



# 1 Corinthians

*A Verse-By-Verse Commentary*

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## CHAPTER 1

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

1 Corinthians is comprised of 437 verses in 16 chapters. This makes it four verses longer than the epistle to the Romans. A few things should be noted about the letter: Its composition is dated at AD59. It is generally directed toward proper Christian conduct and the avoidance of heresy and division within the church. Paul established the church in Corinth during his missionary travels, but it continued to have many problems with adjusting to proper conduct, especially because of being in a pagan environment. This letter is then written to address these problems and to give guidance in these and other church-related issues.

Paul begins with an introduction to confirm the letters authenticity. In it, he identifies himself and his position, and from whence his authority arises - "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ." As Paul established the church, they would know him and hopefully take heed to whatever issues he would address. To ensure they hadn't forgotten, he identifies his title. He was "called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ."

The title "apostle" is something which is incorrectly applied in the church today. The apostles were only those who personally witnessed the work of Jesus Christ. Paul was called as an exception to this because he only came to know Christ after His ascension. He will specifically note this calling in 1 Corinthians 15:8. The apostolic age ended with the completion of the Bible and the death of the last apostle. Being an apostle then had a special significance and only came about by a specific calling by Christ himself (see 1 Corinthians 15:7).

Next he identifies from where his calling was derived. It was "through the will of God." The story of Paul's conversion is recorded in the book of Acts and it would have been widely known among the churches that he established. His authority was obvious, but he is calling it again to mind in order to establish the basis for the bold statements and directions that he would make throughout the letter.

God's will is something that occurs in His eternal state, outside of time itself. Paul was specifically chosen to carry the message of Christ to the gentile people of the world. It is his letters which establish church-age doctrine and they are prescriptive in nature. Ignoring, diminishing the importance of, or mishandling Paul's letters will inevitably lead to unsound doctrine and even heresy. Paul is such an important figure that hidden

pictures of him and his ministry are actually seen in the book of Genesis. God's calling upon his life and ministry carry the authority of God; what Paul writes is divinely inspired.

Finally in this first verse, Paul states that the letter is from him "and Sosthenes our brother." Sosthenes is mentioned in Acts 18:17 - "Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things." Once the "ruler of the synagogue" in Corinth, he became a disciple of Christ through Paul's ministry. Paul mentions him to add weight to the letter. He would have been one of the first converts in Corinth and being the synagogue's ruler, he would have been well-versed in Old Testament theology. For this reason, he was an excellent person to cite in the introduction.

It is also possible that Sosthenes was acting as Paul's scribe. Just as in Romans with Tertius, who is mentioned in Romans 16:22, Paul probably had a scribe write as he dictated the letter. As a synagogue ruler, Sosthenes would have certainly been a competent person to act as a scribe. He would be familiar with how to carefully handle the pen in important matters such as this.

Life application: In the church, we have things that we "feel" are right or wrong and we often speak out or act on those issues in a prescriptive manner. But what we "feel" is irrelevant. The only thing that matters in the conduct of the church is what God has prescribed for us. And the doctrine of the church during this dispensation is what Paul has laid out in his epistles. The book of 1 Corinthians is a carefully detailed letter which addresses many important issues. Make sure to study, contemplate, and apply his directives to your church and personal life.

*Heavenly Father, You called Your apostles to carry Your message to the church. They have important instructions that show us the marvelous things You have done for us in the Person and work of Your Son, Jesus. Help us to study, contemplate, and apply Your word, as brought to us through them, so that we will be competent in our Christian walk. Thank You, O God. Amen.*

**To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: 1 Corinthians 1:2**

After his introduction, Paul makes his addressees known by starting with, "To the church of God which is at Corinth." Corinth is on an isthmus and its location was on a very

narrow portion of it. Because of this, a "highway" was forged from one side of it to another and boats were literally dragged across it to save them the time of sailing all the way around the land. Because of this strategic location, Corinth became a well-known and valuable city in the Roman empire.

