice of food. Finally, Paul tells them that the ultimate criterion in matters of Christian Liberty is glorifying God. Whether one eats the meat or not, he must consider the potential impact of his actions upon the testimony of God.

Imagine for a moment that I decided to take this class on a trip to the Caribbean. So, we boarded a ship and then I informed you that I was your captain. I also explained to you that we do not have much fuel--just enough to go out for a short trip and then return. After we departed from the safety of the shore, I broke the news to you that we do not have an anchor on the ship and that our ship's navigation system is broken. ***How would you feel about our trip?*** What if I explained that everything will be fine because when we were out on the water I will watch another ship on the horizon to make sure that we were not moving? What is wrong with that idea? (***The problem is that you cannot be confident of your location by comparing yourself to something else that is moving***) As believers it is most important that we fix ourselves to the Scriptures. Biblical principles must be our foundation rather than comparing ourselves to other believers or churches in our culture.

Thus, I want to suggest that the Bible inform your choices on matters of controversy or Christian Liberty. Perhaps you have seen a water filter which layers permeable fibers upon each other. I want to suggest that the Bible becomes a filter for the choices that we make. In this text there are six different principles which might function like single strands in a filter that will preserve the integrity of our actions and inform our choices. While this text in its original setting is about meat offered to idols, I believe that the principles here can help us in our own set of difficult issues. There are many controversial situations which believers face today that demand Biblical answers.

- Who am I allowed to date and marry? Or how do I counsel someone else about whom they can marry?
- What can a Christian wear?
- What can I watch?
- Where exactly am I allowed to go?
- What can I listen to?

Now, let's look at the text to discover these principles.

- A. Principle #1: the principle of edification (8:1-13). *I must consider others when making personal choices.*

This principle should become quite clear through the detailed study of chapter 8. There are three distinct sections of this chapter.

1. A wrong basis for Christian Liberty: my intellectual or spiritual knowledge must be subordinate to love (8:1-3). *Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.*

***Have you ever asked a simple question of someone and received a complex answer?*** In 8:1, the Corinthians had asked Paul a very simple question: Can I eat meat? Yet, the answer that he gives is three chapters long. Perhaps, you remember asking your father for permission to use the family car for your date. “Dad, can I use the car?” What happened next? Perhaps he said “Son, have a seat!” And he began to tell you how much responsibility it was for a young man to be trusted with a car (speed, wash, put gas in the car) and then he digressed into a discussion on how to treat a young woman in the car. Finally, as you’re listening to him, it appears that he will give you the car. Sometimes simple questions have complex answers! Paul treats the Corinthians’ question in a similar fashion.

The Corinthians actually asked Paul two questions, one in verse 1 (What about idol meat) and one in verse 4 (Can we eat meat offered to idols?). A few times in this book, Paul gives **περι δε** statements and then immediately proceeds to give a quote from the Corinthians. It actually might be best to put a colon and quotations marks after the word “idols” in verse 1. Thus, it is actually the Corinthians that said, “All of us have knowledge.”

***But of what knowledge are they talking?***<sup>165</sup> Some of the Corinthians were claiming that they knew that they could eat the meat that had been sacrificed to idols. This is ironic in light of the short amount of time which had elapsed since the Jerusalem Council. To better understand this, we must realize that there are five major passages on Christian Liberty in the New Testament. The first is the whole book of Galatians (A.D. 49-50). The second is found in Acts 15 (A.D. 49-50). The third text is ours found in 1 Corinthians 8-10 (A.D. 55-56). The fourth text is Romans 14-15 (A.D. 56-57). Finally we have Colossians 2-3 (A.D. 61-63). Let’s briefly look at the first one! Please turn to Acts 15.

Let’s look at the Jerusalem Council a little closer –

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|-------|--|
| 1-2   | No small dissention and dispute – A large dispute  |
| 5     | Pharisees added to salvation   |
| 7     | Peter’s confession   |
|       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Holy Spirit given to the Gentiles too</li> <li>▪ No difference between Jew and Gentile</li> </ul> |
| 12    | Paul and Barnabas declared miracles and wonders among the gentiles   |
| 13    | James enters the scene   |
| 20-21 | James declared that the reason for these limitations was not to offend some – restrict the liberty of Gentile believers.                   |

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<sup>165</sup>The word knowledge may be a spiritual gift or the accurate perception of a situation or a Christian doctrine.



In A.D. 49, the Jerusalem Council writes to the Gentile Churches and gives them four necessary things.

- Refrain from meat offered to idols
- Blood
- Things Strangled
- Fornication

Only six years later in Corinth, the church there states that they knew that it was fine to eat these meats, because they all realized that they were not actually worshipping the idols. This is the knowledge of which some of the Corinthians boasted.<sup>166</sup> So, Paul quickly warns the Corinthians about the dangers of knowledge.

- The ultimate aim of the Corinthians was knowledge instead of love. They thought that if they could truly understand things then they would be the most spiritual Christians.
- I love verse 2! It basically says that if we think that we understand something completely, then we probably do not! I mean, how faulty is it to think that we can fully understand all the sides of a controversial topic (especially when one considers the depravity of man's thinking). Remember Job when he was confronted with the mind and intellect of God in Job 38-41? Job was overwhelmed with God's knowledge and underwhelmed with his own.
- Yet, often I find my opinion of my own intellect as much like a marsh-mellow which becomes puffed up. Then God uses something in my life to smash me down and squeeze out any pride that I had in my own intellect. My own logic is not a reliable guide! Even if God enables me to attain some level of understanding of something, I need to show it in love. ***If a position is not held in love, then it is not the right position!***
- Verse 3 says that if we forget about the pursuit of knowledge and desire to love God first and foremost in our life, then God will KNOW us. The verb ***is known*** in verse 3 is a perfect, passive verb. This means that this sort of loving believer has come to be known and is still known by God. Murray Harris says, "He or she has experienced true knowing."<sup>167</sup>

**So, the wrong basis for Christian Liberty is knowledge or what I perceive to be right and wrong!!**

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<sup>166</sup>Knowledge might simply speak of an accurate perception of this situation or of Christian doctrine in general. In light of Paul's contrast of "knowledge" and "love" in chapter 8, the strong Corinthians might also have been claiming to have a spiritual gift of knowledge which allowed them to rise above this scenario and eat the meat that had been offered to idols.

<sup>167</sup>Murray Harris' Translation.

2. A wise foundation for personal choices: there is one true God (8:4-6).  
*Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.*

In this section, Paul is not only defending the fact that there is one true God, but also reminding us of the wisest foundation for making personal decisions regarding controversial topics—God’s opinion. These verses lay for us one of the richest theological sections in all of 1 Corinthians. Let’s take a closer look at them.

a. Slogans from knowledgeable Corinthians (4)

In verse 4, we find two “Corinthian Slogans.”

- a. Slogan #1- “There is nothing to an idol.”
- b. Slogan #2- “There is only one God.”

b. Paul’s answers to the Corinthians (5-6)

These two slogans are answered with two ideas.

a. Answer #1- There are multitudes of imposters (5).

Paul’s first answer is a simple adjustment to the first slogan of the Corinthians. Witherington says that verse 5 follows a “yes . . . but” procedure.<sup>168</sup> Paul states that there are many alleged gods and lords. The term **κύριος** was a standard title for the deities of the mystery cults that thrived in Corinth. You see, the Greeks believed that heaven and earth was ruled by a multiplicity of lords. So, Paul agrees that idols are simply blocks of wood or stone, but he does qualify their statement by saying that there are many supposed gods and lords in the world.

b. Answer #2- There is only one true God (6).

Paul’s second answer comes in verse 6. This time, Paul fully agrees with the second statement from the Corinthians. But now, Paul will take their statement and further expound upon its relevance to this issue of meat. The existence of God

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<sup>168</sup>Witherington, 188.

has or should affect the Corinthians in at least three major ways.

- a) Our physical existence is from God the Father.

Verse 6 says that for us (Paul and the Corinthians) there is but one true God. He is the Father and all things come from him. This speaks of God's act in creation. God created all things; thus, we live because God choses for us to exist.

- b) Our spiritual existence is from Christ the Lord.

Paul also says that there is one Lord—Jesus Christ, and by him we now exist. But is this speaking of Christ's act in creation or redemption? It might be best to see the first part as creation and the next statement (same preposition in original) as redemption. So, Christ was active to create us and redeem us.

- c) Our eternal existence continues for God's glory.

But if we stop here, we fail to see the real purpose of this section. But you say, "We have already covered verses 4-6." However, we skipped over one important word.

There is a progression in our text that can be seen in verse 6 as one identifies the prepositions. Paul's thought goes from "from . . . through . . . *for*". You might consider marking these in your Bible as it helps to see the purpose of this section. Thus the main point in that God created us, Christ sanctified us, and we are to respond by living *for God*. We are from God, through Christ and thus most importantly for God. **Thus, our thinking about liberty should begin and end with God.**<sup>169</sup> Actually this will be Paul's point in chapter 10, when he says that what we eat or drink or whatever we do, we should do so for God's glory.

But let's not leave this idea too quickly. Do you realize that our life is to be lived solely for the Lord? Yet, we are distracted by our own multitude of idols. Our passion for the Lord should radiate a single,

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<sup>169</sup>Richardson, *Paul's Language about God*, 304.

laser-like beam of fervor for God, yet our passion for God is diffused at best. As Murray Harris says, we suffer from a “multiplicity of conflicting directions rather than a single ultimate concern focused on God.”<sup>170</sup> We are fragmented by many lesser things. So, we must keep God’s glory as our primary concern throughout life.

Let me ask you a few questions:

- 1- Do you believe that there is one true God?
- 2- Do you think that God has an opinion on what you do?
- 3- Have you asked Him his opinion on what you do every day?

3. A worthy consideration for personal choices: the condition of my weaker brother in the Lord is my concern (8:7-13). *However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*

As we go through the last verses of this chapter, we will need to take them a little out of sequence. I want to look at verse 8 first. Then we will look at the rest of the chapter. I also want to make two propositional statements to you that I believe are grounded in the text of this chapter, but you will do well to study this passage out for yourself.

- a. Foundationally, the issue in this text is not a sin issue (8).

First, I would like to submit to you that this issue was not an argument over a sin issue, or something that intrinsically sin in itself. My point is that this was just meat. It was simply a block of protein. It was muscle. Meat, in and of itself, is not a sin issue.

Now, we must be momentarily distracted with some definitions. In defining Christian Liberty, it is very important for us to deal with a few concepts.

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<sup>170</sup>Harris, 633.

- What is legalism?

*Biblical use-* In the first century, legalism was the belief that obedience to the Law of Moses was required for salvation.

*Misguided Popular/Contemporary use* – The modern use of “legalism” is expanded. We tend to say that legalism is when one adds works to sanctification. When someone says that women should not wear pants, we respond by saying that they are so legalistic! Yet, I do not know anyone who says if a woman wears pants she cannot be saved.

- What is liberty?

*Biblical use-* Our liberty was purchased with a great price. But in the first century, liberty was used to describe ***freedom from the practices of the Mosaic Law*** (Sabbaths, feast days, circumcision). It also came to be used of **“those areas, elements, or practices of the Christian life that are not prohibited as negative actions, nor mandated as positive actions in the Scriptures either by express statement or by reasonable implication.”**<sup>171</sup>

*Misguided popular use* – However, some use this term today not as a reference to issues that are not gray areas, but they use it in places that are expressly forbidden in scriptures. So, in our modern world, when it comes to watching a movie with swearing or cursing or immoral scenes, we try to place it into a liberty sphere, when it should never be there. There are some things that the Bible strictly forbids. One of the problems in the church today is that we tend to place things into the wrong sphere of consideration.

When you can watch fornication on TV and say that you are free to do so, then you have abused liberty.

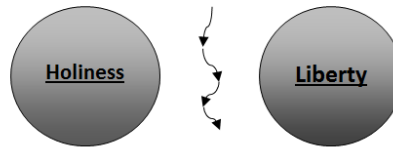
Let me ask you a question, **Should I choose to drink poison that is diluted 2 to 1 or should I rather choose to drink poison that is diluted 10 to 1? Answer: I should never choose to drink poison at all!** I should not choose to sin for any reason or at any time. Liberty is freedom from the Law and meats and Sabbaths and Circumcision. Liberty might also be used as freedom in gray areas. But, liberty never involves freedom to sin. It did not in that setting, nor should it in our setting, speaking of a freedom to participate in sin. A better place to deal with these issues is in the holiness of God sphere. A

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<sup>171</sup>Samuel E. Horn, Dissertation on Liberty, p.11.

better passage to deal with some of our liberty issues might be Romans 6. (Shall we continue in sin? God forbid.)

Diagram:



In 1 Corinthians 8:8, one of the Corinthians might ask: ***What is the big deal if some unbeliever gave me a piece of meat to a block of stone or wood? Why can't I eat that?*** And they might have a valid point, especially since meat was not as readily available in their culture as it is in ours!

Notice that Paul says that “food will not commend us to God.” As we look at this first phrase, we need to realize that this might be another Corinthian slogan. The Corinthians definitely made statements about meat, like back in 1 Cor 6:12-13. The Corinthians were known for taking “legitimate freedoms” too far.<sup>172</sup>

- b. Potentially, this meat issue might become a sin issue (7, 9-13).

Surrounding verse 8 is a field of landmines. There is a multitude of ways in which this “amoral” thing could be wrong for the Corinthians. To see all the ways that this meat might become wrong, let's look at this situation through the eyes of three different people.

- a. The perspective of the weaker brother: if I go against my conscience, then it is wrong for me.

Perhaps, there was something in the past of the weaker brother that kept him from being able to swallow the meat with a clear conscience.

In verse 7, some eat the meat offered to idols and as a result they defile their weak conscience. The conscience is ***an internal witness given to us from God that testifies about the integrity of our actions***. It testifies whether our actions are good or bad. In Paul's writings, the conscience can be good, seared (hardened), weak, or defiled. So, the conscience might be subject to weakness or be in need of correction. Thus, the idea, *Let your conscience be your guide*, is not a good statement. Conscience cannot be our guide because of total depravity.

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<sup>172</sup>“Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good”- 1 Thess 5:21; Eph 5:10.

Back in 1 Corinthians, Paul says that the conscience of the weak becomes defiled by their participation in eating the meat. A weak or misinformed conscience is one thing, but an abused conscience is something far worse. Thus, the weaker brother believes that he has gone too far!

Later, in verse 10, Paul says that his conscience is strengthened to eat meat. But this is definitely not a positive thing, because it leads to his ruin (v.11). The word “strengthened” means something like *built up*. The concept here is that our freedom has actually caused someone to go against their conscience and it leads to their spiritual demise.

Romans 14:22-23 might actually teach a comparable principle (Read that text). I always thought that my mother devised the saying, “If you doubt, don’t” until I read through this text!

- b. The perspective of the stronger brother: if I cause someone else to fall, then it is sin for me.

The strong must realize that **they do not make choices in a vacuum**. In verse 7, it says that not all men have the knowledge that there is one God and that idols are nothing. The strong might boast that they are not superstitious weaklings, and that they glory in the one true God. But, the weak are not able to say that. Paul is proving in verse 7, that the stronger brother must consider the weaker brother. We must be sensitive to the previous lifestyles of our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Gromacki says that mature believers must be aware “that some regard certain amoral things to be sinful for them because of their past involvement in a sinful society.”<sup>173</sup> As part of our relationship in a local assembly, we must be willing to really get to know each other, including strengths and weaknesses and be sensitive to each other’s views on these issues. We cannot settle for “plastic Christianity.” Inside our churches, there should be a “spirit of openness.” Church is not a country club. We should not desire to have a training base for Pharisees; rather, a body where we encourage each other.

Then if you look to verse 9, Paul admonishes the strong Christians not to allow their liberty to become as stumbling block to the weak. **How does Paul describe liberty in verse 9?** He says that it is *this liberty of yours*. The use of this pronoun might suggest that Paul is not aligning himself with this

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<sup>173</sup>Gromacki, 105.

right. This is a subtle indication that their liberty was completely self-centered.

In verses 10 and 11, Paul sets up a scenario that might bring about harm to the weaker brother. He describes a scene in which the stronger brother is eating at a table in the idol temple. Then along comes the weaker brother who sees what is going on and goes into the temple himself. In verse 11 the word “through” could also be translated “in.” While this may mean that the knowledge of the strong brother is the instrument that leads to the demise of the weaker, it is probably best translated as “in.” Thus the weaker brother attempts to share “in” your knowledge, but he cannot survive the experience. He is surrounded by a knowledge that he does not fully share and this leads to his ruin. He then finds destruction in the idol temple.

Let me ask you, how do you respond when you encounter weakness in the physical arena? A baby is weak. A small puppy is weak. Do you kick them in the face because they are weak? Do you trample them? Do you scorn them in their weakness? What would you think of someone who has no regard for the physical well-being of an impaired innocent person? The vulnerability of our weaker brother should bring out a desire to love, protect, and edify them.