"The church of God" is a term which implies that this was an established church, founded on God's working in and through the Person of Jesus Christ. It was Paul who established the church as is noted beginning in Acts 18:1. He preached his message and those who received it are "those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus." This means that they were set apart from those around them as holy. Being "sanctified" in this way means that they are secure in Christ and have received their heavenly position. Ephesians 2:4-6 explains this -

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus..."

Regardless of our earthly walk after salvation, we have been set apart by God because of our simple and heartfelt faith in the work of Christ Jesus. Our heavenly position is settled. Because of this, we have been "called to be saints." Being called "saints" is tied directly to "sanctified." It is the work of Jesus Christ which grants sainthood; not a church or denomination. The abuse of using this title for some people within the church while not using it for all is certainly to be condemned. If a person is a true believer in Jesus Christ, they are a saint. The "litany of the saints" is a long and wonderful list which includes all who have called on Him, not a select portion who are then elevated above the rest. Paul explains this again many times, such as in these words in 2 Timothy 1:9 -

"...who has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began."

As Paul notes to Timothy, it is "not according to works." Instead it is exactly as he states both to Timothy and to those in Corinth. It is an honor for "all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." To "call on the name" means to invoke the name for the purpose of worship. One doesn't "call on the name of Jesus" and then revert back to the name of "Jehovah" of the Old Testament (as the Jehovah's Witnesses and other aberrant cults do). It is the recognition that Jesus is, in fact, the

Lord Jehovah who was manifest in the flesh. It is His name alone by which men must be saved (Acts 4:12).

In finishing up this verse, the words "both theirs and ours" is given to imply that sainthood and acceptance of Jesus Christ isn't limited to a location (such as Corinth) nor a denomination (such as Roman Catholicism). Nor is it limited in any other way except in the calling on of Jesus Christ as Lord. Anyone, of any race, place, culture, or individual church who calls on Him is a saint and his name is written in heaven - Jew or Gentile, male or female, all are one in Him.

Whether this letter was intended as an encyclical or not, it is a timeless letter. Because it is in the Bible, it wasn't just intended to be read by one (or all) the churches in the area and then stored away. Rather God has used it to provide doctrine to all churches in all ages. However, the contents of the letter seem so targeted to Corinth and their many flaws that it would seem they wouldn't want the letter circulated, thus embarrassing them. But when thoughtfully considered, the same problems arise again and again in all churches at one time or another. This is why reading and contemplating the words of Scripture are so very important.

Life application: The Bible and its books, especially Paul's letters, give us direct guidance for the many issues which are bound to arise within the church. Church tradition, although welcoming and comforting to congregants, is never to be used as a substitute for adherence to the Bible. If your church has more tradition than Bible... time to move from your church. Stick to the Bible and be instructed by God.

*Yes Lord God! How wonderful it is to know that when problems arise in our church, we don't need to guess about what to do, nor do we need to seek out a fallible pastor, preacher, priest, bishop, or pope. Instead, we just need to turn to Your word and find the remedy there. You have addressed those things which are important to You in Your word and so we will stick to it like glue. Thank You for Your superior word. Amen!*

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

1 Corinthians 1:3

After identifying himself, his calling, who was accompanying him, and who the letter is directed to, Paul now gives the standard greeting which is found in most of his epistles, "Grace to you and peace to you."

Grace is unmerited favor which cannot be earned. This is the common greeting among the Greek people. Peace however is the common greeting among the Hebrew people. In their language, the word is *shalom*. This is more than a greeting for calm or quiet, but is a state of wholeness and completion in all ways. Paul unites the two terms just as the church is being united between Jew and Gentile during his time. This grace precedes the peace because only after receiving the grace of God can a person experience the peace of God.

Paul extends this wonderful blessing to them "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." It is a greeting from the eternal God – both the unseen Father and His Son who reveals the Father to us. Rather than being an argument against the divinity of Jesus Christ, it is an argument for it. He is tying the two in as one - Jesus being a member of the Godhead. He is not making some type of great division, but a harmonious blending of the two.

Throughout Paul's letters, as with the entire Bible, the deity of Jesus Christ is a concept and a precept which simply can't be missed. It is the very heart of what God has done for the reconciliation of the people of the world.

Life application: Outside of God's creation, which reveals Him in a general way, we cannot comprehend Him except through His special revelation. One way we receive special revelation is through the mouths of His prophets. But these prophets all testified to the same thing - Jesus Christ (John 5:39). The most magnificent special revelation of God that we have received is the incarnation of Jesus. But for us, even this isn't sight, it is found in the testimony of those who have recorded what they knew into the New Testament. So, in order to understand God, one must know Jesus Christ, and one cannot understand Jesus Christ unless they know their Bible. Today's life application.... know your Bible.

*Heavenly Father, how grateful I am that I can fellowship with You personally. I can read Your word and know who You are. I can have personal talks with You as I pray in a quiet place or on a bustling city street. And I can feel Your presence as I attend church and fellowship with others as we praise You and give You thanks for Your wonderful care of us. Thank You for allowing us to fellowship with You, O God. Amen.*

**I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus... 1 Corinthians 1:4**

Paul's introduction and greetings are friendly and filled with encouragement. His closing statements will likewise be uplifting and attentive to the building up of his recipients. However, in the main body of the epistle, Paul is going to address, rather directly at times, many hard issues. Some of these issues may be found offensive in today's climate of "tolerance," but these are things which are important to God and which He expects us to pay heed to. We are saved by grace through faith, but we are expected to live out our salvation in holiness and right living.

Before addressing the difficult issues which must be addressed though, he first ensures those at Corinth that they are dear to him and ever on his mind. He states, "I thank my God always concerning you." One can just picture him walking along the road to his next destination and recalling the people and experiences there at Corinth. As they came to mind, he probably uttered such thoughts out loud... "Yes Lord, thank You for those in Corinth. Thank you for Mikeopolus, Lisatha, and Philipherous. And Lord, you know how good Kristiniki was to me while I was there. Thank you for these folks, and all of those I've come to know." It is Paul who wrote to the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), and he certainly did this himself in such a manner.

Next he explains why he was so thankful to God for them. It was based on "the grace of God which was given to you." Grace is unmerited favor. It cannot be bought, it cannot be earned, it is completely undeserved. But at the same time, it isn't forced upon us by God. Grace is bestowed upon us when we submit to Him properly. And this grace is "by Christ Jesus." He did the work; through Him we receive God's grace.

Upon receiving this grace, many benefits are available to the believer. Paul will continue with his thought in the coming verses concerning this, but then his writing will also cover those things that the Corinthians were engaged in which imposed upon God's grace. We will see that such behavior is not what God intends for His children. Let us pay heed to the words of 1 Corinthians. It is a classic example of a church in crisis and needing sound theology, proper doctrine, and right direction.

Life application: God's grace is sufficient to cover all our sins - past, present, and future. But He does not intend for this grace to be abused. We are saved in order to be holy and glorifying of Him, not to continue to participate in the sins of the flesh.

*Lord God, I know that Your grace is sufficient to cover all my sins, but I would rather that the future be free from such things. May I never presume upon Your favor by living in a manner contrary to the high-calling I have received through the shed blood of Your*

*precious Son, my Lord Jesus. Be with me, strengthen me, and help me along this rocky path of life. To Your glory I pray. Amen.*

**...that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge...**

1 Corinthians 1:5

This verse carries on from the previous one where Paul thanked God continuously for the grace He had bestowed upon the Corinthians. This grace, given by Christ Jesus, was endowed so that they would be "enriched in everything by Him."

The knowledge of Christ is an exceedingly great knowledge, granted by grace. It enriches our lives in every way and is what leads us to the greatest knowledge of all, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God. These are available to us through the teachings of the apostles who were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as they uttered out the words of the Bible. Paul and the other apostles gave their instructions to the churches directly; now we have the Bible which serves this purpose. In the Bible then is "everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge."