Notice how Paul further describes this weaker brother in the end of the verse 11. This is ***the weaker brother for whom Christ died***. True knowledge and love is seen in the face of a crucified Savior. If ever there was a person who could have asked why he should bother to help others, it was Christ. The Scriptures proclaim that at any time Christ could have called twelve legions of angels (Matt 26:53) to deliver him and destroy the world, but he voluntarily subjected himself to the will of those who were far inferior to him. Now, there is at least a little part of all of us that do not like having another person tell us what to do, especially if the other person is someone that we deem as inferior to us! ***Christ loved your Christian brother so much He was willing to die for him. That was the extent of his love. How can we cause this same brother to fall? If Christ was willing to die for my Christian brother, should I not be willing to consider him?***

And if the message is not clear enough for the stronger believer when he is confronted with the sacrifice of Christ, in verse 12, Paul makes one last point to the stronger brother. He proclaims that when you go ahead with this liberty that makes your brother stumble, you actually go about sinning against your brother, wounding (bruising) their weak conscience, and

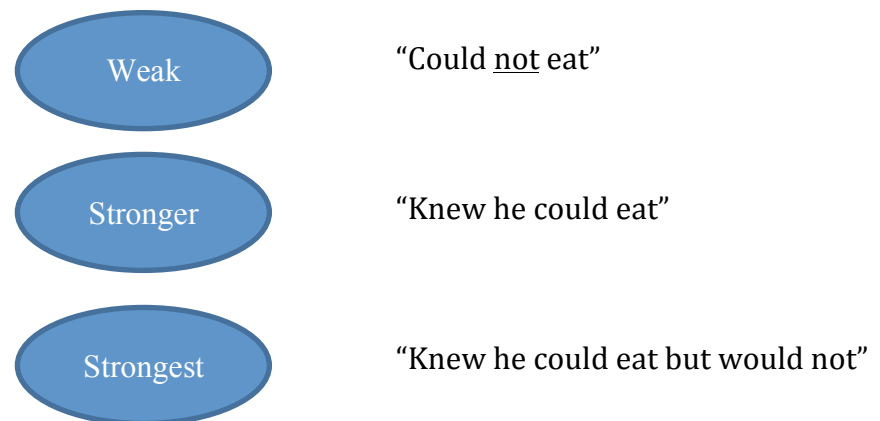


sinning against Christ. In modern English we have lessened the force of the word wounding. If we hurt someone's feelings, that is said to have wounded them. However, the original word was much more severe than emotional hurt. This word τυπτοντες speaks of the continual process of beating or bruising someone.<sup>174</sup> The thought of bruising the conscience of another believer was frightening to Paul. He was already guilty of persecuting Christ when he was an unbeliever, and now he does not want to be guilty of it again!

- c. The perspective of the strongest brother: I know that I can exercise freedom, but I will not, if my insistence on a freedom causes someone else to sin (13). *Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*

I see this passage as a little different from others. Most people see two different brothers in this passage, but I see three.

DIAGRAM:



In verse 13, Paul knows that he can eat the meat, but he will become a vegetarian before he purposely causes his weaker brother to stumble. He actually uses an *emphatic negation* in verse 13 and he means something like “never, never.”

But let's look deeper into what Paul says that he would “never, never” do. He would never, never cause a brother to stumble. Many people make comparisons between the two passages that talk about weak and strong brothers. While Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8-10 have many similarities, they are not completely parallel. You must be aware of **two main differences** between these texts. First, the meat is different. In 1 Corinthians 8-10, the meat is meat which had been offered to idols. In

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<sup>174</sup>Where did you reference this? Look it up in BDAG.

Romans 14-15, the meat is non-kosher meat, or meat that has not been slaughtered in the Jewish ceremonial way. The second main difference is the weaker brother. In Romans 14-15, the weaker brother is simply “offended” at the freedom of the stronger believer. But in the 1 Corinthians passage, the weaker brother is not offended, but is caused to offend. In Romans, he is the “ripped brother,” but in 1 Corinthians he is a “stumbling brother.”<sup>175</sup> So, in 1 Corinthians 8, it is not that the weaker brother is offended at the audacity of the stronger brother, but is intrigued by his freedom. He walks by the idol temple, and says, “Wow, we have freedom to do that? Cool!” This is also seen in verse 9, where the weaker brother stumbles over the freedom of the stronger.

Now, one of the loudest objections that I have heard about limiting one’s liberty by considering the weaker brother is the following: ***If I do that, then I will be led about by the whims of the consciences of judgmental believers.*** However, this text stops short of making that statement. Let’s use an example to help us with this.

(Women in Pants)

- 1) If someone were offended at me, I must ask “why?”
- 2) What are their Biblical reasons?
- 3) After they show me their reason, I should be prepared to show them my reasons.
- 4) I must then determine the nature of the offense. If my brother is “offended,” then I can still prefer them, but I do not have to accommodate him.
- 5) If my brother is “caused to offend,” then my wife will never wear pants around him again.

Thus, if my brother is “caused to offend,” then I should defer to him. But if my brother is “offended,” then I can prefer him but can also agree to disagree on the issue.

- B. Principle #2: The principle of promotion (9:1-23) - We must be willing to sacrifice personal rights in order to promote the gospel.

Today we are going to learn another principle that will help us form the anchor that keeps us from drifting. The filter of God’s Word is being pieced together to keep us where He wants us! Today, we will learn that we must be willing to sacrifice in order to promote the gospel. We must keep the gospel in mind.

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<sup>175</sup>Support this with independent exegetical observations and also by consulting 3 or 4 exegetical commentaries.

Patrick Morley describes a group of fisherman who landed in a secluded bay in Alaska and had a great day of fishing for salmon in his book *A Man in the Mirror*.<sup>176</sup> But when they returned to their sea plane, it was aground because of the fluctuating tides. They had no option except to wait until the next morning till the tides came in. But when they took off, they only got a few feet off the ground and then crashed down into the sea. Being aground the day before had punctured one of the pontoons, and it had filled with water.

The sea plane slowly began to sink. The three men and a 12-year-old son of one of the men, prayed and jumped into the icy waters to swim to shore. The water was cold, and the riptide was strong, and two of the men reached the shore exhausted. These two men looked back, and saw their companion, who was also a strong swimmer, turn around because his 12-year-old son wasn't strong enough to make it. They saw that father with his arms around his son being swept out to sea. This father chose to die with his son rather than to live without him.

Paul never got over the fact that Jesus loved him (Romans 11:33-36; 12:1-2) so much that he sacrificed his life. As a fitting response, Paul sacrificed to see the gospel advance in the life of those to whom he ministered. He was not selfish, but he put aside his own will and did whatever God asked him to do. We would do very well to meditate on the sacrifice of Christ for us!

There are four sections of this chapter that will help us see the sacrifice of Paul.

1. Paul defends his own position as an apostle (1-2) – “I am an apostle.” *Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*

In verse 1 - 6, Paul continues his discussion on Christian Liberty by first defending his own position as an apostle. In these few verse, Paul asks seven questions that lead the Corinthians to admit with him that God has placed a call on his life to be an apostle.

In this argument Paul is proving that he is truly an apostle. His first proof is that he had seen the Lord. Remember when Paul was on the road to Damascus and was blinded by the appearance of Jesus to him. Paul not only met that credential to being an apostle, he also claimed to be sent by God. In Galatians he tells us this (Galatians 1:15-16). *But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone.*

He had not only seen Christ and was commissioned by the Lord, but he also was sealed by the fruit of his ministry. The Corinthians themselves were the proof of his apostleship. Verse 1 ends with this thought, ***are ye not my***

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<sup>176</sup>Source information, #?.

***work in the Lord?*** And verse 2, even calls the Corinthian church the seal of his apostleship. The word “seal” means that they were the visible sign of his position. They were the valid stamp that verified his apostleship. You certify my apostleship, he might say.

We must be willing to sacrifice personal rights in order to promote the gospel.

2. Paul declares his own rights as an apostle (3-14) – “I have apostolic rights.” *This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.*

As an apostle, Paul deserved a certain amount of respect. So, Paul has all the rights of a normal Christian, and he also has the rights of a DIVINELY SENT AMBASSADOR FOR GOD. But in verse 5, he says that he gives up the right to a wife (as some other apostles, like Peter have) so as not to hinder the gospel. He chose to give up a life of companionship for the sake of the gospel. Not only did he give up marriage, but he also gives up the support that a wife might require. Paul limited himself and sacrificed for the advance of the gospel

After defending his position as an apostle, Paul declares his own rights, specifically his right to receive financial support for his apostolic labors. In this declaration, he uses illustrations from both the culture and the Scriptures.

- a. A Cultural Defense (7)

Let’s read verse 7. Paul asks first, ***who serves as a soldier at his own expense?*** What soldier is expected to fight in battle and then in his free time go earn some money for food? That is ridiculous. If a soldier was asked to work in his free time, he would not be sharp for the battle. Next, he asks, ***what farmer plants a vineyard and doesn’t eat any of the fruit?*** Finally, he says,

*what shepherd maintains a flock without getting some of the meat?*

b. A Scriptural Defense (8-13)

But Paul never rests on logic alone to prove his point. He then goes to scripture in verses 8 and 9 and says, *For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain."*

With this verse, Paul is referring to the common practice of those living in the Old Testament era. The OT tells us that when the ox was working for you, that you should also provide for it. The ox would pull a threshing sled over the grain or tread it out with their feet and separate the wheat from the chaff. After this work, one could easily throw the materials up into the air and the chaff would blow away, while the wheat would drop straight to the ground. So, Paul argues that this Old Testament passage was not recorded entirely for the profit of livestock, but for our own instruction. If God requires us to take care of cattle, do you not think that we should also take care of our Christian ministers?<sup>177</sup>

Then, in verse 11, he says that if he has sown spiritual things for them, is it too much to ask for their material things? Skipping over verse 12 briefly, Paul also states that ministers of the temple were supported and allowed to eat (13). Even under the dispensation of the Law, God's ministers were taken care of by other believers. Paul is simply using the Law of Moses for illustrative reasons.

c. An Authoritative Demand (14)

Finally, in verse 14, Paul appeals to the Lord. This might be a reference to Luke 10:7 "... the laborer deserves his wages. . .", but we are not quite sure of the original source of this quote. For Paul, the words of Christ form his climactic conclusion about supporting laborers. This final source of authority clinches the argument for him.<sup>178</sup>

3. Paul denounces his apostolic freedom (15-19, 12) – "But I will not use my rights."<sup>179</sup> *If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?*

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<sup>177</sup>G. K. Beale suggests that this use of Deuteronomy 25 is an analogy (as opposed to a typological use). He says, "Some OT commentators suspect that the Deuteronomy 25 text was already understood proverbially in its context because it is the only verse that deals with animals in that chapter and the overall context is justice to other human beings. Every other verse in Deuteronomy 25 is about justice between humans" (Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 68).

<sup>178</sup>Witherington, 208.

<sup>179</sup>Consult Sermon Notes: 1 Cor 9:16-17.

*Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. For if I preach the gospel that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.*

After Paul goes through the whole pain staking process of defending his position and then declaring his rights, he quickly retreats and denounces his own freedom. He pulls a surprise move! ***Why would he do this? What is he trying to accomplish?*** Have you ever seen someone insist on “their rights” only to then forsake them?

Perhaps, at this point we should realize that Paul is not simply “defending himself,” but is actually providing an example of “self-sacrificial behavior” for the Corinthians to follow.<sup>180</sup>

Paul lives this way because he has a single passion in life—Paul lived for the gospel. His mission in life was the gospel of Christ. He would not obstruct evangelism in any purposeful way. This commitment to the gospel meant that he would not take full advantage of his freedoms as an apostle or his liberty as a Christian! The Corinthians—whose rallying cry was Christian Liberty—must have been shocked by this level of sacrifice for the gospel. The gospel was not part of Paul’s life, it *was* his life.

Paul makes four bold statements in this section that show us that he is willing to denounce any freedom that he may possess as a Christian to further the gospel. In Verse 15 he says “it were better for me to die” than for someone to rob me of the glory of a pure gospel ministry.<sup>181</sup> He is not willing to put any stumbling block in the way of the Gospel.

In verse 16 he says that he is ***under necessity***. This means that God’s compulsion presses upon him. Paul would experience overwhelming sorrow if he did not preach the gospel.

Then in verse 18, he says that he would make “the gospel without charge.” This does not mean powerless or without electricity but this meant that the gospel would be free of financial charge to the church. There would be no entrance fee. He labored long hours sowing tents in order to make his ministry

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<sup>180</sup>Witherington, 203.

<sup>181</sup>A divine compulsion (16-17)

free to the Corinthians. In offering himself in this way, the free gospel would be offered free of charge. Consequently, even his ministry would reflect the free gift of salvation. This would also bring a reward to Paul.

Finally, in verse 19, Paul says that he had made himself (he had enslaved himself) servant unto all. Paul's lifestyle was so selfless he could say that he was at the disposal of all those that came across his path—he was servant to all.

Paul is denouncing any freedom that may prevent others from accepting Christ. And back in verse 12 he makes his motives very clear.

*If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?  
Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure  
anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.*

The word “hinder” (KJV) means a cutting of some sort, such as made in a road to hinder an enemy, to break up the road. It was used of a military that would break up the trail or a bridge of another to stop their advancement. Paul says that he would sacrifice anything in order not to stop the gospel. He would endure hunger or hardship. He would even go homeless and give up financial comforts just so that one more soul would be saved! And although Paul is dead and in a grave, his life passion still speaks to us today. This reveals a primary motivation in Paul's ministry: the advance of the gospel.

***Why would Paul not accept support?***<sup>182</sup> There are three possibilities:

- 1) Potential converts might think twice about this type of ministry.
- 2) Paul did not want confusion between this support and a gift he was generating for the Jerusalem Church. (2 Corinthians 9:5; 12:17-18)
- 3) The gospel could not be fittingly presented by preachers who insisted upon their own rights.<sup>183</sup> The selfishness of some preachers does not support their message.

Perhaps, we should respond by asking ourselves a few questions. ***Am I doing anything openly or secretly that is keeping people from being saved? Should I sacrifice money and give more so that others may be saved? Can I give more of my time to the Lord, so that others may come to Christ?*** Christian Liberty is often abused in the pursuit of “what I want!” Paul was not selfish; he would sacrifice to promote the gospel. The principle of promotion involves personal sacrifice.

4. Paul describes his own approach as an apostle (20-23) – “Because I value the gospel.”<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup>Gromacki, 111. Gromacki also sees a motive in v.15. Paul didn't want people questioning his motives.

<sup>183</sup>Barrett, 207

<sup>184</sup>For a lengthy treatment of this text, see my paper on *εὐνομος Χριστου*.

*In a bit of practical advice, Paul shows us his approach to life<sup>185</sup> and the gospel. Paul used many different approaches to promote the gospel and gain others, but all of them involved great personal sacrifice. In our text, Paul mentions four different ways that he would sacrifice, which were crucial to his approach in evangelism. As we consider these four different cases (scenarios), it is also important to observe Paul's motivations in ministry.*

- a. He would sacrifice for the good of the Jews (20). *To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. "*

At different points in Paul's life, he subjected himself to portions of the law that he felt were no longer necessary in order to minister to the Jews. In Acts 16:1-3, he advises Timothy to get circumcised to minister to the Jews. In Acts 21:23-26, he participates with some Jews in some rites of purification. You see, Paul did not look down on the Jews as long as they did not believe that his obedience to these traditions had saving merit.<sup>186</sup> Paul sacrificed for spiritual growth of the Jews.

- b. He would sacrifice for the good of the Gentiles (21). *To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.*

In verse 21, he moves on to the 2<sup>nd</sup> group of people and describes them as ones that are without the law (**ἄναμος**). This would obviously mean the gentiles. But he quickly qualifies his approach to these people by saying ***as not without the law (ἄναμος) to God, but under the law of Christ.***<sup>187</sup> This statement is the key to this whole passage. Paul is NOT saying like many Christians in our world would have you believe that "he can use any method that works to save souls." He says that even while he ministers to these people, he is still under the law of Christ. The ***Law of Christ*** is the new standard that Paul uses to guide his conduct. But what exactly is the Law of Christ? It might mean that Paul is driven by the words and actions of Christ as the new standard for his ethic. Paul attempts to obey what Christ says as he lives his life.

There are five exegetical clues that cause me to lean this way. First, in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul speaks about the commands from the Lord (Jesus

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<sup>185</sup>Paul shows us how that he has applied Biblical principles to his life situation: Pay, Marriage.

<sup>186</sup>Paul says, "I did not accept pay or my own right to travel with a wife, but I do implore my right to be flexible in reaching others for the gospel. I invoke my liberty to sacrifice selflessly for the gospel of all other people. These were the "rights" that Paul was concerned to use.

<sup>187</sup>We cannot be "lawless." There are certain "ethical imperatives."



Christ). Second, at the end of chapter 8, he says that the sacrifice of Christ encourages us to sacrifice for weaker believers. Third, in 9:14 Paul talks about words from Christ as final validation for paying Christian ministers. Fourth, at the very end of this whole discussion in 11:1, Paul says that the Corinthians should follow him as he himself follows Christ. Finally, in chapter 11, Paul uses what Christ said at the final supper as a model for participation in the Lord's Table. In a very real way then, what Jesus did and said determined how and when Paul would accommodate to others for the sake of the gospel. He would not compromise the message just to see souls saved. IN AN AGE OF GRACE, THE LAW OF CHRIST SHOULD GUIDE ME!

Some might say because of this verse that we can go into the bar and drink as long and we are a witness. But they do not understand the whole passage here. The main concern of this text is not what I can do as a Christian (or what do I have the freedom to do), but it is what I can give to the Lord to further the gospel!

We need to get teens from "What can I do?" to "What does he want?"

- c. He would sacrifice for the good of the weak (22). *To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.*

By including the weak, Paul addresses the specific situation at Corinth. As we learned in our discussions of chapter 8, there was a great deal of temple idolatry in Corinth. Paul said that he would respect the conscience of the weaker brother and not cause him to sin by eating the meat. This verse should be quite convicting to the STRONG CHRISTIANS at Corinth.

- d. He would sacrifice for the good of the gospel (23). *I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.*

Paul was flexible in his approach to the lost. In some ways he was like a chameleon. He would change his colors to further the gospel, as long as he did not compromise. He would gladly sacrifice. Paul states that it is quite possible for him as an apostle to exploit people and abuse his power! However, he would not do this, because he valued the gospel. He would sacrifice all Christian and apostolic rights because he cared more for the gospel. What will you sacrifice for the gospel?<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>188</sup>The gospel applied to the life of a sinner draws out loyalty instead of fear or negativity. Because of our human nature, the Law of Moses often provoked greater sinfulness, although sometimes there might be external submission. The difference between being motivated by grace or law might be the difference between a dog who is bound to his master by love and loyalty or a dog who is solely bound on the basis of a leash! Remove the leash from a loyal dog and he will remain faithful. Remove the leash from a compliant dog and he will leave or attack.