God has spoken by Christ everything we need for our spiritual life and practice. This verse, among many others unfortunately, leads folks to believe that because they have accepted Christ, they have all knowledge and all discernment in Christ. Relying on "Holy Ghost" power and instruction, they actually delude themselves and others into accepting whatever nonsense they utter at any given time - prophecies, teachings, proclamations, etc. But this isn't how things work. The apostolic instruction has been given and it has been recorded. Now, in order to understand "all utterance and all knowledge" we actually have to open our Bibles, read, study, and apply.

This is hard work and that is tedious to many. How much easier it is to simply pull out individual verses and misapply them to life's momentary trials or victories. But the Bible, and all it contains, is God's word and demands that we keep it in context as we study it. Through this precious word we are edified, built up, and given our proper knowledge.

Life application: To fully understand God's intentions for us is a long and difficult task. The first thing we need to do is to get right with Christ, receiving Him as Savior. After that, we should actively seek Him out through His superior word. Take time, every day, to read and study this infinitely precious treasure.

*Lord God! How I treasure every new discovery in Your word. I revel in it and love to see its deep riches unfold before me. And thank You for others who have so diligently studied*

*it, finding patterns, parallels, and precious pearls of wisdom. When I read the things others have discovered, it reminds me that there are so many faithful people pursuing Your wondrous gift to us. Thank You for Your great word, O God. Amen!*

**...even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you... 1 Corinthians 1:6**

This verse, like the previous one, is continuing on from verse 4. The grace of God was given to the Corinthians by Christ Jesus. Because of this they "were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge." This leads to him saying that this was "even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you." The Pulpit Commentary says that "the genitive is thus objective (about Christ), not subjective (the testimony borne by Christ)." In this manner then, the Christian testimony was, in fact, confirmed in those in Corinth.

The apostles, particularly Paul, passed on the message of Christ through preaching and instruction to the Corinthians and it was confirmed through signs. However, we will see in the chapters ahead that they abused the signs and made what was given in honor to look childish and demeaning. Because of this, Paul had to give explicit instructions concerning gifts, particularly the gift of "tongues." To this day, charismatic and Pentecostal churches continue to demean these gifts, ignoring the very instructions breathed out by the Holy Spirit through Paul.

As God will never contradict Himself, then any supposed gift which doesn't correspond to the instructions He has given in His word cannot be a "gift" from the Holy Spirit at all. We must pay particular heed to the instructions concerning these things as they come in the chapters ahead. Christianity is to be a "Christ-centered" religion, not a "look-at-me-centered" one. He is Lord, we are His subjects.

Life application: What change was wrought in you when you came to Christ? Hopefully you will remember that He is the one who deserves the glory for having saved your soul and confirmed it through a noticeable change in you. Remember to always glorify His great name in all you do.

*Heavenly Father, from time to time I get feeling pretty great about "me" and the things I do... and then I remind myself that there is no thing that I own, no accomplishment I have achieved, and no honor I have received that didn't originally come from You. It truly is all by Your grace and so to You alone goes the credit for all that I am. Help me to remember this as I walk along life's road... it is all about You. Amen.*

**... so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ... 1 Corinthians 1:7**

This verse is still continuing on with the same basic thought that Paul has been making for the past three verses. The grace of God was given to the Corinthians by Christ Jesus. Because of this they "were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge." This led to "even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you."

Because the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them, through their conversion to a new life in Him, it ensured that they would "come short in no gift." The term "come short" is used in connection with the thought of verse 5 where Paul said they "were enriched in everything by Him." Because they (and we also as believers) are so enriched, there will be no deficiency or lack in any "gift."

The term "gift" is *charismati* and doesn't only imply miraculous gifts, such as speaking in various languages, healings, and etc., but instead is certainly speaking of a sound and proper Christian walk. It includes right knowledge, right application of that knowledge, sound conduct, harmony between believers, etc. That it isn't speaking only of miraculous gifts is certain based on the contents of the rest of the epistle.