- C. Principle #3: the principle of protection (9:24-27)<sup>189</sup> *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

We have started on a study that has taken us through two principles of Christian Liberty—the principle of **Edification** (*I must consider my brother, when making personal choices*) and the principle of **Promotion** (*I must not do anything that would hinder the gospel*). Today, we will learn the principle of **Protection**. (*I must be disciplined in the choices that I make*).<sup>190</sup>

Someone having read Paul's last statement in 9:22, *I am become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some*, might be tempted to think of him as a rather undisciplined man with no guiding principles. He might be understood as standing for nothing, but Paul goes through great lengths to prove that this is not the case. The parenthesis of verse 21 shows us that Paul was good at being flexible to the needs of his audience, while allowing the law of Christ to bind him!

But verses 24-27 show that Paul did stand for something, and there were some things that he would not compromise. The possibility exists for one to preach to others, yet end up sacrificing his reward. Self-discipline was very important to Paul.

Let me ask you a question: ***Are there some things wrong for me to do that are not wrong for another person to do?*** What do you think?

The best answer to this question is yes. While sin is always sin, there might be some things that I must avoid, which would not impact another person in the same way. This is quite obvious in the differences between men and women (internet safety). Perhaps, there must be areas of restraint in my life because of past spiritual failure in my life. Jim Berg talks about "designer lusts" in his book, *Changed into His Image*.<sup>191</sup> He references the passage in James that says *everyman is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed*. I need to avoid some things because they may lead to a failure in my life. Personal discipline is necessary!

Instead, some believers think that since "God is at work" in my life to bring me to sanctification I do not need to get personally involved.<sup>192</sup> However, in our text Paul

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<sup>189</sup>We have already explored two different principles in these texts. In a scenario where you had to choose between your weaker brother or an unsaved person, who would you choose to offend? You should offend the unsaved person for three reasons. First, love must be the identifying mark of all followers of Jesus Christ (Jn 13:35). Second, 1 Cor 10:27-30 paints a scenario like this one and commands that a believer consider the conscience of other people. Third, Gal 6:10 specifically counsels believers to prefer those of the household of faith.

<sup>190</sup>Of course, self-discipline is one of the things which Paul emphasizes in this text!

<sup>191</sup>Jim Berg, *Changed Into His Image*, ?.

<sup>192</sup>Phil 1:6, 9-11; 1 Cor 15:10; Jas 4:10 "I must cooperate!"

illustrates the value of personal discipline and suggests that it includes four different things.

1. Personal-discipline includes striving (24). *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.*

Paul uses the Greek word for *race* in verse 24 which would remind this people of the Isthmian Games. The isthmian games were broadly celebrated and attended. They occurred every two years near Corinth.<sup>193</sup> As a matter of fact, Paul was in Corinth in 57 AD, and he would have been present at these spring games. This would be a perfect place for him to sell tents, since the competitors and spectators would be housed in tents on the plains outside of Corinth. The location of these games was just 8 1/2 miles from the city of Corinth, so these people would be very familiar with the racing. The competitors would have to train for at least the ten months leading up to this event and would even have to take part in a mandatory last month of supervised daily workouts. If they did not do this training, they would be named by the herald at the games, as being disqualified, which was a major embarrassment to the athlete. This striving would take an all-out effort amid the strict training that was expected. Those who competed had to go without many indulgences in order to compete. Likewise, the Christian and Christian minister must avoid things that impede spiritual progress.

2. Personal-discipline includes sacrifice (25a). *Every athlete exercises self-control in all things.*

Personal-discipline also involves sacrifice. In verse 25 it says that every athlete exercises self-control in all things. Paul is not lawless in “all things” but exercises self-control in “all things.” This is always true of the athlete that expects to win. He will eat only the best in his diet. He will get up early and go to bed early. He will condition, even when he does not feel like it. He will sacrifice. This type of self-discipline is a rebuke to a half-hearted flabby Christian. Paul wanted them to smell the sweat of the Isthmian Games and remember the work involved in the Christian life. The starting line for us is the foot of the cross and the finish line is the grave. This type of self-discipline involves sacrifice. We are to lay aside all of the weights and the sins that do so easily beset us in this race.

3. Personal-discipline includes strategy (25b-26). *They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.*

Not only does personal discipline involve striving and sacrifice, but it also involves the right strategy. We cannot aimlessly pursue after what we feel is God’s will for us. We are not just ***sacrifice without a steering wheel, but we are strategic about how we run our lives.*** In this section of the text,

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<sup>193</sup>Witherington, 12 The Isthmian games were started in 3 AD.

I believe that we can find two different parts of the strategy for personal-discipline.

- a. Our strategy should have an eye toward the future (25b).

First, Paul will try to motivate his readers in Corinth to keep their eyes on the future. One very interesting study that contributes to our understanding of the Scriptures is Biblical archeology. Those who go on “digs” are able to find helpful things in stones, rocks, carvings, paper manuscripts, and coins. Actually, one person has recently claimed to find an ossuary (clay box used for storing bones) that is from James the brother of Jesus! Archeology has helped us with verse 25 as well. If you were to look at some of the coins from ancient Corinth, you would see the image of those who were victors in the Isthmian Games. On the head of these victors was a crown. And Paul’s reference to a **corruptible crown** was a graphic picture to the Corinthians. They were familiar with these sorts of crowns that would quickly fade away. According to images on these coins, guess what the crowns of the victorious were made of? (Pine branches or Celery Leaves) So, Paul says in a sense, do not try to obtain earthly rewards, but remember the heavenly reward that will not fade away. At the end of life, Christian will receive either a prize or disgrace at the judgment seat of Christ. Christ will give on that day the incorruptible crown to those who have been faithful to discipline their bodies to serve him. He himself wore a crown, but it was of thorns, and he did this so that we might wear the crown of victory. And what a joy that will be when those pierced hands place this crown on the heads of his faithful Christians!

But will you be one of the faithful that have kept this strategy in mind? Will you keep your eyes to the future?<sup>194</sup> Too many of us have lost sight of the end! We take our eyes off the finish line and put them on our futile little things. Too many of us have fallen off the track and quit running if we are in the race at all!

Why should we seek after earthly distractions when we could attain an incorruptible crown?

Imagine a runner in the Olympics who competed with sun glasses, necklaces, and long, fake manicured nails. Our response might be, “Come on man! Throw it off!” We must look beyond the stands and the mirror to the finish line in our Christian life. We must look to Christ!

- b. Our strategy should include effective labor (26).

Our strategy should involve keeping an eye on the future, but it also requires effective labor. Paul says that he did not **run uncertainly**

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<sup>194</sup>Illustration: Andrew’s t-ball. “Keep your eye on the ball!” Stay Focused!

(like he did not remember where the finish line was). “I do not run aimlessly!” Men and women, we cannot afford to mismanage our lives!

He did not fight as ***one that beateth the air***. Have you ever seen someone take a big swing at someone and miss? Missing the target accomplishes nothing but embarrassment and laughter. Paul was not going throughout his life aimlessly. He was committed to serve God. So the choices that he made, even in his personal life, were very important!

4. Personal-discipline includes surrender (27). *But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

Paul is very transparent and personal in our passage.<sup>195</sup> I do not follow others who claim to be strong enough to endure temptations in a certain area or some who are arrogant about their own spiritual integrity. I listen to those who are afraid of spiritual failure. Paul very transparently informs the Corinthians that he is very concerned with his own spiritual ruin.

In verse 27, Paul gives to us the last key to discipline that delights God. We need to be willing to surrender anything that distracts for the ultimate purpose of our lives. I believe that it is possible to strive for Christ and yet not to surrender something that he is asking for you. It is possible to sacrifice and still to hold back something that you are not willing to surrender. He says in verse 27 (READ ABOVE)!

The words ***keep under*** mean to give his body a black eye, to strike a blow to himself or more specifically his flesh. ***Bring it into subjection***, means simply that he is making his body his slave.<sup>196</sup> This does not mean that when he would sin he would literally hit himself or take out his frustration on his physical body; but that he would make his sinful fleshly nature sacrifice what it wanted, because it lusts against the spirit. He is saying that it is not just enough for him to be saved, but he must also continue, especially as a preacher. There is a danger for any of us to become a professional preacher, while failing to apply the Scriptures to our own personal lives. The overall thought of this passage is that YOU CAN NOT SEPARATE PRACTICAL MESSAGES FROM PERSONAL CHARACTER. What a man does is far more important than what he says.

He then concludes his thoughts by saying that it would be fateful if he preached to others and were himself considered a ***castaway***. This word means disqualified or unapproved—something that is good for the garbage or to be thrown away. The Corinthian church to whom Paul wrote was a congregation of castaways, and they needed to do something about it.

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<sup>195</sup>Use the illustration of an elderly man in a church who was concerned for men on the internet.

<sup>196</sup>This picture is probably a continuation of his metaphor of boxing. He brings his body into subjection.

- D. Principle #4: the principle of caution: we must exercise a realistic examination of ourselves in areas of temptation (10:1-13).

Another consideration that we must make in matters of liberty and conscience concerns the believer's relationship to temptation. ***Is it a sin to be tempted to do something wrong?*** No. It is only wrong when we fail to do what is right in the temptation. ***Well then, how should a Christian approach temptation?*** Should we be confident in the face of temptation or should we be cautious? If you look closely at this passage it will become clear that a believer must be cautious about temptation. ***Why would someone, whose stated purpose in life is Christ-likeness, want to continually place himself in areas of temptation?***

Having just finished a personal discussion of the danger of failing to exercise discipline (9:24-27), Paul illustrates this danger another way.<sup>197</sup> In the first part of chapter 10 (10:1-13), Paul introduces the story of the Israelites who failed to enter the Promised Land. ***But, why did Paul use Israel as an example?***<sup>198</sup>

The Israelites were spiritually privileged people who became disqualified. They were people who loved to live out on the edge of the freedoms which God had given them. They loved to see how far they could get without being punished by God. Ironically, what the Israelites in their compromises were to the OT; the Corinthians were to the NT. But let's look a little closer at the example of Israel. In verses 1-13, Paul progresses through the failures of the Israelites in three phases.

1. The privileges of Israel (1-4)

Notice that the first words of verse 1 are a declaration from Paul about the need for the Corinthians to "know" something. "Paul had opened his discussion of this subject [Christian Liberty] by affirming that the heart of the matter was knowledge and the use to which knowledge is put (8:1-3)."<sup>199</sup> Ironically, although some of the Corinthians claimed to know ("know-it-alls") the best practices in matters of eating meat and idolatry, Paul implies that there might be some things that they just do not know!

We need to see the blessing which God extended to the people of Israel. Paul talks about five different favors that God manifested toward the Israelites. There is a key word that is mentioned five times in verses 1-4. ***What is the key word?*** It is the word "all." You might want to mark this word in your

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<sup>197</sup>This logical connection between Paul's story in chapter 9 and Israel's story in chapter 10 can also be seen in Paul's use of γὰρ in 10:1.

<sup>198</sup>There are many possible reasons for and benefits of Paul using the example of Israel. 1- This is an example of a people who liked compromise. 2- His use of Israel shows us how to properly use the Old Testament in applications to our own life. As we follow his example, we will learn what both the Old and New Testament means to our contemporary struggles. 3- The ultimate reason for Paul's inclusion of the Israelites in his material on liberty is to illustrate that privileged people may become castaways.

<sup>199</sup>Collins, *First Corinthians*, 368.

Bible as a visual reminder to you of what is going on in these verses. All of the Israelites had great privilege, but most of them still become castaways. Let's notice the five privileges.

- a. They all followed God - *For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud* (1).

In verse 1, Paul says that they were *under the cloud*. The cloud represents God's direction in their lives while in the wilderness. God led them by the manifestation of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, although only the cloud is mentioned in this text. Being *under the cloud* might also speak of God's protection over the children of Israel.

- b. They all were fortified by God - *and all passed through the sea* (1).

The text says that they all passed through the sea. This means that they were protected by God. What a miraculous event this must have been! The parting of the Red Sea was one of the greatest displays of God's power that humanity has ever been given the opportunity to observe. God held back the waters of the Red Sea with his Almighty hand. Could you imagine going through a seabed on dry ground with walls of water extended over your head? They all were fortified by God.

- c. They all fellowshiped with God - *all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea* (2).

Then, in verse 2, we read of the third privilege of Israel. They were baptized unto Moses. This is strange language! ***What does it mean to be baptized unto someone?*** The best solution is to see this as a symbolic use of the word baptism. When the Israelites passed between the waters of the Red Sea and had the cloud (watery substance) above them, it was like they were baptized. In this baptism they were identified with the administrator of the Old Covenant, Moses.

In the Corinthian setting, this would be a good reminder. New Testament believers are baptized unto Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant. Being baptized into Christ primarily meant being **identified** with him. Perhaps the Corinthians boasted of their baptism in Christ as proof of their special elite spiritual privilege. But, Paul says that they were not the only people that were baptized as God's children. The Israelites were also identified with Moses in their own sort of baptism.

- d. They all were fed by God - *and all ate the same spiritual food* (3).

In verse 3 it says that they all ate the same spiritual meat. This phrase indicates that the Israelites were fed by God in the wilderness. God was their source of their food. All throughout their wilderness wanderings, God provided manna for them to eat. At other times, he gave them quail.

The adjective, *spiritual*, is attached to this food probably as a description of the source of the meat. This food and drink came from the Spirit of God. The food was supernaturally produced.

- e. They all were filled by God - *and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ* (4).

Not only did God meet their need for food in the wilderness, he also gave them water. In verse 4 it says that they all drank the same spiritual drink which came out of the Rock. And later in the verse, Paul identifies this Rock as Christ. *What does all this mean?*<sup>200</sup>

Well, there are different ideas about the *movability* and *identity* of the rock. Actually, there is an old rabbinic tradition about a moveable rock that rolled after the “the wanderers through hills and valleys, and when they camped it settle at the tent of meeting.”<sup>201</sup> However, this teaching seems foreign to Paul’s thinking and highly unlikely for the Old Testament narrative.

A better explanation for the rock following them might be that once the rock was struck water came from the rock. This water did not stop flowing and may have even formed some sort of lasting stream, which the children of Israel followed in their wanderings.<sup>202</sup>

Regarding the identity of the rock, it seems best to see the reference to Christ and the Rock as symbolic in meaning. The rock imagery is best explained by a type/antitype relationship. The rock prefigures Christ as an illustration of God’s saving activity in two different Christian eras. This typological view is strengthened by the many other examples of types in this passage (spiritual drink, spiritual food, baptism into Moses, etc.), not to mention the two-fold occurrence of *τὸν* words in the following passage. The main point of this comparison is that “Christ provided the miraculous water then just as He provides benefits to the Christian now.”<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup>Yeo says that there are at least five views of this. 1) The realistic view is that the Rock is the preexistent Christ. 2) They are both identical events. 3) The symbolic view is that the rock stands for Christ. 4) That these two things are parallel, but not the same. 5) The typological interpretation is that it points to the Christian reality. Thistleton, *1 Corinthians*, 727.

<sup>201</sup>See Garland for five different rabbinic traditions concerning a rock following Israel. Garland, 470. The *Targum Onkelos* on Num 21:17 and the midrash *Sifre* on Num 11:21 speak about a rock or well following the Israelites through the wilderness.

<sup>202</sup>See Gromacki, *An Exposition of 1 Corinthians*, 120.

<sup>203</sup>Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 219.



The primary point of this passage is that ALL ISRAEL ate the same meat and drank the same drink. In other words, Israel's eating the manna provides a typological foundation for the church's celebration of the Lord's Table. This unity is similar to the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. It is no coincidence that Paul begins to talk about the Lord's Supper later in this chapter and then devote an entire section in the next chapter to it. Perhaps, there were some Corinthians who were overconfident in the value of their participation in the Lord's Table. Perhaps, they felt that Communion meant that they were not vulnerable to spiritual dropout.

Lockwood offers an interesting proposal. He says, "Just as all the fathers of Israel received a type of Baptism, so they also received a type of the Lord's Supper."<sup>204</sup> The Israelites definitely had many advantages over all the other people of their time. But none of these privileges guaranteed that they would even see the Promised Land.

2. The problems of Israel were devastating (5-10).

Starting in verse 5 of this text, Paul begins to show us that despite all of the privileges of Israel, God was not pleased with many of them. However, the word "many" might be a little misleading. He was not pleased with all but two of them! Actually, he was quite angry with them.

Verse 5 says that they were **overthrown** in the wilderness. This means that their dead bodies were *shrewn* or *spread* all throughout the desert. When God was done punishing them, there were graves in every section of the desert, and there were very few Israelites at this time who died a natural death. Moses tells their story in the first half of the book of Numbers. The first generation of Israelites did not trust God in the wilderness and began to complain about his provision, so God decided to wipe them out! As a matter of fact, Leon Wood gives us a very graphic picture of this upheaval in his book entitled, *A History of Israel*. He states that at this time there were at least 1.2 million Hebrew adults. At least this number of Israelite adults were strewn as corpses throughout the wilderness in 38 ½ years.<sup>205</sup> That means on the average, eighty-four people died each day. Further, since they would only be able to bury the dead during daylight, there would be approximately seven funerals an hour for over thirty-eight years! God was not pleased with this people.

And there are at least four different problems found in verses 6-10, which brought about God's judgment. In these verses, Paul offers up a commentary on the wilderness failures of the children of Israel. Let's notice their lack of control.