To conclude this verse, he ties in this fullness of what Christ offers during our lives as sufficient to carry us through until the end as we are "eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, be it a day or be it an entire lifetime of waiting (which has now gone on for 2000 years) we are fully gifted in our lives to endure and continue on in a full and complete manner as we wait on His return.

However, as we will see ahead, despite being so gifted, the Corinthians failed to properly apply what was available to them. Hence, Paul wrote this letter for correction, instruction, and reproof. If this letter to them was given as such a guide, how much more ready should we be for each difficulty that arises? We have the whole word of God available to us! If we would simply take the time to read it and apply it to our lives, we would be living in a manner worthy of that great name to which we have been called.

Life application: The Bible is given to instruct us and to enrich our walk with the Lord until He returns for us. In it is everything we need for our spiritual journey. And yet, we ignore it and expect to be filled through shallow sermons one hour a week. This is a great error. Our filling comes through knowing our God, knowing our God comes

through knowing Jesus Christ, and knowing Jesus Christ only comes through knowing the Bible. Study your Bible!

*Most glorious and exalted heavenly Father... today I am filled with a new hunger to search You out and know the wondrous mysteries of Your wisdom and knowledge. Help me to pursue You through Your word, through Your creation, and through daily meditation and contemplation on Your greatness. Thank You for displaying Yourself to us in ways that we can know You personally and fellowship with You intimately. Amen.*

**...who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:8**

This finishes up the long thought which began in verse 4. Since then, Paul:

Thanked God for His grace given to them by Christ Jesus  
This grace would enrich them in everything; by all utterance and knowledge  
Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them  
So that they would lack no gift as they awaited the revelation of Christ

And it is He, Jesus Christ, "who will also confirm you to the end." This is another of the multitude of verses concerning "eternal salvation." Despite our own weaknesses, we shall be confirmed to the end. We have been given God's grace to help us along the way, but even if we should fall and fail to act upon the gifts we have been given, we will still be "confirmed." We are established in Christ and it is He, not us, who bears the ability to continue us in Him "to the end."

As we live, or in our death, we belong to Jesus Christ as Lord. No power in heaven or on earth can remove us from our position, granted by grace through the exercising of our faith. It is this act which then shows us to "be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Greek word *anegkletous* is used for "blameless." This word indicates a judicial standing. Though we may fall into sin, the sin will not be counted against us. Because we have moved from Adam to Christ, we are in Him and free from blame and condemnation. In essence, there is no charge of crime because of our position in Him.

This doesn't mean, and the Bible never promotes, that we should willingly sin. We are to conduct ourselves in holiness and righteousness. The church has the right to take action against those who flagrantly and openly flaunt sin as will be seen in Chapter 5. But in

that chapter, using an actual case of open disobedience, Paul never questions the salvation of the sinner. Rather, he assumes that his salvation is secure. However, he will suffer judgment and trouble in this world at the hand of Satan so that his "spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." 1 Corinthians 1:5.

This "day of our Lord Jesus Christ," which is also referred to in that passage in 1 Corinthians 5, is the day when we will stand before Him and receive our judgment for deeds in the flesh, but it is just that - a judgment of rewards and losses; not one for condemnation or salvation.

Life application: Salvation is eternal. We are saved despite ourselves. However, we will face many trials and troubles in this life if we fail to live up to the standards which Christ has set in His word for us. We will also suffer loss when we face Him at the bema-seat of judgment. How much better to live rightly, uphold His standards, and persevere in Him now. By doing so, our life will be rich and full and our judgment will be one of great reward.

*Lord God, thank You that because of the work of Messiah I have no fear of condemnation. Your word assures me that in Him I have been confirmed to the end and that I will stand blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. I truly am in awe of Your great and gracious Gift. I stand in awe of Jesus! Amen.*

**God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.** 1 Corinthians 1:9

The word "faithful" here is emphatic. In the Greek it is the first word of the sentence. A direct translation would say, "Faithful God by whom you were called..." What God speaks, He will perform. What God determines will always come about. And what God has started, He will complete. He is absolutely faithful. This is also seen, for example, in Philippians 1:6 -

"...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ."