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<sup>204</sup>Lockwood, *First Corinthians*, 324.

<sup>205</sup>Leon Wood, *A History of Israel*, ?.

- a. They lusted in the wilderness (6, 8).

The first problem of the Israelites is their lust. Notice that they lusted after something in both verse 6 and verse 8.

- a. They lusted after evil things (6).

Verse 6 is the first in a string of citations from the Pentateuch. Notice that there is just enough given in each of these verses to whet your appetite for these Old Testament stories. The reader is actually forced to go back in his/her Bible and study the Old Testament text to make sense of what Paul is trying to do in 1 Corinthians.

Verse 6 is a citation from Num 11:4-20. Let's turn there and read through this story.<sup>206</sup>

**What evil things did the Israelites lust after in Numbers 11 (4-5)?** What is so evil about garlic and onions?

Nothing is inherently wrong with garlic, just as nothing is inherently wrong with meat. However, it became wrong to the Israelites because they lusted after it. The Corinthians must learn that ***it is possible to be under the condemnation of God for insisting on something that is not naturally bad in and of itself (inherently).*** The problem is not with the object of the lust, it is with the desire itself.

Let's stop and think about this for a while. When you go down to the mall, ***why do the young people dress the way that they do?*** Why do they wear belts that are huge? Well, they want to be noticed. Why do they wear shirts that are 3 sizes too small? Well, because deep down inside the ***girls want the guys to look and the guys want to look.*** Let me ask you: ARE THOSE DESIRES RIGHT?

So, then your teen comes up to you and asks if they can buy the belt or the shirt. And because you have picked up on some of the world's tactics, you say "no". Then your teen does not understand why you could make this decision, after all it is just a belt or a shirt. They want to make the whole conversation about the belt (it is just leather) or about the

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<sup>206</sup>Consult Sermon on Num 11.

shirt (it is cotton-what's wrong with cotton?).<sup>207</sup> But the issue is not the shirt, the problem is the desires. There is nothing wrong with cotton; it is just that there is not enough of it!

Craig Blomberg says, "Yet, even that which is amoral can often give way to the immoral. Indeed those links usually account for why even morally neutral practices were first forbidden."<sup>208</sup> Even something like watching TV or wasting too much time on the internet can become wrong if we crave it too much or if it displaces other more important pursuits.

Some of us are so insistent on our own liberty that our freedoms and rights become gods to us! ***Is there anything in your clenched-hand that you refuse to give over to God?***

*We must exercise a realistic examination of ourselves in areas of temptation.*

- b. They lusted after evil women (8).

Verse 8 shows us that their lust problem went beyond fruits and vegetables; they also lusted after evil women. This verse is a quote from Num 25:1-2. It says,

*While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.*

The children of Israel allowed themselves to be wooed by their own sexual lust. The background to this passage in the Old Testament is fascinating! Balak was then the king of Moab. And he sent an invitation to a prophet of God by the name of Balaam.<sup>209</sup> Twice Balaam refuses to go, but finally decides to go to the king. At this point, Balak takes Balaam to three different high places and encourages him to curse Israel (22:41, 23:14, and 23:27-28). Instead of cursing them, he actually blesses them. These blessings anger King Balak (24:10), so they both decide to go their own way. At this point in the story, we should be pleased with the resolve and character of Balaam. However, something else happened!

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<sup>207</sup>Perhaps you would be tempted to use the law's denouncement against mixed-fibers in clothing, but that would probably not be a very good argument. In Deut 22:11 it says, "do not wear wool and flax together."

<sup>208</sup>Consult NIV Application Commentary.

<sup>209</sup>A serious question presents itself over whether Balaam was a god-fearing prophet or whether he was a normal sorcerer?

As we have already notice in 25:1-2, the children of Israel are corrupted by the daughters of Moab (Midianite-same people).<sup>210</sup> The condition of the people of Israel is so perverse that one of their male leadership was performing a sexual act in front of all of these Israelites in a tent just outside of the tabernacle. Fortunately, Phineas the priest is repulsed by this sin and thrusts both of them through with a javelin (6-8).

***But how could this happen?*** Discuss Num 31:1-2, 8, 15-17.<sup>211</sup>

Balaam sold out! (This is especially clear when one reads in the New Testament of the doctrine of Balaam. -Rev 2:14- *But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balaak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols and to commit fornication*). Balaam counseled Balak to attack the corporate purity of the nation of Israel by corrupting them with Canaanite/Midian prostitutes.

The Corinthians must learn from the failures of the Israelites in this story because the Corinthian believers had similar moral temptations all around them. There were at least 26 different idol temples in the city of Corinth. At one time, there were over 1,000 prostitutes devoted to the worship of Aphrodite.

***Well, what can we learn from this?*** Do you suppose that Christians in America today struggle with lust? Well, I can boldly proclaim to you today, that there is never good justification, within the bounds of Christian liberty, to substantiate lust! The Scriptures say quite the opposite. To say that there are just a few immoral scenes in a movie is to say that this movie provides the strong potential for temptations toward lust. **Why would someone, whose stated mission in life is conformity to Christ, want to make allowance for strong moral temptations?**

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<sup>210</sup>Verify this comment with some historical proof.

<sup>211</sup>There is an apparent contradiction between the numbers of those killed when comparing our text to the text in Numbers. Were 23,000 killed or were 24,000 killed? And more importantly, does this mean that there is an error in our Bible? There are two possible explanations that might solve this issue. 1-Some point out that these are both obviously round numbers. Perhaps one author rounded up, while the other author rounded down. 2-Others state that Paul's number is larger because he is making some allowance for those who were slain by the judges in Num 25:5. Still others reject these ideas and suggest that Paul was misled by a recollection of Num 16:62.

How do you suppose Paul might counsel one who claimed to have “THE LIBERTY” to expose himself to moral temptation???

- b. They idolized in the wilderness (7).

This verse is a quote from Exodus 32. ***Where do you see idolatry in the quote in 10:7?*** You don’t, you are forced to go back to the Old Testament and find this passage. Let’s read the first 6 verses of Exodus 32.

Here the Israelites insist on a type of pluralism, where they would be able to combine the worship of the false gods of Egypt with their worship of God. This was a tragic decision for the children of Israel. They said, “Give us back what we used to have and allow us to worship that way.”

So, notice what Aaron does.

1. He bows to the pressure from the people; he caves in. This pressure might be similar to what modern preachers face. This is like when we “poll lost people” and ask them what they would like to hear in our services, and then put pressure on God’s men to put those changes into our worship.
2. He suggests the approach. There is nothing inherently wrong with gold or calves, but when you fashion an idol and worship it; it becomes wrong.
3. He fashions the idol.
4. He suggests that this worship be performed to God.

Perhaps, there were different groups present when Aaron makes these moves. There were some who were insistent on this new type of worship. There were others who were opposed to it. There were probably others that were confused by this worship (as Aaron was the high priest of God).

Ultimately, however, God through Moses judged these people for their compromise with false worship. The Israelites learned that ***there are some things so closely connected with false worship that believers must avoid them.*** The Corinthians needed to learn this as well. Paul is just about ready to say for them to avoid eating idol meat in the idol’s temple because of the association. We might do well to learn the same lesson.

In some ways, this consideration makes me more conservative in what I bring into my worship of God.<sup>212</sup>

1. I am not going to take what they are doing in a catholic mass and bring it into my worship (Stand at the side, Latin readings, confession booths). The very fact that they worship in this way, makes me hesitant to do it.
2. I am not going to take what some of the charismatics are doing in the name of worship and Christianize it for my worship (convulsing, holy laughter, music).
3. Bottom line: I am not going to take a “worldly object” of self-worship and Christianize it for my worship. ***There are some things so closely associated with false worship that believers must avoid incorporating them into their worship.***

c. They lusted in the wilderness (9).

So, they lusted in the wilderness and they idolized in the wilderness, but the children of Israel also lusted in the wilderness. In verse 9, it says that they tempted Christ. ***What does that mean?***

To answer that question, let’s remember the OT story. The text that is being cited here is the snake story from Numbers 21. In verses 5 and 6 it says,

*And the people spake against God, and against Moses, wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this bread. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.*

Here the children of Israel are forced to navigate around the land of Edom and go well out of their way. They were forced to cover territory in the wilderness that they had already covered before. So, the people begin to complain against God. They want more variety in their food. They tempt Christ by questioning his provision and grace for them. They push God and try His patience; they tempt Him to respond to their sin. Thus “tempting Christ” might be similar to “presuming on God’s gracious provisions” for us. In the Pentateuch, God responds to these sins from Israel and says that ***they tested Him these ten times.***

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<sup>212</sup>It appears that Paul took compromise in a moral issue and applies it to a scenario that includes non-moral things.

We ***put the Lord to the test*** in so many ways. **How do we test the Lord?** Some believers today actually teach that a believer will not be held accountable for any sin that he commits. They go so far as to say that a believer should not confess sin or ask for forgiveness. Here is how they reason: SINCE . . . God will not remember my sin anymore, and all my sins were forgiven at the cross, and Christ's sacrifice has perfected us forever, and we will never be brought under condemnation because of being in Christ . . . THEN . . . I do not need to feel guilty about my sin, or ask forgiveness of my sins as a believer.<sup>213</sup>

However, our Lord told the disciples to pray: *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us.*<sup>214</sup> It is true that all of my sins are covered because of the work of Christ, but that does not give me a license to ***continue in sin that grace might abound***. The Israelites ***tested the Lord*** in the wilderness.

- d. They complained in the wilderness (10).

Verse 10 is an allusion to Numbers 16, please turn there.

- The Complaint (1-3) - The rebels say, "Moses and Aaron, you have taken too much upon yourself."
- Moses's Response – he fell on his face and then stated that actually these rebels had taken too much upon themselves (v.7). He then calls these offenders before the tabernacle.
- God's Response (20-22) - at first His desire to completely consume the entire nation of Israel. But later, God instructs Moses what to do with the rebels and then executes them (28-35).
- But, to this point in our story there is **no murmuring** of the people, until . . . (41). The very next day, the Israelites claim that Moses and Aaron had killed God's people!
- So, God decides to send a plague upon the people (42-50). There is no mention of a destroyer, but most people believe that this is the text that Paul is alluding to back in 1 Corinthians 10.

**Why would Paul appeal to this example with the Corinthians?** To show them that God takes complaining about his leadership and His gracious provision very seriously. If there were people in the Corinthian church, complaining about the position of Paul, they better stop and reconsider how God deals with complainers. Why do I mention this? Perhaps, you have been discouraged by someone else who complains. Well, if they are God's child, then God

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<sup>213</sup>License: We attempt to justify sin [practices by abusing God's gracious provision.

<sup>214</sup>Consult Heb 10:14, "For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are being sanctified."

will not allow their words to go unchecked. They will be held accountable for every idol word.

3. The purposes of Israel in this section are quite obvious (11-13).

Paul is like Moses in the Old Testament, who protests any involvement from God's people in idolatry.<sup>215</sup> The Corinthians must learn a lesson from Israel. If these people that were so fortunate to be led by God and fed by God could resort back to their previous sins, the Corinthians should also be nervous about their condition. Paul uses Israel for two distinct purposes in this chapter.

a. Admonition (11-12)

First Paul uses Israel to give a strong admonition to the believers in Corinth.

- a. The target of the admonition is New Testament believers (11). *Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.*

Paul intended believers of his day to learn a lesson from the Israelites. Paige Patterson explains, "Just as Paul argued that the verses in Deuteronomy concerning muzzling the ox while it treads out the corn were written for the sakes of those who would come afterwards (9:9-10), so he argued that the wilderness experiences of Israel were examples intended to prevent future generations from making the same mistake their ancestors made."<sup>216</sup>

Notice that it says that all these things happened to them for an example to us. They were written to admonish those who stand at the ends of the age. If the Corinthians were to learn from the failures of the Israelites, then we must also learn from it. According to the eternal purposes of our gracious God, we are the objects of a historical lesson concerning Israel and the Corinthians as well. May we learn from the failures of those in the past!

- b. The point of the admonition is to express caution even in our most confident areas (12). *Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands, take heed lest he fall.*<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup>Garland, 464

<sup>216</sup>Patterson, 158.

<sup>217</sup>Who in the OT should have heeded this advice? Israelites? Aaron? Moses?



The Israelites failure was not heeded by some of the Corinthians. Paul uses the example of Israel burying their dead while the Corinthians are burying their own dead (1 Cor 11).

To remind us once again of the context, this verse might be best seen as a reminder to the “stronger brother” in Corinth. Some of these brothers thought they were standing. This standing “represents a state of immovability in regards to ever giving in to temptation.” <sup>218</sup>

The Corinthians which thought that they were immovable were to take heed, lest they fall. **But what did Paul mean when he said “fall?”**

1. Some state that this means that they might lose their salvation.<sup>219</sup>
2. To be disqualified from the ministry – some use the appeal of Paul in chapter 9 as a threat of the loss of a ministry position.
3. To die – in the Old Testament context “to fall” meant to die. Thus, the Israelites and even Moses himself died. It is also true that some of the Corinthians were dying because of their sins.
4. To fall in an area of temptation – this is probably the best answer to the question. Those who were most confident in their own perseverance for the Lord needed to be on alert, lest they fall to temptation.<sup>220</sup>

The actual word “fall” emphasizes the “make-or-break nature” of the trials that believers face.<sup>221</sup> Even the most confident believers were to be alert, lest they slip into sin.

### **Do you feel the impact of Paul’s sharp words of warning?**

Paige Patterson says, “There is culpability in every man. The best men who ever lived, our Lord excepted, at one time or another deeply and keenly disappointed themselves.” <sup>222</sup> At the

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<sup>218</sup>Trail, 26.

<sup>219</sup>Gordon Fee holds this view, ?.

<sup>220</sup>My View: Combination of 3&4. View 4 might actually lead to view 3.

<sup>221</sup>Prior, 170.

<sup>222</sup>Patterson, 163.

very least, we must remember the main principle of the first half of this chapter: we must be cautious. We should exercise a realistic examination of ourselves in areas of temptation.

**Have you failed to heed the warning of a gracious God upon your life?** Imagine one of the Israelites who persisted in sin, but somehow escaped the judgment of the plague on those who ate the quail, or the judgment on Balaam and the adulterers, or the judgment on those who prostituted themselves at the golden calf, or God's condemnation of those who complained in the story of the serpents. Imagine one who went through all of that, yet still decided to continue in their sin, only to be ultimately wiped out by God for his sinful heart. Sometimes, many of us are similar in the way that we attempt to approach God. We forget about his judgment and the warnings that he has extended to us. Too often, we fail to see the gracious warnings of our God.

**Has God asked you to go without something that you personally hold very close to your heart?** Well, instead of berating you for your stubbornness let me appeal to you gently. We are deprived of something; the true condition of our heart comes out.<sup>223</sup> Please go to the Lord and ask him for the strength of character to put all personal pursuits and agendas on the back burner for the unsurpassed glory of a cruciform life.<sup>224</sup>

- b. Encouragement (13) – *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

In verse 13, we have one of the greatest verses of comfort found anywhere in your Bible! How many of us have come to this verse for help over the years? Paul's comfort comes in two ways and is specifically intended for the weaker brother at Corinth who feels useless struggling against temptation.<sup>225</sup>

- a. Temptations are common to all of us.

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<sup>223</sup>Illustration regarding children who are given something and respond in a good attitude but when their requests are denied they often respond in the opposite manner.

<sup>224</sup>It may be helpful for one to stop at this point and be reminded of what Moses said concerning the first generation of Israelites in Dt 8:2. In this passage, Moses states that the wilderness experiences came upon the Israelites to test them and to see what was in their heart. Would they prove their allegiance to God throughout their time of deprivation in the wilderness, or will they evidence a lack of focus? The answer becomes very clear as one reads through the Pentateuch.

<sup>225</sup>Robertson and Plummer, 208.

First, Paul says that your temptations are common earthly temptation. The temptations that the Corinthians were going through with the idol meat were normal temptations.

Paul addresses the craving in terms of a temptation which “draws, seduces, beguiles, attracts, and corresponds to the deeper nature of sin.”<sup>226</sup>

The point of the first part of the verse might be to show us that we all face temptation. We all experience them, and no one is beyond falling to temptation. So, Paul says, “You are not the only one struggling with a particular temptation to do wrong.” There is some debate over the nature of the will of a believer. The libertarian view of the will of a believer is that a believer always has the chance to do what is right in the midst of temptation.<sup>227</sup>

- b. Assistance is provided for all believers.

But, let’s look at the nature of this assistance.

- a) It is supernatural assistance – “**God is faithful.**”

Here we learn something vital regarding temptation: ***God is the true source of spiritual victory.*** The only way that one experiences sustained victory over temptations is through the faithful provision of God. Paul Himes says it well, “The central character of 1 Cor 10:13 is God himself, and anyone who preaches this passage should focus on the graciousness of God more than the ability of humans.”<sup>228</sup>

Paul had already made this point to them in his introduction to this book (1:7). God will keep us firm to the end, because he is faithful (Andrew Illustration).

- b) It is informed assistance.

God will never allow an impossible scenario to come upon the child of God. Thus, no temptation is ever present without its proper way of escape (exit plan). “The imagery is of an army trapped in a

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<sup>226</sup>Thistleton, 747.

<sup>227</sup>See Paul A. Himes, “When a Christian Sins,” *JETS* 54:2 (2011), 335.

<sup>228</sup>Paul A. Himes, “First Corinthians 10:13: A Rejoinder to Steven Cowan,” 801.

rugged country, which manages to escape from an impossibility through a mountain pass.”<sup>229</sup> The word is also used in the NT of sailors who attempt to lighten their load by throwing cargo overboard. This is the only way that they might escape (Acts 27:18, 38).<sup>230</sup>

- c) It is assistance that will work – God will allow you to bear through the temptation.