God is indeed faithful and it is He "by whom you were called." The word "called" implies more than hearing a voice in the distance. It is the effectual calling noted by Paul in Romans 8. In that chapter, he gives the sequence of events which leads from that effectual calling right up until our being ushered into glory -

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." Romans 8:28-30

To God who calls, we are already glorified in His mind. This is the surety of the doctrine of eternal salvation. Though we may err, stray, or forget, God never will. That which has been started will be accomplished. This is wonderful news for those who step out in faith and receive Jesus Christ as Lord.

The calling which Paul speaks of is just that too, it is "into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." We move from Adam to Christ. We go from strangers and aliens to friends. We were separate from God and now we belong to Him. As Jesus Christ is the Son of God and we are "in Christ," we are now also called "sons of God." The marvel of what God has done through Jesus will be held in awe for all eternity.

Life application: Jesus Christ is our Lord. Let's live and act as if we really believe it - to the glory of God the Father!

*Yes, yes, yes! O wondrous God, I am over-flowing with awe at the beautiful plan laid out in Your word. Despite our disobedience, our turning away, our self-centeredness, and our confused thinking, You call us back to fellowship with You. Now Lord, help me to be so forgiving in my own life. May others see You in my actions and realize that Jesus is the true hope they need. May You be glorified by how I treat those who so desperately need You. Amen.*

**Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.**

1 Corinthians 1:10

Paul now transitions from initial greetings and encouragements into the main body and purpose of his epistle. In this first verse of the main body, he begins with the Greek term *parakalo de* - "I exhort, moreover." The participle *de* is what implies the transition to reproof.

Five principle rules should be applied when evaluating Scripture for personal use. There are many others, but these first five should always be at the forefront of one's mind -

1. Is this passage descriptive (does it merely describe something)
2. Is this passage prescriptive (does this actually tell me something I am to do)
3. Context (what is the context of this particular verse or passage)
4. Context (see above)
5. Context (see above)

As the epistle is being evaluated, we must ensure that we have considered the context of the passage or it becomes a pretext; a falsity. In essence, "Context is king."

When considering whether something is "prescriptive" there are two logical subdivisions to be considered also -

- Prescriptive
  - command (an imperative to do something)
  - exhortation (a plea to do something)

Understanding why something is either an imperative or an exhortation is needed because we have free-will to consider. When we fail at a command, we are being disobedient and it will definitely affect others, the body, etc., in a negative way. When we fail to adhere to an exhortation, we are making bad choices that can have negative impacts on us. The result is usually more self-destructive, as individuals or as a body (even though others outside the exhortation can also be harmed). It is sometimes hard to determine if what we are being told is actually a command or a mere prompting to act without compulsion, but being attentive to the context will normally resolve the matter.

These general rules may seem unnecessary, but they are actually critical to a proper analysis of Scripture. If we remember them, our walk and our doctrine will be greatly enhanced.

So, considering these tenets, let's start into the main body of Paul's letter -

"Now" as noted above is the participle *de* and is the transitional mark.

"I plead with you" implies that what Paul says here is prescriptive but in the form of exhortation. We are encouraged to take action based on a plea. If we do so, things will go smoothly, if we don't then negative consequences are sure to result.

"Brethren" is Paul's way of tying the church together into a unified body and it encourages continued unity within that body. As we'll see in the many verses ahead, disunity, faction, in-fighting, and division are all major problems within the church at Corinth.

"By the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" is given as the highest authority and it is given as the only name upon which we are to be identified. A very, very good example of a major failing in this regard continues on in our Christian world today -

- It occurs denominationally, "I am a Roman Catholic" or "I am a Lutheran." etc. In some instances, there is even the incredibly stupid doctrine that one can "only be saved" if they are members of a particular denomination. This isn't limited to large denominations, but it is taught by many smaller denominations, cults, and aberrant churches around the world. Rather, there is one way to be saved and it is through Jesus Christ, not a denomination.
- It occurs by individual name. "I am a Calvinist" or "I am an Arminian." etc.

Such petty divisions only divide the body. The fact is that both John Calvin and Jacob Arminius were both fallible men with often very-flawed doctrine. To identify oneself in this manner is to reduce one's reliance on the Word of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and to go down a strange path of less-than proper doctrine.

"That you all speak the same thing" is supportive of what was just said by Paul - "By the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." If the members of the church uphold, exalt, and rely on the Person and work of Jesus Christ, then they will naturally tend to "speak the same thing." However, there are always going to be differences of opinion on what a Bible verse says when the main rules above aren't properly handled. And so again, in order to "speak the same thing" we need to always consider the five principle rules of interpretation - prescriptive, descriptive, and context, context, context. By doing this, we will properly handle the word of God and be more inclined to always speak the same thing.

Continuing on, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to have "no divisions among you." The word in Greek here is *schismata*, "schisms." It is a word that indicates a tear or a breach. In

classical Greek the word was specifically used when noting the tearing of material. When a garment is torn, there is no longer one piece, but two. These two pieces are no longer at harmony with one another and cannot be used for the same purpose they once were. However, with a properly wielded needle and thread, they can be repaired. Paul is addressing, and will continue to address, major schisms within the church at Corinth. However, his epistle is just that intended fix - the metaphorical needle and thread. When divisions of a similar type arise today, we can use this same epistle, dating back now 2000 years, to fix the same old problems which arise. For example, "Come on people, drop the name 'Calvinist' from your Bible study!"

To finish his thought today, he begins with "but." In contrast to this, do that. And the "that" is for them is to "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment." Instead of factions, divisions, back-bitings, in-fightings, and other schisms, he implores them to be "joined together" as one cloth, without tear and without the need of mending. They are to be of the "same mind" as they together resolve the difficult issues of running a harmonious and loving congregation.

By using the Bible, we can do this today; without the Bible as our instruction, it will not occur. But to be of the "same mind" concerning the Bible, we also need to be of "the same judgment." There is only one proper conclusion to be made from all biblical passages, but to come to the same judgment, there needs to be a putting away of pride, a more thorough knowledge of the whole body of Scripture, and a complete reliance on what is actually intended for a passage, even if it seems contrary to what we may wish or desire. Our desires are irrelevant. When God determines, we should always agree.

Life application: Paul's letter to the Corinthians will address numerous real problems. These problems didn't end with the publication of the epistle. Why? Because people run ahead without giving heed to the word of God. What we need for proper doctrine and correct living is found right there in the Bible. Let us hold fast to it and always apply it to our lives.

*Dearest Lord Jesus, You are the Head of the church and we are all members of that church. Help us to not divide our allegiances by claiming denominational or individual church superiority. Rather, help us as denominations, individual churches, or as individual people to exalt Your word above petty differences. You have spoken, let us be obedient. But in order to do so, help us to properly evaluate and apply what Your precious word says. Amen.*

**For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. 1 Corinthians 1:11**

The word "for" is used as a connector to the previous verse and to then build upon that thought. In verse 10 we read –

"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

Based on this, "For it has been declared" is now stated. Paul wanted the Corinthians "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" but they weren't in such a state. And so in order to resolve the wayward condition they were in, he was writing this epistle of instruction. "Concerning you" means the Corinthians and it is to them specifically that he is writing. This letter may or may not have been intended as an encyclical, but either way it is specifically meant for this church at this time.

However, it is also intended as a guide for any other church facing similar circumstances and so God ensured it would be kept and eventually included in His word.

Despite the rebuke that is coming, Paul next enters the thought "my brethren." He isn't questioning, nor will he question, the salvation of individual believers. And he never does in any of his epistles. Paul works under the assumption that if a person is saved, they are forever saved. There is no such thought in his writings, or in the rest of the Bible, that one can "lose" their salvation. Verses which seem to imply this are always mishandled and out of context. He is writing to his brethren for their instruction and reproof.