The provision of the way of escape comes in the very end of the verse: ***so that you may be able to bear it.*** God gives a “way out,” and expect us to use it. “One must assert that a believer, no matter what the situation, has the ability to choose not to sin (since God does not allow the temptation to get to the point where the end result is, by necessity, sin).”<sup>231</sup>

- E. Principle #5: the principle of relevance- we must be properly related to both God and man in this world (10:14-30).

The Corinthians struggled in how to relate properly to the world and society around them.

- See 1 Corinthians 5. They withdrew from meals with all men that were . . . But Paul’s intention was for them to limit their “table fellowship” with so-called believers that were . . .
- Yet, in 1 Corinthians 1, it appears as if some of the Corinthians were willing to compromise the very message of the cross so as not to be of an offense to the world.

These two passages serve as examples of the Corinthians’ struggle to properly relate to the world. But, how important is “relevance” or “social acceptance” for the child of God?

- What can we do to be relevant? What thing can I do to remain relevant to our culture? (Dress styles, Interests, Facebook, sports, politics, video games, and current events)
- What can we not do? Can we compromise?

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<sup>229</sup>Leon Morris, 142.

<sup>230</sup>Gromacki, 123.

<sup>231</sup>Himes, “When a Christian Sins,” 341.

In an effort to answer these questions, Paul poses three scenarios for further discussion of liberty. These three scenarios take place in three different geographical locations (idol temple, meat market, home of an unbeliever). Paul is concerned in this section to show that the believer must be properly related to God and man in areas of liberty. Relevance is possible and important.

1. There are some things that we must avoid for the sake of properly relating to God and this world (14-22). *Eating meat at the idol temple is strictly forbidden.*

In this first section, Paul makes the clear point that the Corinthians must avoid pagan worship.<sup>232</sup>

- a. You know what to do (14-15). *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.*

In verse 15, Paul appeals to them as “wise” or “informed” men. F.F. Bruce gives the translation “sensible.”<sup>233</sup> The question in this part of the text is whether Paul is being sarcastic with this description of the Corinthians. Paul is not being sarcastic as that would hinder his argument with the Corinthians. Why would Paul purposely try to offend the Corinthians by mocking them? Better, he appeals to them as sensible spiritual men.

And in verse 14, we learn that Paul desires that they “flee idolatry.” In a sense, Paul says that they need to run away from it. You cannot mess around with pagan worship! “You know what to do, get out of there!”

- b. Examples of meals in worship (16-18)

To further support his argument against eating idol meat in the temple, Paul gives **two different examples** of religious ceremonies that involve a meal.

- a. The Lord’s Supper (16-17) *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

Now unity is an excellent fruit of our participation in the Lord’s Table. But our unity with each other is not the

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<sup>232</sup>These social dinners in pagan temples were where citizens would make contacts, build social networks, conclude financial arrangements, and drum up business. Idol temples were the first century Applebee’s or Golf Course. See Witherington, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 43.

<sup>233</sup>F.F. Bruce, 95.

primary benefit of communion. Our union with Christ is pictured even by the very elements of the Lord's Table.

Notice also, the "heavy emphasis" placed on partnership or participation in this section (16-twice, 17, 18, 20, 21). The Lord's Supper encourages sharing "in Christ." When we are at the Lord's Table it is not a "normal meal," but a symbolic act, indicating a deep relationship with Christ. No Christian might argue that the bread and the cup don't really matter. As we participate in the elements of the Lord's Table, we worship our risen Savior!

- b. Israel and Feasting (18) *Consider the people of Israel are not those who eat the sacrifice the participants in the altar?*

Robertson and Plummer say, "The sacrifices of the Jews furnish a similar argument to show that participation in sacrificial feasts is communion with the unseen."<sup>234</sup> Verse 18 might be in reference to one of the idolatrous feasts of the rebellious children of Israel in the wilderness, but it is probably better to see this reference to their normal sacrifices.

The main point of verses 16-18 is that *if you eat a religious meal (ceremony/feast), you partake in worship to the spiritual reality to whom the meal is intended.*

- c. Idols and meat are nothing, but demons must be avoided (19-21). *What do I imply then? That food offered to idols are anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.*

The principles of verses 16-18 allow Paul to introduce a new and alarming topic of consideration for the Corinthians. In verses 19-21, Paul states that demons stand behind the worship associated with these idols.

Do you remember what we said about the idol and the meat? They were merely material objects. Paul implies this again by his question in verse 19. Both idols and meat are nothing beyond their physical materials. Idols are inanimate blocks of wood and stone. Meat is dead animal protein. Nothing more! This is a similar argument to chapter 8, when Paul says that there is only one God!

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<sup>234</sup>Robertson and Plummer, 215.

However, in verse 20, Paul says that demons are the spiritual realities behind the worship of these pagan idols. Thus, Paul points out that you cannot possibly be a partaker of the Lord's Table and the table of demons. This is similar to Christ's argument in Matthew 6 – you cannot serve both! Perhaps, this is why some of the Corinthians were sleeping!

- d. Sober warnings (22). *Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?*

- 1) Do you desire for the Lord to be jealous?

We are like a bride who cheats on her husband, which results in righteous jealousy.

- 2) Are you stronger than the Lord?

Another way of saying this is, "Do you think you can handle the Lord?" We must be extremely vigilant concerning "false worship." It must all be rejected! The Corinthians were saying "no big deal." But yes, it is a big deal! All forms of false worship must be completely avoided. How should we feel about going to a Catholic Mass? Or how about taking communion at a Catholic or Lutheran Service? What other religious ceremonies should be anxious about?

Bryan and I went to a Mormon Ward without realizing initially where we were. Once we realized it, we left immediately. What would you do? What should you do?

There is within some of our hearts a curiosity about other religions and how they worship. Have you ever wanted to go to a different church to see how they did it? Well, it is one thing to go to a church with a different music standard, or tradition, or style of preaching, it is another thing to go to a church outside of our Protestant denominations. Demons energize false worship and we should be cautious about any participation with idolatrous worship!

2. There are some things that we must accept for the sake of properly relating to God and this world: *eating meat in the market place poses no threat* (23-26).

- a. A reminder to prefer others over ourselves (23-24). *"All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.*

Paul's point in verses 23 and 24 is that we can function normally in society where no compromise is involved. This meant that the Corinthians could buy meat down at the meat market in the agora.

Observant Jews would not buy their meat here, because it was not slaughtered or prepared the kosher way.

The issue of meat is an interesting study in the Bible. In Acts 10, Peter chooses to go with Cornelius. In this text, Peter learns that all meat is clean and the traditional sanction against certain meats was lifted. In Galatians 2, Peter removes himself from table fellowship with Gentiles over matters of food. In Acts 15, the church at Jerusalem forbids eating idol meat & things strangled. Finally, in Romans 14-15, there is a dispute about meat which was not kosher.

So, Paul gives us a solution to another controversial issue related to meat. But, he does so in a very mysterious way. He says, "All things are lawful."

There are four possible meanings of this phrase:

- a. I cast off all restraint (no morals). This would be an appeal that approves moral license.
  - b. A restatement of their claims (but no **περι δε**).
  - c. An indication that they were not under the Mosaic Law
  - d. Paul refuses to reject a Corinthian slogan that is correct as it goes, but qualifies it.<sup>235</sup>
- b. A concession for relevance and practicality (25-26). *Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any questions on the ground of conscience. For the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.*

You can eat meat in the market, because God is the original source of all such food. You can function normally in the market place in an amoral environment. Verse 26 is a quote from Psalm 24:1.<sup>236</sup>

3. There are some scenarios where we must be flexible for the sake of properly relating to God and this world (27-30).

Eating idol meat at the temple was strictly forbidden, and eating meat from the market was permissible. But eating meat in an unbeliever's home is another matter altogether. Although the KJV says that verse 27-30 occur at a feast, it is best to see the events of these verses taking place in an unbeliever's home (the KJV translation is not a problem as long as you realize that feasts could take place in the private home of an individual).

How do we know that the scene is the home of an unbeliever?

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<sup>235</sup>Grace Principles, ch. 6.

<sup>236</sup>Witherington, 207. [?]



- First, verse 27 identifies the host as an unbeliever.
  - Second, if this feast took place in an idol temple, it would directly contradict Paul's strong appeal about fleeing idol temples in verse 14-22.
  - Third, why would someone need to tell you that the meat was offered to idols, if you were in the temple? You would already know that!
- a. Paul first encourages the Corinthians to eat (27). *If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.*

The Corinthians may eat everything placed before them in a private home. I hear that the key to success as a short term missionary is to eat everything place before and to ask no questions for **stomach's sake**. But for liberty, Paul instructs the Corinthians to eat everything that is placed before you at an unbeliever's home and to do so for **conscience** sake (27). While Paul does not come right out and identify whose conscience he is talking about in this verse, it is best to see it as the conscience of the believer's that Paul is addressing. This is your own conscience. So, basically we should not feel obligated to give "third degree treatment" to our host about the history of the food that is set before us.<sup>237</sup>

- b. Later, Paul says, "Don't eat!" (28-29a) . *But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—I do not mean your conscience, but his.*

However, in verse 28, Paul says that they are not to eat the meat if another's conscience is offended at this practice. But whose conscience is Paul addressing in verse 28 and 29? There are at least four different possibilities.

- Unsaved Host – this might be the simplest understanding of our text, to this point in the paragraph we are only introduced to two characters (host and brother). Also, the actual identification of the meat by the offended person points to someone who is very familiar with pagan idolatry. If the conscience is the host's, then it is probably best to see the host as trying to "help the Christian out" rather than "challenging him."<sup>238</sup>
- Unsaved Guest – this is possible, but it would appear to make the situation more complex than Paul originally intended.

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<sup>237</sup>David Garland used the term "third degree" on page 493 of his commentary.

<sup>238</sup>See Fee, 484.

- Weaker Brother – this view believes that the weaker brother becomes aware that the meat has been offered to idols and then “sounds the alarm.” This view makes much sense of the scenario, but Paul never really identified the owner of the conscience as a brother or sister in the Lord. So, you start through the whole host of questions: 1) What biblical reasons do you have . . . ? 2) How did you get invited . . . ?
- Any Man – this is the best solution. The answer to the owner of the conscience is as broad as the pronoun “anyone” that is found in verse 28. David Garland says, “The person who makes the announcement understands the food to be religiously significant.”<sup>239</sup>

Paul believes that every other person’s conscience is important to consider when making personal choices. This is actually quite a strong admonition in our text.

- c. Finally, Paul raises some possible objections to his philosophy of flexibility in matters of indifference (29b-30). *For why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?*

Paul’s point was so strong that he predicts how some might object to his teaching by using diatribe. Actually, many commentators are confused by the questions of verse 29 and 30. They do not see how these questions contribute to this passage. One even stated that these questions are “the major stumbling block to determine the flow of the argument in this section.”<sup>240</sup> **Why do you think these sections are here?**

I see these questions doing two things in our text.

- They post possible objections to Paul’s discussion of relevance, flexibility, and restraint.
- They prepare the way for Paul’s ultimate principle of liberty. The only way these questions can be answered is by appealing to the concept of glorifying God in every choice that we make.

- a. Why is my freedom judged by another’s conscience?

Paul asks then, “What advantage is there in allowing my liberty to be judged by the conscience of another?” In a sense, the question asks, “How does this profit me?” or “Why should I bother?”

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<sup>239</sup>Garland, 496.

<sup>240</sup>D. Watson, 308.

Well, we should bother because **God will be glorified and magnified in the selfless use of my liberty.** God is often best glorified in a situation when I am willing to limit my right for another's good.

- b. Why should I be willing to be slandered concerning something for which I thanked God?

Why should I not enjoy the food for which I give thanks to God? Why should I abstain from this food? It appears that Paul makes the point that it matters least of all what I eat, but it matters far more that I do not purposely give someone else an occasion for stumbling.

- F. Principle #6: the principle of glorification: we should glorify God in every choice that we make (10:31-11:1)<sup>241</sup>

- 1. The principle stated: *do all to the glory of God (31). So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*
- 2. Final considerations in areas of liberty (10:32-11:1)
  - a. Encouraging spiritual growth in another glorifies God (32-33). *Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.*

Spiritual Growth – “So that they might be saved.” Paul’s overriding concern was how to gain more followers for Jesus Christ.

- b. Christ forms the perfect example of glorifying God (11:1). *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

The first verse of chapter 11 encapsulates all that Paul wants the Corinthians to do. They were to follow him, because he was following Christ. Thus, Christ is the perfect example of using liberty for the glory of God. Let’s look at several key passages. Rom 15:3, 2 Cor 8:9, Eph 5:2, and Phil 2:5-8.

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being*

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<sup>241</sup>It appears that Paul might be framing one last important passage from 10:23 to 11:1 with the words “all things.” In 10:23, they were claiming that “all things” were permissible, but Paul’s final answers regarding the “all things” are that they are to please everyone in the “all things” and that they are to glorify God in the “all things.” This might be one main passage which speaks about deference and magnifying God.

*found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Could Christ legitimately ask “why should I bother?” Could he say “Why should I abstain from delivering myself?” He could have called legions of angels to destroy the world and set himself free, but he did not! He could have tapped into his eternal power at any time, but he did not! He not only lived, he also died for the good of another and for the good of all others! He voluntarily subjected himself to the will of his father for the glory of his father! He is out perfect example.

Do you remember the illustration that I have at the beginning of our discussion of liberty? I talked about getting permission from my father to use the family sports-car for a date. At the end of my father’s challenge to me concerning the responsibility of driving the car, he put his hand into his pocket and took out some keys. I will not forget what he did next. He extended the keys to me and said, “Use these responsibly!” Christian freedom from the Law and sin is absolutely incredible! It is great! We can do things that we could never do before. Yet, we must feel the obligation to use our liberty as an opportunity to minister to others in this world. Don’t allow your self-centeredness to rob you of the opportunity to minister to more people in this world!

VIII. The 4<sup>th</sup> Problem: a discussion concerning abuses in the worship of the Corinthian church (1 Cor 11: 2-34).<sup>242</sup>

Summary: This passage’s emphasis on reflecting God & remembering Christ is a continuation of the theme of God’s glory from chapter ten. This passage presents a very important topic. What is the role of women in worship? Why did Paul tell the women to cover their heads? The focus of this text is not the coverings, but Christ! The focus of worship should not revolve around worship participants but, rather, Christ’s person!

***Read and Transfer Rosner/Ciampa, Minnick, and articles by Wallace and Grudem.***

***Transfer Fee, Thiselton, Anchor, Witherington, Trail, multiple articles.***

What is more important to you, common church practice or Biblical authority? If someone could show you that your church tradition did not mesh with the Scriptures, what should you do? Well, if the tradition is conservative, we are normally willing to abandon it. But if the

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<sup>242</sup>Conduct a classroom exercise where you ask three questions. 1) Questions related to 1 Cor 11. 2) Questions related to 1 Cor 14. 3) Do you passages contradict each other? If not, how can these two passages be synthesized? The solutions to this apparent contradiction are threefold: some believe that chapter 14 is not a legitimate Pauline text (Fee), others suggest that 1 Cor 11 is not in the church (Fish) and that only chapter 14 talks about women in the church, and others suggest that 1 Cor 11 allows women to pray and prophecy in the church with covered heads and chapter 14 speaks of a qualified silence. Women are not allowed to weigh prophecies and in this way exercise judgment upon the prophecies of men (see 14:29). So, women can prophecy, but they cannot evaluate prophecies and even ask their husbands at home if they have any questions.

tradition is more open or progressive than the Bible, we are normally quite reluctant to relinquish those practices and return to a more Biblical approach. Further, when something has gone more progressive, it is almost impossible to turn it back.

Before we get into this text, one question deserves some attention. *Is this text “corrective” or “preventative”?* It appears to me that the head covering issue is not as much of a problem as the abuse of the Lord’s Table. This can be seen as one simply notes the four different occurrences of the word “commend” (ἐπαινεω) in this chapter (11:2, 17, 22 [twice]). For the most part, the Corinthian believers were following the established traditions which Paul handed down to them.

#### A. The Corinthian women and head coverings (11:2-16)

Before we can discuss any contemporary relevance to this text, we must discipline ourselves to see what the text is actually saying. We must interpret the text and try to avoid any application to our lives until we understand the whole!

##### 1. Exegetical observations

I have divided this text up into five different sections, which all have to do in some way with Paul’s counsel on head coverings. We will perform a sweeping overview of this text, before we get into practical considerations.

- a. The basis for the head covering: the headship principle (2-3). *Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.*

In verses 2 and 3, Paul establishes the headship principle. There are three ways to interpret verse 3. When it says that God is the head of Christ, this could mean either that God is the authority of Christ, or that God is the source of Christ. The word κεφαλε (head) is where the controversy lies. Of course, this word can be used of someone’s physical head. But in other occurrences in this text, does it speak of authority or source? Let’s first look at what would happen if we translated it that God is the **authority** of Christ. This would point to when Christ voluntarily subjected himself to the authority of God in function as is Son. In this way, Christ submits to God as his authority and fulfilled not his own will, but the will of his father. The man would be under the authority of Christ and the woman under the authority of man.

Another way that some scholars have handled this issue is to say that “head” means **source**—like the source or head of a river. Thus, this word speaks of the origin of something or someone. This would mean that man is the source of woman, the Christ is the source of man, (probably at creation) and that God is the source of Christ. But, where this theory run into trouble is when it says that God is the

source of Christ. This would seem to imply that Christ came later or was an offspring of God. Now they would say that this probably refers to the incarnation when Christ became man. But other problems appear at this point if you accept this (how would man be subject to a fleshy Christ?). It is important to note that those who accept this view are normally egalitarian as opposed to complementarian in their view of the woman. It is also very important to note what David Garland says on this issue: "No Greek lexicon offers this as an option."<sup>243</sup> So, this view is impossible theologically and linguistically.

Finally, the word head might be used in reference to representation or preeminence. Sometimes we talk about Adam being the head of the human race and by this we mean that he represented mankind. He was representative of the whole. The concept might then speak of someone being preeminent or foremost.<sup>244</sup>

In verse 3, the headship principle shows that man is the authority over or preeminent representative of woman.

- b. Clear requirements about head coverings: women must cover their heads, while men must not (4-6).<sup>245</sup> *Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.*

Paul lays out the pattern that was to be observed in worship: men were not to wear *head coverings*, while women were to wear them. This is the common practice in the early church, which preserved right reverence in worship.

- a. Women must wear head coverings or they dishonor their heads (4-5).

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<sup>243</sup>Garland, 515. Κεφαλε as source is submitted by Gordon Fee.

<sup>244</sup>If taken this way, then it is probably best to normally translate nouns in this text as man/woman instead of husband/wife.

<sup>245</sup>Several OT texts demand attention for a proper understanding of why women were required to cover their heads. These texts include Deut 21:12, 2 Sam 10:4, and Num 5:18. Thompson believes that there is a connection between this practice and Old Testament teaching. He says, "Paul's specific statement that the woman who prays and prophesies 'with an uncovered head (*akataklypto te kephale*) disgraces her head' (11:5) insofar as it 'is one and the same thing as being shaved' (*te exyremene*) is probably based on the midrashic reading of Old Testament texts, according to which the woman's shaved head is the symbol of shame (cf. Deut. 21:12; 2 Sam. 10:4; 1 Chron. 19:4; Isa. 7:20). Paul's equation of the uncovered head with the shaved head in 11:5b is probably based on Numbers 5:18 (LXX), according to which the priest will 'uncover the head' (*apokalypsei ten kephale*) of the woman suspected of adultery" (Thompson, *Moral Formation*, 130).

What was very interesting for me is that this is a new pattern *for worship* in Christianity as compared to early Judaism. In Judaism, women were treated as mere property or as slaves. A man could write a bill of divorcement for just about anything and a woman was not even present in the worship practices of men in the temple of tabernacle. Women were to worship behind a curtain in their own way and place.

Yet, Paul declares that women can and do have a part in church worship, but that they are to cover their heads. This sort of covering was not uncommon in their society. John Walvoord says that “*the preponderance of evidence points to the public head covering of women as a universal custom in the first century in both Jewish culture and Greco-Roman culture.*” Later, he states that “*the nature of the covering varied considerably, but it was commonly a portion of the outer garment drawn up over the head.*” When it comes to worship practice, Paul’s instruction is liberating to Jewish women, while being in line with the common religious practices of Greco-Roman women.

In particular, women were to cover their heads when they prayed or prophesied in the church. The prayer speaks probably of corporate prayers. The nature of **prophecy**<sup>246</sup> is another interesting study. Let me make seven or eight concise statements about prophecy. After much study and debate, I believe that it is best to see this prophecy as different from either preaching or teaching. Women are not allowed to do either of these (pastoral references). Both teaching and preaching involved studied attention to apostolic doctrine and teaching, but this form of prophecy was more of an “impromptu response” to preaching/teaching, which required weighing or evaluating. Thus, I believe that prophecy in the NT era might be shown in an authoritative, apostolic form, but that it could also take place in a lower degree as well (local church prophecies). But all prophecy from God was authoritative and accurate. Some may have been reduplicating the gift in the wrong way in Corinth. While all prophecy from God was authoritative and accurate, New Testament prophecy required that someone weigh them because false prophecy was a possible hindrance to the health of the church. While I do not believe that any form of the gift of prophecy continues in the church

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<sup>246</sup>More work needs to be done on the nature of prophecy. Lexical studies of προφητεία, προφητης, and προφητεω must be conducted within the Corinthian Epistles, the NT, the LXX, and other secular Greek literature. Grudem’s book on prophecy should also be consulted along with Knight’s book.

today, a similar parallel might be “responsive testimonies.”<sup>247</sup>

- b. If women do not cover their heads in worship, they might as well shave their heads completely (6)!

Verse 6 provides an interesting point about head coverings as well. John Chrysostom summarized the verse this way: “If she flings away the covering provided by Divine ordinance, let her also fling away the covering provided by nature.”<sup>248</sup> So, Paul says that if women are not willing to cover their heads, then they should go the whole way and shave or cut short (“crop, clip” – clip in a boyish, Spartan style) their hair.

“The logic is that if she goes uncovered to appear like a man, she may as well cut her hair short and go all the way to appearing like a man.”<sup>249</sup> This interpretation of verse 6 becomes clearer when one considers the Roman historical situation that Paul addresses in ancient Corinth.

In the Roman culture, a woman would be held accountable for the way that she dressed and she would even forfeit some legal rights if she dressed in an inappropriate fashion. Bruce Winter speaks of “controllers of women” (γυναικονομος), who were elected magistrates that legislated the public decorum of women. He says,

*To enforce these roles they had official powers to confiscate women’s clothing, to impose certain fines and to restrict their conduct. They could tear or confiscate in public a dress that was considered offensive and dedicate it to the gods. This would be a public humiliation for the woman involved.*<sup>250</sup>

One author suggests that some of the women in Corinth may have been following an ancient sexual revolution, which he describes as the emergence of the “New Roman Woman.” He also suggests that some female believers at Corinth “were replicating the attitude and actions of ‘new’ wives.”<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>247</sup>Thiselton believes that it is wrong to limit this gift to spontaneous utterances but also believes that it involves applicational preaching of the Word. Thiselton, 828.

<sup>248</sup>Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, ?.

<sup>249</sup>Trail, 68.

<sup>250</sup>Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 86.

<sup>251</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.



So, Paul is reducing the argument to the absurd and saying that women should then just go the whole way and clip their hair like sheep or shave their head bald! With this in mind, I believe that it is a mistake for us to get too distracted by the length of hair of women which is appropriate.<sup>252</sup> Paul does not strictly forbid women from cutting their hair or having shorter hair in this text. One concern that he has is that their haircut does not make them look like a man. His greater concern though is that they wear a head covering!

c. Theological appeals for head coverings: Glory and Angels (7-10).

In verses 7-10, Paul gives at least two strong theological arguments for women to cover their head in worship. Neither one of these arguments is easy, but both must be explored.

- a. Women must cover their heads because they are the glory of the man (7-9). *For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.*

Three simple statements articulate Paul's thought in verses 7-9.

- a) Statement #1: Man is the image and glory of God.

- Image of God

In Gen 1:26-27, we learn that both man and woman were formed in the image of God. We represent God himself. Mankind is a visible representation of God's splendor and dominion. But we know that the image of God was distorted at the Fall. It was "horribly marred," but not lost. Like a candle in the wind, the image will burn brightly at times, and then nearly go out at other times.

But the image of God is being restored in the lives of believers through a process called sanctification. God is like a professional restorer working on a priceless, but severely damaged work of art. God

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<sup>252</sup>An alternative understanding of verse 6 might be that if there was something shameful in their culture for women to have short or shaved hair, then they should wear the marriage veil. This might suggest then that women are to cover their heads so that they are not distracting or seductive in worship.

enables marred pictures to be gradually refocused. This image will be perfected in believers in heaven one day. This shows us that every human being is valuable to God. We offer evangelism to every human, regardless of race, social rank, or gender because we all represent God.

- Glory of God<sup>253</sup>

There are two different aspects of the glory of God that we need to discuss today. First, God's *inherent* glory is important. The Hebrew word for glory (*kaved*) literally meant heavy or weighty. It was used of Eli who was a heavy individual. Eventually, this word also came to mean someone who deserved honor or recognition. In modern English, we might call such a person—a person of influence, a heavyweight. The word glory then speaks of the weight of God's attributes. It is the sum-total of all the attributes of God (holiness, love, grace, justice, goodness, power, etc. – his reputation). Second, we must also notice God's *ascribed* glory. In our text it says that man is the glory of God. ***How does man relate to the sum-total of God?*** Well, in our text, the word "glory" speaks of assigning honor to God. This can be observed later in the text in verse 14 when Paul uses the word "dishonor, disgrace" as the opposite of "glory." In the way that we worship we can assign glory to God.

However, Philip Graham Ryken says, "It is one of the defining marks of our time that God is now weightless. He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticed. [Some] consider him less interesting than television, his commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence, his judgments no more awe-inspiring than the evening news, and his truth less compelling than the advertiser's sweet fog of flattery and lies. That is weightlessness."<sup>254</sup>

b) Statement #2: Woman is the glory of man.

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<sup>253</sup>"Paul—like the Rabbis—does not say that man ever lost the image of God. . . . The things which man *did* lose were the glory of God and the dominion over Nature which were associated with that image; and he lost them when he forgot that he himself was *eikon theou*, and sought to find that *eikon* elsewhere." (Morna Hooker, "Adam in Romans 1," in *From Adam to Christ*, 83)

<sup>254</sup>Ryken, *Learning of God in Stories from the Bible*, ?.

The end of verse 7 is difficult. It says that woman is the glory of man. While women are able to glorify God, this means that she somehow ascribes honor to man. This is true because ***she came out of the man***. This speaks of the fact that she was source in man and came from his rib. Paul intends this phrase as a reason that she brings honor to the man. She also assigns honor to man because ***she was created for him***.

- c) Statement #3: Woman must cover her head, because she is the glory of man.

Paul makes a theological premise here. He says that man ought not to cover his head in worship because he is the image and glory of God. He represents God himself. Woman is the image of God (Gen 1:26-27), but she is the glory of man. She is to cover her head as a sign that worship is all about God's glory. This act was a symbolic veiling of the representative of the human race, the man. Worship is about God's glory, not man's. "If 'woman is the glory of the man,' the apostle desires women to dress in such a way as to keep people from gawking at man's glory in the church."<sup>255</sup>

Let's allow others to comment on this idea. Ben Witherington says, "She must cover her head so that only God's glory is reflected in Christian worship."<sup>256</sup> Garland says, "On the one hand, it [the covering] serves to efface man's glory in the presence of God."<sup>257</sup> It is the cloaking of the glory of mankind. Ronald Trail says, "Because woman reflects man's glory, she should be covered when she worships since God alone should be glorified."<sup>258</sup> So also, Ciampa and Rosner say, "All eyes should be focused on God's glory in the midst of his holy people."<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>255</sup>David Peterson, "Gifts and Ministries in 1 Corinthians," 142.

<sup>256</sup>Witherington, 237.

<sup>257</sup>Garland, 525.

<sup>258</sup>Trail, 71.

<sup>259</sup>Rosner and Ciampa, 533.

- b. Women must cover their heads because of the angels (10). *That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.*

Verse 10 gives another difficult theological motivation for the women to cover their heads: because of the angels. Historically, several possible meanings have been given to this phrase.

- Human Messengers<sup>260</sup>

The word for angels can simply mean messengers. Some believe that there were messengers of some nature that were sent to inspect the church and that Paul tells the women to cover their heads because of the human messengers.

- Pastors<sup>261</sup>

- Demons (Fallen Angels)

Some relate this to Genesis 6:1-4 and the sons of God who married the daughters of men.<sup>262</sup> They also tend to say that the uncovered heads of women would in some way seduce these false angels. However, angels are sexless beings and I also do not know why Paul would be concerned for the welfare of demons.

- Angels who maintain God-ordained hierarchies.<sup>263</sup>

Some believe that angels are the custodians of the created order and that God has entrusted some stewardship of things in this world to angelic beings.

- Angels who are guardians of the worship of God.

None of these views help us yet! ***Please turn to Isa 6:1-5.*** In the NT, the words covering and

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<sup>260</sup>Bruce Winter believes this. Winter, 89.

<sup>261</sup>Very few people believe this. Minnick believes it and connects this text with Rev 2 and 3.

<sup>262</sup>Tertullian, *The Veiling of Virgins*, 1.7.

<sup>263</sup>For examples of this view, see Witherington and Barnett.

cover are restricted to 1 Corinthians 11 (ανακαλυπτω . . . κατακαλυπτεται – 11:5, 6, 7, 13). However, in the Septuagint “to cover” (κατακαλυπτω) is sometimes used for “covering the face and/or head.” This is extremely important because we have to discover why Paul says angels in 1 Corinthians 11. Of course, Paul expects his Greek audience to understand this without further explanation. It would be best then for us to run to their Greek Bible (Septuagint) to look for any mention of the covering of something in the presence of God. **Read Text.** The seraphim in 6:2 cover their face and feet with their wings. This is the same word for cover. The angels themselves, as powerful (yet subservient) created beings, approach God with a covering. Further, angels are present at the worship of God. The Psalms teach that it is before angels that we sing praise to God.<sup>264</sup> On one particular occasion, John Chrysostom was critiquing the worship of his people. In a moment of intense rebuke he said to them: “Don’t you know that you are standing in the midst of angels? With them you are singing, with them you are chanting, and do you stand there laughing?”<sup>265</sup>

To me, it seems best to say that women were to cover their heads because angels would be repulsed at the audacity of a woman not to do so. Men should only go without coverings because the text tells them not to.

In light of this and other factors in chapter 11, it appears that Paul is most concerned to protect and preserve the honor and dignity of God in chapter 11. As a matter of fact, the glory of God might be Paul’s prevailing theme for the whole book (consult all glory texts including 10:31 and 15:28).

- d. An important disclaimer concerning head coverings: both man and woman are dependent upon each other (11-12). *Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for*

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<sup>264</sup>See Ps 138:1.

<sup>265</sup>Quoted in Robertson and Plummer, 233.

*as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.*

In verses 11 and 12, Paul gives a very important disclaimer about the interdependence of men and women. He states that neither man nor woman is inferior to the others. By doing this, Paul anticipates some of the misconceptions that people might take from what he has been saying. Paul makes it very clear that woman is not inferior to man. Man and woman are both dependent on each other for life. Both man and woman are created by God. He created man from dust and women from man, and now both proceed through the woman. This paragraph protects the church from a subordinate view of women.

- e. Final appeals for head coverings: appeal to common sense, nature, and church practice (13-16). *Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.*

After having already appealed to his theological reasons, Paul pulls “out all the stops”<sup>266</sup> in his closing arguments. Perhaps, he suspects that this might be a difficult area for the Corinthians.

- a. Appeal to common sense (13)

Paul says that this should be self-evident to people like you.

- b. Appeal to nature (14-15)

Nature gives hints that women should cover their heads as well. Nature might refer to the common expectations of a culture or society.<sup>267</sup> It might also refer to “the way things are.”<sup>268</sup> To the stoic-trained Corinthian, “nature” was the regular/normal order of things. Perhaps, Paul means that nature itself teaches us that there is to be a distinction between men and women (voice tones, facial hair, etc.).

Paul reveals that one way that nature’s lesson is taught is by the natural length of a woman’s hair. Hair is not the covering

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<sup>266</sup>Witherington, 235.

<sup>267</sup>Garland, 509.

<sup>268</sup>Fee, ?. This speaks of the natural order of things.

that Paul has been describing, but is a final illustration from Paul of the need for a head covering.

c. Appeal to common church practice (16)

Finally, Paul appeals to the custom among churches of his day. Women failing to go with head coverings would be abnormal. When all is said and done, they must be mindful of the universal practice of other churches to whom Paul ministers.

## 2. Practical Ramifications

After working through the text, we are now ready to make application by attempting to answer two different questions.

a. Are women to wear head coverings today?<sup>269</sup>

- a. There is no applicability for this text today.
- b. Real head coverings must be worn today in worship.
- c. A woman's hair is her head covering.
- d. The head covering was a meaningful symbol which requires a correlating symbol today.

I believe that we must honor some of the timeless principles which this text reveals to us, but there are definitely differences between our culture and theirs. For instance, just because a woman does not wear a covering in worship today, does not mean that she is not submissive or respectful of the authority of men. Just as a woman with short hair does not mean that she is masculine, an adulteress, or a prostitute. As a matter of fact, in our culture today, a woman wearing a head covering in worship might be draw more attention to herself instead of God.

b. What principles must be honored today?

- a. Both men and women should appropriately participate in public worship.

Paul takes it for granted that women will participate in prayer and prophecy in worship as long as they have the appropriate head coverings. While women should kindly

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<sup>269</sup>Dan Wallace gives these four different views of the applicability of the head covering to the church today.

reflect their submission to the authority of men in worship, they are empowered to worship God in the church as well.

- b. Worship is a cosmic experience.
- c. We must make God the consuming center of our worship.

No attire or worship practice should distract others from worshipping God. Worship is all about the glory of God!

B. The abuses concerning the Lord's Supper (17-34)<sup>270</sup>

There is a close connection between the first and the last parts of chapter 11. The connection between the veiled women and the Lord's Table might not be apparent at first, but that is because modern believers are largely ignorant of events in the first century. Both of these practices had to do with worship services. So when we talk about the Lord's Supper, we are talking about a specific aspect of the way that we meet together to worship. That is why Paul uses the phrase "gathered together" five times in the last half of the chapter.

When you think of the Lord's Supper or Communion of whom or what do you think? Is there a particular place that comes to mind? A particular passage? A particular custom? Regardless, hopefully you think of a person—the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>271</sup> Have you ever lost somebody close to you? Most of us have! At certain times of the year you remember them (birthdays, holidays, etc.). If saved, you also ANTICIPATE seeing them again! This is also one of the reasons that we celebrate the Lord's Table. We remember and anticipate a person!

- 1. Some real problems in their worship: two abuses of the Lord's Supper (20-27, 33-34).

The Corinthians evidenced two different abuses of the Lord's Supper.

- a. Some were approaching the Lord's Supper (Agape Feast) selfishly (20-22, 33-34). *When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. // So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that*

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<sup>270</sup>I do not deal with verses 17-19 in my outline. More attention should be given to all these verses, especially to Paul's view of the winnowing effect of divisions. Some divisions need to occur in order to expose those who are not really a part of the church of Christ.

<sup>271</sup>Well, I am glad that no one admitted to the rest of us that they look at it as annoying obstacle to the Packer's game or our Sunday meal or afternoon nap. I can remember thinking as a young child, "OH NO, THIS MEANS THAT THE WORSHIP SERVICE WILL LAST EVEN LONGER THAN USUAL!"



*when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.*

First, we need to see that the Corinthians did not approach the Lord's Table in the right way. All they thought about was themselves. Paul uses chiasm<sup>272</sup> here. That simply means that he states some material first, and then he further develops it at the end.

It is commonly known that the Lord's Supper celebration of the first century was quite unlike most modern practices today. There are differences today in materials, procedures, and size. Believe it or not, they did not always have those little crackers and grape juice in little thimble size cups. First of all, they all ate off the same loaf of bread and drank from the same large cup at communion.<sup>273</sup> One loaf and cup was an indication of the collective unity of the whole group. Second, there are procedural changes between many modern celebrations and ancient celebrations of the Lord's Table. The *Agape Feast* normally accompanied the Lord's Supper. This Love Feast is thought to have initiated their celebration of the Lord's Supper. Jude tells us in his short letter that there were false teachers that were abusing these love feasts within the church that he was familiar.

*These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted.*<sup>274</sup>

Archaeology has shown that the average size of a dining room in Corinth would be only large enough to sit about eight to twelve adults maximum, and that the overflow would have to sit in a larger courtyard that would seat thirty to fifty people.<sup>275</sup> Consequently, the host would have to select a few visitors to eat with him. In some cases, this would leave the poor neglected,<sup>276</sup> which is where verses 21 and 22 become relevant.

The rich were abusing the poor brethren in these feasts and were gorging on the food and getting drunk on the wine while the others

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<sup>272</sup>Pericope:

A. 20-22

B. 23-27

B. 28-32

A. 33-34

<sup>273</sup>This cup contained some low-level alcoholic grape juice.

<sup>274</sup>Jude 12.

<sup>275</sup>The dining room was called the "triclinium."

<sup>276</sup>This is because there was a clear "class consciousness" in Corinth.

were not getting any. This treatment was quite severe. Paul uses the word *προλαβανω* in 11:21, which means “to devour or to take vigorously.” The poor were the hungry, while the rich were the indulged. The poor were thirsty; the rich were intoxicated. As a matter of fact, Paul asked some very convicting questions to the rich in verse 22.

- 1) Don’t you have houses to eat and drink ordinary meals in?
- 2) Do you despise the church of God?
- 3) Do you want to shame them that have-not? Do you actually want to humiliate the poor? Paul asks these questions to indict these ones of selfishness.

In the final part of the chiasm in verse 33, Paul counsels them simply. *“So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.”* This principle of preference for each other has an amazing impact on the world and displays the corporate unity of the church. Imagine if we instituted this practice at the church “pot-blessing” celebrations!

- b. Some were approaching the Lord’s Supper forgetfully (23-27, 20). *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.// When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat.*

In verses 23-27, some of the most well-known and often quoted verses in the whole Bible appear. Paul reveals what real communion should be like, since he recalls the words of Christ at the Last Supper and applies them to a local church. Paul gives us the proper example of Christ’s words, the proper focus on the sacrificial death of Christ and the proper purpose of remembering Christ. One commentator describes verses 22-26 then as “a diamond dropped on a muddy road.” He likened the mire and mud to the abuse and problems going on in this church.

Did you notice that Paul repeats the phrase, *“DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME?”* Paul uses repetition to emphasize a main point to the Corinthians. The real problem was that they were not only selfish, but they were also very forgetful. They got together and had their meal, yet they forgot who they had come to worship. He also says in verse 27 that the unworthy participation in this supper brings the guilt of sinning against the death of Christ, which was a very serious offence.

In verse 20, Paul uses a bit of sarcasm with this church to shame their sinful practices. Notice, you may be passing the bread, drinking the cup, but what you are doing has nothing to do with the Lord. Christ would have no part in this. This is not the Lord's Supper!

We can make this same application about how at times we "play church." We take the offering, make the announcements, read our Bibles and say our prayers, but do we really come to REMEMBER CHRIST? We must remember Christ when we meet together!

2. Some resulting possibilities of worship: two outcomes for the Lord's Table (28-32). *Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.*

As we learn from the bad example of the church of Corinth, let's also notice some different resulting possibilities of worship. Worship can be a powerful avenue to honor God, edify believers, and testify to the unsaved or it can be a means of securing the wrath and punishment of God. In verses 28-32, we have two different outcomes of worship. Some are protected by God and others are punished.

- a. True examiners will be protected (28-29).

In verse 28 and 29, blessing and protection come on those that approach the table of the Lord in the right way. The key word that would describe the action of these worshippers is examination.

- a. We need to examine ourselves at the Lord's Table: the concept of introspection (28).

It says in verse 28 to "examine yourselves." The word for examine means to test and was often used of testing different metals. The Corinthians were to test the way that they approached the Lord's Supper. 1 Corinthians reveals at least six major problems that they should have examined. They were divided, carnal, arrogant and immoral, selfish, and skeptical. They had many things to examine through introspection. However, modern believers should also question the sins of the church and their own hearts. Could it be that some of our own membership have experienced chastening for failing to appropriately examine themselves at the Lord's Table?

- b. We need to examine Christ at the Lord's Table: the importance of reflection (29).

Not only should we introspect, we should also reflect in participation of the Lord's Supper.

There are two possible interpretations to 29.

1. Failing to distinguish the communion food and drink from the rest of the food and drink.
2. While celebrating the Lord's Supper, they were not recognizing the important significance of a risen Savior.

There was hardly any awareness at all of the Lord's presence in their midst. The rich were not remembering his death and resurrection. There was not an awareness of and anticipation of this return. While the very items of the supper itself picture in a beautiful way the blood and body of Christ, many there were forgetful of it. These elements are a vivid portrayal of Christ's sacrifice. They are symbolic. How could believers forget this or fail to focus upon it at the Lord's Supper celebration?

Perhaps, it would be good for us to stop here and consider these two proper examinations—we must examine ourselves and our Lord at the Lord's Supper. Often, we are good in our circles of preaching on necessary introspection but what about the reflection? Communion is not primarily to be a time of "personal piety" or a time for me to "tune out everyone else and get right with God," but it is to be a time of REMEMBERING CHRIST. We preach, "GET RIGHT, GET RIGHT, GET RIGHT," but, I have to admit in my prayer that I can't get myself "right." I can only be righteous through Christ. Communion and worship should center on Christ! We must remember him!

b. Abusers will be punished (30-32).

Finally, Paul comes right out and says that abusers have been and are currently being punished for their abuse of this sacred rite. Some were presently sick and weakly among them. And some of them actually were punished with death. In verse 32, Paul gives a reason for this type of discipline—so that we will not be condemned with the world in the final judgment.

Some of us may say, "Oh good, he said that only those that abused the Lord's Supper would be the ones that would be eligible for God's punishment. I am sure that I do not do that! I AM SURE THAT I DON'T ABUSE IT, I MEAN I MAY NOT APPRECIATE IT; BUT, I DON'T ABUSE IT." But when you really examine what the text says about these abusers, can you honestly say that you have not behaved yourself

selfishly or forgetfully in the public worship service. ARE YOU HONESTLY APPROACHING WORSHIP IN REMEMBRANCE OF HIM?

At certain holidays, I remember my grandmother. When I hear some people laugh, I think of her. Is the Lord's Table a time when you reflect upon the person and work of our Lord and Savior? Perhaps, it would be good for us to end this lecture by singing the song: *Hallelujah, What A Savior!*<sup>277</sup>

IX. The 4<sup>th</sup> Question: an excursus on the value of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:1-14:40).

Summary: Paul arranged chapters 12-14 in an 'A-B-A' pattern with love as the central thought of the whole section.<sup>278</sup>

A. Introductory comments regarding spiritual gifts (12:1-3)

1. Spiritual gifts are important (1).
2. Unconverted people are easily deceived (2).

When they were pagans, they were being led astray  
"Some have argued from 12:2-3 that before they became Christians, the Corinthians had been involved in ecstatic utterances connected with pagan worship."<sup>279</sup>

3. The Holy Spirit's empowerment is essential (3).

B. The contributions of the Godhead regarding spiritual gifts (12:4-11)

1. The Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts (4).
  - a. The key word is gift.

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<sup>277</sup> **Verse 1** - "Man of Sorrows!" what a name, for the Son of God, who came, ruined sinners to reclaim. Hallelujah! What a Savior! **Verse 2** - Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood; sealed my pardon with His blood. Hallelujah! What a Savior! **Verse 3** - Guilty, vile, and helpless we; spotless Lamb of God was He; "Full atonement!" can it be? Hallelujah! What a Savior! **Verse 4** - Lifted up was He to die; "It is finished!" was His cry; now in Heav'n exalted high. Hallelujah! What a Savior! **Verse 5** - When He comes, our glorious King, all His ransomed home to bring, then anew His song we'll sing: Hallelujah! What a Savior!

<sup>278</sup> Brian Rosner believes that love is the central through of the entire book. He says, "Far from being an emphasis confined to Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts, the motif of love, so beautifully expounded in chapter 13, undergirds all of Paul's moral teaching in this letter. John Chrysostom agrees. In his view, the problems in Corinth arose from the absence of love. In commenting on 16:14 he wrote, "Let everything be done in love"—because in fact everything has been mentioned so far has come about of the neglect of this' (Homily 44 on 1 Corinthians; PG 61.375)." Brian S. Rosner, "The Logic and Argument of 1 Corinthians," 20-21.

<sup>279</sup> David Peterson, "Gifts and Ministries in 1 Corinthians," 148.

- b. The key source of the gift is the Spirit.
- 2. Jesus Christ models spiritual gifts (5).
  - a. The key word is administrations.
  - b. The key source is the Lord.
- 3. God the Father empowers spiritual gifts (6).
  - a. The key word is operations.
  - b. The key source is God the father.
- 4. An expansion of the Holy Spirit's role of distribution (7-11)
  - a. He gifts all believers for the profit of all the church (7).
  - b. He gifts believers differently (8-10).
  - c. He gifts according to His will (11).
- C. Although there is diversity within the church, believers enjoy a profound unity with each other (12:12-13).
  - 1. We all partake in the same baptism.
  - 2. We all partake in the same drink.
- D. Each believer within the church is important to the spiritual health of the whole (12:14-31).
  - 1. Each member is important (14-17).
  - 2. Each member is set by God (18).
  - 3. Each member depends on the others (19-21).
  - 4. Each member is necessary (22-26).
    - a. The appearance of individual members is not a reliable guide to their value (22-24).
    - b. All members contribute to the body (25-26).
  - 5. Each member is to show love for the others (27-31).
    - a. God has designed specific functions for the members (27-28).

- b. Whatever our gift, we need to pursue the more excellent way (29-31).
- E. Believers must demonstrate love<sup>280</sup> while using their gifts in the church (13:1-13).

1. The value of love (1-3)

- a. Tongues are of no value without love (1).
- b. Prophecy, understanding, knowledge, and faith are of no value to me without love (2).
- c. Giving and martyrdom produce nothing without love (3).

2. The nature of love (4-7)

- a. Eight things love does not do:
  - 1) Love does not envy.
  - 2) Love does not brag.
  - 3) Love is not arrogant.
  - 4) Love is not disgraceful.
  - 5) Love is not self-seeking.
  - 6) Love is not easily-angered.
  - 7) Love does not keep records of wrong.
  - 8) Love does not delight in evil.
- b. Seven things love does:
  - 1) Love responds properly to others: longsuffering and kindness.
  - 2) Love rejoices in truth.
  - 3) Love supports others.
  - 4) Love perseveres in friendships.

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<sup>280</sup>While there were many ancient sources for Paul's emphasis on love, Christ's own radical commitment to self-sacrificial love provide Paul with deeper insights into the nature of love. "Undoubtedly, the humiliation and self-denying love of Jesus provided Paul's deeper insights into the nature of love, the dominant feature in Paul's lists" (Thompson, *Moral Formation*, 109).

5) Love believes in others.

6) Love hopes for the best.

3. The eternality of love (8-13)

a. Other gifts are temporal (8).

b. The maturity of the body of Christ will cause some gifts to fail (9-10).

c. Two illustrations of the maturity of the body of Christ (11-12)

1) An illustration of earthly, progressive maturity (11)

2) An illustration of heavenly, ultimate maturity (12)

d. A final statement about the eternality of love (13)

F. Believers should prefer prophecy over tongues because of its ability to build others in the church (14:1-40).

1. The purpose of tongues and prophecy (1-5)

2. The importance of understanding tongues and prophecy (6-20)

a. In communication (6-11)

1) A logical appeal (6)

2) A musical appeal (7-8)

3) A practical appeal (9-11)

b. In prayer (12-15a)

c. In singing (15b-17)

d. In teaching (18-20)

3. The function of tongues and prophecy (21-25)

Paul's use of the OT in 14:21 is a major part of his rhetorical strategy. He uses this OT passage to convince the Corinthians "to prophecy rather than speak in tongues when they worship together as an assembly."<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>281</sup>Heil, *The Rhetorical Role*, 203.



- a. Tongues were a sign to unbelievers (21-22a)
- b. Prophecy edifies believers (22b)
- c. Tongues now confuse unbelievers (23)
- d. Prophecy now convinces unbelievers (24-25)

Paul says that although 'tongues' were originally given as a testimony to the lost and 'prophecy' for believers, now prophecy is an even more valuable tool to reach the lost.

4. Regulations on tongues, prophecy, and the role of women (26-35)

- a. Tongues (26-28)
- b. Prophecy (29-32)
- c. Women (33-35)

5. The source of tongues and prophecy (36-38)

6. The value of prophecy (39-40)

- a. It builds up (39).
- b. It is orderly (40).

X. The 6<sup>th</sup> Problem: a discussion of the skepticism of some in the church who questioned the physical resurrection of the body of a believer (1 Cor 15:1-58).

Summary: Some within the church at Corinth did not believe that the Christian hope included the resurrection of the body. While we are not given any information about the reason(s) for this doubt, Paul explained that God will use the material substance of our earthly, physical bodies to create immaterial, eternal bodies. Paul started his argument by reminding the Corinthians of their belief in his Christian gospel which involved the resurrection of Christ's body. After explaining that Christ's death and resurrection are in accordance with Scripture, Paul briefly considered what it would mean for believers if Christ did not arise from the dead. Christ did rise from the dead, however, and this guarantees the future resurrection of believers. Christ's personal victory over death foreshadows his ultimate victory over death when he causes our resurrection. Consequently, the Corinthians must refuse to neglect their belief in the resurrection of the body and continue their difficult Christian ministry.

Sometimes 1 Cor 15 can get a little overwhelming since it contains 58 verses and since many of these verses communicate complicated ideas. As we approach this chapter, we must look for the main idea and make sure to subordinate any less significant topics. David Garland

rightly summarizes the scope of 1 Corinthians 15. He says, “Paul is not trying to prove the resurrection of Jesus but to argue from it that Christians will be resurrected.”<sup>282</sup> Paul did not begin his discussion with the problem itself—the resurrection of believers, he started with a more foundational premise with which the Corinthians agreed—the resurrection of Christ. When properly understood this chapter offers not only depth of Christian theology, but also depth of Christian ethics.

The main teaching of this chapter divides into *three different sections*. Paul says that (1) true Christian experience requires faith in the gospel (1-11), (2) includes hope in future realities (12-57), and also (3) involves perseverance (58).

A. True Christian existence requires the gospel of Jesus Christ (1-11)

Have you ever been really confused by something or someone? Perhaps, you tried really hard to listen to a teacher describe some area of study. Or, perhaps, you were reading a book and you had to understand it for a quiz. You just wished that the writer would clearly say what he wanted to say. Or, perhaps, you paid close attention as someone gave you directions which just seemed to go on and on and on. Or, perhaps, because you find yourself in church today, you remember a time when you really tried to understand what the preacher was saying, but to no avail.

In moments like these, don’t you wish that someone would just give you the “bare bones” facts or the dummy edition? Today, we are going to look at how Paul summarizes the content of one and a half years of preaching to the Corinthians. If he had to summarize the whole content of his preaching in one word, it would be the word “gospel.” And our summary will not stop there, but Paul will also summarize the gospel itself, breaking it into two core essentials. Let’s look today at the bare essentials of Paul’s preaching and the bare essentials of the gospel itself.

1. The core content of Paul’s preaching (1-2). *Now I would remind you brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

In verses 1 and 2, Paul mentions his preaching of the gospel twice. Paul reminds the Corinthians that they had responded properly to his preaching. The clear subject of Paul’s proclamation to the Corinthians is given in verse 1—the gospel (εὐαγγέλιον). When Paul went down into the streets and houses of Corinth he proclaimed to them the gospel of Jesus Christ. (**READ 1 COR 2:1-5**)

The Corinthians received it, they were continuing to stand in it, and thus they were being saved by it as long as they did not have an empty faith. Within these verses Paul emphasizes that believers must remain loyal to the gospel. We cannot allow ourselves to get distracted by other interests in life from our

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<sup>282</sup>Garland, 678.

fidelity to this message! The gospel was extremely important to Paul and the Corinthians, and it must remain that way for us today.

A few years ago, the rave within Christianity was to give the law (νόμος) to lost people. There is a proper place for that in showing men their sinfulness, ***but is the gospel the clear content of your speech with other people?*** When was the last time that you shared the gospel with someone else? Did you have an opportunity to do so this past week? If not, why not? Why did you not tell lost people about the good news of Jesus Christ this past week? The gospel was the core content of Paul's message to the Corinthians; let's commit to make it the core content of our conversations with others as well!

## 2. The core content of the gospel (3-11)

After establishing that the core content of Paul's proclamation was the gospel, Paul then proceeds to tell us what the core content of the gospel is.

- a. Essential Component 1: Jesus died for our sins (3-4a). *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried.*

One of the essential components of the gospel is that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures. Paul says that when he was at Corinth, he delivered (παρέδωκα) what he had received (παρέλαβον) from God. These two words are "technical terms used by rabbis for 'handing over' to their disciples a body of teaching."<sup>283</sup> These words were also used in chapter 11 about what Paul had received and delivered from the Lord (11:23). Paul declares that his message did not originate with himself—that it came from God, and that he was simply passing it along to the Corinthians.

- a. The importance of Jesus's death

The first thing that Paul proclaimed was the death of Christ. Without the death of Jesus, no one would ever be saved. This past Friday, we commemorated the death of Jesus. But did you notice in your Bible, that the text explains why Jesus died. It says that He died "for our sins."

The word "sin" means to fall short and the Bible talks about many different sins. (All have sinned, the penalty of sin is death)

- b. Confirmation of Jesus's death

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<sup>283</sup>Barnett, 270.

While I normally do not get much time in my 1 Corinthians class to cover the blessings of 1 Corinthians 15, I do try to ask the students to look over verses 1-11. I like to ask them one question: ***How many parts of the gospel do you see in verses 3-4?*** I get all kinds of answers, but the best answer is that there are two non-negotiable parts of the gospel mentioned in this section (***Death***-confirmed by the burial, ***Resurrection***-confirmed by the appearances).

Having made those observations, we learn that the death of Christ is a verifiable fact. Christ was buried in a tomb for three days and Paul says that this was in accordance with what the Scriptures say. Some (Thiselton) believe that Paul does not have one particular text in mind when he says this, but that he is thinking about the testimony of the entire Scriptures. Others (Garland) says that he is thinking about Hosea 6:2. Regardless, the death and burial of Christ coheres with what the Scriptures say about the gospel.

- b. Essential Component 2: Jesus arose from the dead (4b-11). *That he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. And that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*

The second essential component of the gospel is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### 1) The importance of Jesus's resurrection

On this day, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. This day of celebration makes us different than every other religion in the world. No other religion in the world has an Easter. They might have a holy city—Mecca or Medina, but they go there to mourn the death of the prophet Mohammed. They do not go there to celebrate the life and resurrection of their Lord! Three days after Jesus died, he rose (ἐγείρω) from the dead. You see, the resurrection forms the distinctive quality which separates Christianity from all other religions.

Notice what some prominent Christian scholars say about the importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**Robertson and Plummer** say, "Christianity stands or falls with the fact of the resurrection."<sup>284</sup> **H. D. A. Major** says, "A crucified Messiah was no Messiah at all. He was one rejected by Judaism and accursed by God. It was the Resurrection of Jesus which proclaimed Him to be the Son of God with power."<sup>285</sup> **John MacArthur** says it this way, "The resurrection is the heart that pumps life-giving blood into the gospel."<sup>286</sup> The resurrection is indispensable! It was also indispensable to the early preaching of the Apostles in the Book of Acts (Peter in Acts 2, 3-4 and Paul). Let's read Acts 17:22-34. The resurrection was extremely important.

## 2) Confirmation of Jesus's resurrection

Paul moves along to inform us that the resurrection of Jesus also accords with the Scriptures and that it is confirmed by all of the appearances of our Lord. Christ appeared alive in bodily form in a sequence of verifiable eyewitness encounters. Paul traces six different appearances that Christ made (perhaps in chronological order)<sup>287</sup> to verify the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>288</sup>

- b) The appearance to Cephas
- c) The appearance to the twelve disciples

See other notes. Some ancient manuscripts have eleven.

- d) The appearance to more than 500 believers
- e) The appearance to James

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<sup>284</sup>Robertson and Plummer, 330.

<sup>285</sup>H. D. A. Major, *The Mission and Message of Jesus*, 213.

<sup>286</sup>MacArthur, 398.

<sup>287</sup>Rosner & Ciampa suggest that they are in chronological order by drawing our attention to some of Paul's wording ("then . . . then . . . then . . . last of all . . .") (749).

<sup>288</sup>Jesus' death and resurrection is the cornerstone of the gospel. I have purposely been quite simple today. I have reminded you of the bare bones essentials of the gospel. Where do you stand with the cross and resurrection of Jesus? I remember several months ago, asking a man in McDonalds what the thought about the "cross" and about the "resurrection". He tried to avoid the question. He said that Jesus was a good man and that many people believe that he resurrected, but when I asked him to answer the question again, he said that he did not believe that any human could rise from the dead! This man was not a Christian. You must believe that Jesus died and rose again for your sins if you want to be accepted by God!

f) The appearance to the apostles

g) The appearance to Paul

B. True Christian experience also includes a hope in future realities (12-57).

Keith Condie says, "The Corinthian error was to think that what had happened in Christ in the world was the full picture in terms of Christian experience. They thought that they possessed already the full abundance of blessing that had issued from the saving work of Christ."<sup>289</sup> But the 1<sup>st</sup> appearance of Christ is only the beginning of what He has accomplished for us. His first coming anticipates his second coming and our glorious future. We will realize our eternal inheritance at His second coming.

1. Some Corinthian believers denied the future reality of a bodily resurrection (12-34).

a. Assertion #1: They believed in Christ's resurrection, but not a future resurrection of believers (12-18).

1) Assertion stated (12). *Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*

2) Assertion answered (13-18).

a) If there is no resurrection, then Christ would not be risen (13). *But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.*

b) If there is no resurrection, then preaching is worthless (14a). *And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain.*

c) If there is no resurrection, then faith in Christ is vain (14b). *And your faith is in vain.*

d) If there is no resurrection, then we are liars (15-16). *We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.*

e) If there is no resurrection, then we are still dead in sin (17). *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*

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<sup>289</sup>Keith Condie, "The Coherence of 1 Corinthians," 43.

- f) If there is no resurrection, then the dead in Christ are eternally lost (18). *Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.*
- b. Assertion #2: They believed that a “future-hope-only” present existence is pitiful (19-34).
- 1) Assertion stated (19). *If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*
- 2) Assertion answered (20-34).
- a) Answer #1: \_\_\_\_\_ (20-28). *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.*

Paul desires to motivate these believers to see more of the future and for them to be motivated to live consistently in light of the impending worldwide worship of God. God wants believers to go from self-centered mode to missions mode! These people were most concerned with themselves; they were captivated with discussions of anthropology. But Paul wants them to have a passion for theology! Let’s allow a hot theology to guide us as we seek the glory of God! The true end (τέλος) of all history is the glory of God.

- b) Answer #2: \_\_\_\_\_ (29). *Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?*
- c) Answer #3: \_\_\_\_\_ (30-34). *Why are we in danger every hour? I protest brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! What do I gain*

*if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.*

The self-indulgent lifestyle of those who rejected a future, bodily resurrection revealed that they had no knowledge of God and it unfortunately increased ignorance of God in the lives of those around them as well.

OT quote in 15:32 - This is a quote from Isaiah. In the passage in Isaiah, the Israelites are told of Assyrian captivity and are commanded to repent, weep, and fast. Yet, when confronted with their impending doom, the Israelites respond with corruption, revelry, and lewd wickedness. While they still had life, the Israelites pursued a hedonistic lifestyle with everything that they had. So, Paul uses this quotation to shock the Corinthians regarding their own hopelessness if Christ did not raise from the dead. In response, however, Paul says that the Corinthians are to sober up (v. 34).

2. Some Corinthian believers asked questions about how a resurrection was possible (35-57).
  - a. Question #1: How are the dead raised?
    - a. Question stated (35a). *But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised?"*
    - b. Question answered (50-57).
      - a) Premise (50). *I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*
      - b) Premise explained (51-57). *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, as the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The*



*sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.  
But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory  
through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

- b. Question #2: With what type of body are the dead raised?
  - a. Question stated (35b). *"With what kind of Body do they come?"*
  - b. Question answered (36-49).
    - a) The analogy of seeds (36-38). *You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as eh has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.*
    - b) The analogy of flesh (39). *For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind of humans, another of animals, another for birds, and another for fish.*
    - c) The analogy of heavenly and earthly bodies (40-41). *There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.*
    - d) The analogy of the first and last Adam (42-49). *So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being;" the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have born the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*

C. True Christian experience involves perseverance (58)

Paul ends this chapter on the resurrection in a typical fashion with the word “therefore” followed by imperatives. He has used this same word to close his appeals about the Lord’s Supper in 11:33-34 and about spiritual gifts in 14:39-40.

**Have you ever been “discouraged”?** Many different things can discourage a Christian worker.

- The death of a loved one can bring deep despair
- Some sort of relational conflict with someone that we love
- The loss of physical health (the great “decline” or some “great physical pain”)
- The lack of financial security
- A lack of visible results or effectiveness in a ministry undertaking
- The difficulty of doing “all that God wants” or “following through”
- The passing of time itself might be a source of discouragement

However, something might be able to discourage us even more than these things! What if Jesus never rose from the dead? What if there is no such thing as victory over death? Well, Paul faced all sorts of emotional, physical, and social pains and discouragements in his life: *hardships, beatings, imprisonments, riots, sleepless nights, dangers at sea and in the wilderness, betrayal, and the great physical pain of a “thorn in the flesh”*. Despite Paul’s willingness to gladly endure all these things, the concept of “no resurrection” was unthinkable to him! If there is no resurrection from the dead, then he admits that it would lead him to utter misery! So, Paul writes a lengthy defense of the resurrection of Christ and of believers in chapter 15. He concludes this chapter with a wonderful encouragement to Christian brethren: *Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain*. The main point of this conclusion is that all empowered Christian service will be rewarded. And his challenge for believers in light of their Christian hope is that **they must engage in tenacious, toilsome Christian ministry**.

1. Paul gives the church two passionate commands (58a) – *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*.
  - a. Don’t recant, but deepen your commitment to sound truth: **doctrinal tenacity** – *be steadfast, immovable*.

As we look to this simple, yet powerful, verse our attention must be given to two near synonyms in verse 58. These two adjectives express the qualities that Paul implores the Corinthians to possess. The Corinthians are to prove themselves to be *steadfast* (*hedraioi*). This word means “unwavering, unswerving, resolute, or solidly into place.” The second quality demanded of the Corinthians is being *immovable* (*ametakinetos*), which means to be “fixed or permanent.”

Together these words provide the sense—“hold the line, don’t give in.”<sup>290</sup> One gets the impression that Paul wants the Corinthians “to be stubborn.” However, this is not a quality that many of us really appreciate today. For instance, not many parents try to encourage their children to be stubborn or obstinate! “Great job son, that is exactly what I am looking for in you—never surrender to your sisters!” We do not purposefully cultivate stubborn tenacity in our children. Yet, perhaps there are some times when immovability is helpful. I imagine that Paul could have implored the Thessalonians to be immovable in light of all of the opposition and persecution that they faced! “Don’t recant, don’t surrender—be immovable!” However, it is very strange for Paul to tell *the Corinthians* to remain solidly in place or immovable in light of all of their problems. They were divided, carnal, morally weak, boasting in wicked sin, selfish, and skeptical! How could Paul ask *them* to be immovable?

Well, the answer is found in the greater context of this chapter! Of course many believers identify 1 Cor 15 as the great resurrection chapter! If you notice the first two verses of this chapter, you will find exactly what the Corinthians are not to be moved from: *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.* Paul uses the same root word to tell the Corinthians in verse 1 that they are *standing* in the gospel which Paul preached to them. This gospel includes both the death of Christ (confirmed by his burial) and the bodily resurrection of Christ (confirmed by the witnesses). But if you notice in verse 12, Paul marvels that some of them were now saying that there is no resurrection of the dead. Specifically, as verse 35 says, some of the Corinthians were asking “How are the dead raised and with what kind of body do they come?” Some of the Corinthians were skeptical about the possibility of bodily resurrections. So, Paul takes the entire first part of the chapter to inform them that Christ rose from the dead and that his resurrection is a type of “firstfruits” for our resurrection. He is the first harvest of a similar crop! His victory over death in the form of a bodily resurrection guarantees and foreshadows our victory over death. Thus, the Corinthians are to be obstinate, stubbornly tenacious when it comes to belief in a bodily resurrection.

Has anyone ever put pressure on you to change your mind or position on something? Do you know a person who just doesn’t take “no” for an answer, but just wears you down? How do you normally respond to such a person? Well, as a personal confession this morning, I admit that I normally surrender. I come to the point where I would rather change my mind and put up with the

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<sup>290</sup>Williams, 75.

ramifications of whatever that person wants, then to put up with their constant battering of criticisms, tears, and petitions!

However, when it comes to the key tenets of Christian theology, we must never surrender! *We must maintain doctrinal tenacity, unwavering commitment, and obstinacy.* Paul told Timothy to guard the deposit of truth which had been entrusted to him! But, let me ask you a question: Is this message of *inflexibility* very popular in our Christian culture today? Not at all! We are all about change, and meeting contemporary needs! I can't remember the last time that I heard a key Christian leader emphasize "tenacity." In light of the current condition of this world and of our nation, we do not need more messages on *flexibility* as much as we need sermons on *immovability*!

- b. Don't quit, but increase your efforts in ministry: **ministerial toil** – *always abounding in the work of the Lord.*

Not only does Paul call us to doctrinal tenacity, he also calls us to ministerial toil! In its essence, this passage implores us not to quit, but to increase our efforts in ministry! The phrase *always abounding in the work of the Lord* speaks of an overflow or excess of service for the Lord. The *work of the Lord* involves efforts done in building the church and evangelizing the lost for the glory of God. Many times, we allow earthly things to distract us from service to the Lord! We work ourselves to the point of exhaustion on our own homes and have very little effort left for the Lord! We selfishly waste hours of our day on games, television, facebook or other even more damaging pursuits and claim that we have no time for Christian service!

In your lifetime as a believer, you have "much meaningful work" to complete (Eph 2:10).<sup>291</sup> Now, let's momentarily reflect upon your current amount of Christian labor! Is your service half-hearted? Do you serve God only when convenient? Are you engaged in any strenuous, sacrificial work for God? There is much to accomplish for the glory of God in this church!

- Care of our church facilities – we are just about ready to transition buildings. There are chairs to move, grass to mow, walls to paint, and ongoing janitorial needs.
- Teaching – we need men and women who will be always abounding in their work as Christian teachers in our Sunday schools, and Jr. church programs. Although this ministry does involve much "toilsome" labor in study while other

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<sup>291</sup>Witherington, 311.

Christians are eating pizza and watching movies on Saturday night, we need believers who do not shrink from labor.

- Discipleship – we need men and women who will be committed to strategically disciple new believers in this church.
- World Evangelism – There are well over 3500 people groups in this world, who have no real Christian population. In a world of billions of people, we need men and women who are ever abounding in the work of Christian witness.

Basically, there is always more work to perform than can be accomplished! A “call to service” rings out clearly in this text! May it ring in your ears! So, this text calls us to doctrinal tenacity and ministerial toil. Now, I used to think that Christians were normally better at one of these two things. You know—either you like studying your Bible or you like active Christian ministry! However, it appears today that many *believers* are good at neither! We cannot be half-hearted or lazy brethren! We must be firm, yet we must not be static! **We must be uncompromising and unrelenting!**

2. Paul motivates the church with her Christian hope (58b) – *knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

After calling the Corinthians to labor in Christian ministry, Paul reminds them of a motive for doing so. The Corinthians know that Christian labor is not in vain in the Lord. Our work done under the Lord’s control and through his enablement will not be fruitless! It will never fade away, but will produce reward! It is not empty because we will all be resurrected someday to experience the fruit of our Christian labor. Paul insists that all Christian labor performed in the Lord will produce eternal results! Are you motivated by the extraordinary opportunity to invest in eternal priorities?

Perhaps some of us have lost sight of this! Some of us must double or triple the amount of labor that we offer to the Lord! The last time that I spoke on this text in a church setting was approximately 10 years ago. This is the text that I chose for my last address to the church in Cross Lanes, West Virginia. As I looked at those notes this past week, I was reminded of the sense of “youthful zeal” that God gave me when instructing those people! I can remember staying up until 5 or 6 am as a youthful twenty-something working on that sermon (Now a late night is something like 10 pm)!

Do you remember when you first came to know the Lord—you had much zeal! You accomplished much! You exerted much! Don’t allow your “youth’s large vision” to fade away to nothing! Don’t lose your commitment to toil! You may never enjoy the fruit of your labor on earth, but it will all be worth it one day! And when the strength and optimism of your youth fades away, apply yourself in a more rigorous program to doctrinal tenacity and ministerial toil! We must engage in tenacious, toilsome Christian ministry!

- XI. The 5<sup>th</sup> Question: a short discussion concerning a collection for the church at Jerusalem and Paul's desire to come to Corinth (1 Cor 16:1-9).

Summary:

- XII. The 6<sup>th</sup> Question: a short discussion concerning fellow servants of the Lord (1 Cor 16:10-12).

Summary:

- A. The recommendation of Timothy to those in Corinth (16:10-11)
- B. The absence of Apollos is for a short time (16:12).

- XIII. Some Concluding Statements (1 Cor 16:13-24).

Summary:

- A. Concluding imperatives (13-14)
- B. Paul's concern that the church at Corinth submit to and acknowledge Stephanas (15-18).
- C. Various greetings from those outside of Corinth (19-21).
  - 1. The Asian churches send their greetings (19a).
  - 2. Aquila and Priscilla send their greetings (19b).
  - 3. All of the brethren of Ephesus send their greetings (20).
  - 4. Paul sends his greetings by his own hand (21).
- D. Concluding thoughts: condemnation of those who reject Christ and best-wishes to the Corinthian church (22-24).