With the endearing term "my brethren" now stated, he enters into the main reason for his thoughts. It was declared to him "by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you." Chloe is otherwise unknown in the Bible, but she is a woman of such note that including her name indicates that what is declared isn't amiss, but is correct. It isn't actually Chloe who brought these things to Paul's attention, but those of her household. However, by noting Chloe, it is inferring that those in her household would be of the same caliber and reliability. Perhaps they are family or servants speaking on her behalf to Paul. If they are bringing a report of "contentions" from her, then the report is certainly true.

This word "contentions" is the Greek *erides*. It means that there are altercations occurring within the church and these were arising because of the "divisions" noted in the previous verse. When people divide and disagree, it will inevitably lead to altercations. If not resolved, there will certainly be worse problems which will arise and eventually a complete division of the church could result. Paul desires that they unite in harmony rather than divide in contention.

Life application: Divisions in the church are sure to come. If they are because of a tradition, then drop the tradition. Anything added to God's word which causes a division isn't worth the trouble. If the division is something doctrinal, then... to the word! God has given us what we need in His word to rectify any doctrinal issue. Be prepared to search the word while working in love to calm the contention.

*Lord God, I really love the church I attend and the people I fellowship with. Should contentions arise, please help me to be a part of the resolution, not a part of the problem. Give me the wisdom to work in love, hold fast to Your word, and be prepared to defend what is right so that any troubles will quickly be put behind us. Help us Lord to honor You above all else through times of contentment or times of contention. Amen.*

**Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." 1 Corinthians 1:12**

Divisions... Paul referred to them in verse 10 and then what they resulted in (contentions) in verse 11. Now he explains the divisions that he has heard about. "Now I say this" is his way of saying, "Now this is what I mean..."

The believers in Corinth had divided into factions based on style of preaching or in some other way. One would say, "I am of Paul" and another would say, "I am of Apollos." Paul was probably more theologically adept than the rest, having been a Pharisee who was well-grounded in Scripture. Apollos, who is mentioned in Acts 18:24 as "an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures," may have been a better orator and maybe could have woven a message together which was inspiring and interesting.

But there were other divisions besides these two. Someone else claimed "I am of Cephas." Cephas is another name for the Apostle Peter. He had been with Jesus from the beginning. He had received his instruction from the Lord and was one of the "inner circle" along with James and John at all of the high points in Christ's ministry. He could easily have become an object of adoration because of these things. He had seen the

miracles, he was there at the resurrection, he beheld the ascension. And he was also the "Apostle to the Jews." Because of this.... well, "He is my man."

And yet, there was another faction, "I am of Christ." This sounds right (and it is, if truthful), but it can also be interpreted in a negative way as well. If someone isn't holding to proper doctrine and says "I am of Christ" then those who follow him will be led astray. To say "I am of Christ" then must be followed up with proof of that claim or it is worse than fire in a hay pile. It is what leads to cults, feelings of superiority, bondage, and never coming to know the truth. Therefore, one must be extremely careful when evaluating such a claim.

Paul is going to continue to discuss this in the verses ahead and will not leave the matter without a full explanation of what is appropriate. But from what he has said in this verse alone, it is apparent just how wrong this attitude is. And yet, even though it is clearly presented in the Bible, we still fall into this same trap today.

How many thousands of people identify their doctrine with John Calvin (Calvinism)? How many identify their allegiances with a pope? How many claim total adherence to the doctrine of Christ and yet are actually deeply entrenched in cults? This is the reality of the world we live in. We get swept up in idol worship of a great orator; we get sidetracked by someone who is supposedly theologically competent, but we don't check what they say. Maybe we get so caught up in a denomination that we feel salvation comes only through it. This may sound nuts, but it is more prevalent than one might think.

Let us not make such errors. God has revealed Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible is what tells us of Him and His work. Therefore, let us continually return to the fountain of Scripture and check our doctrine against it. When we place our allegiance in a man, we will always be disappointed. When we put our hope and trust in Christ as He is revealed in Scripture, we will always be edified and in a right standing with God.

Life application: It is fine to hold a pastor in high esteem. In fact, the Bible says that we should render them "double honor" (1 Timothy 5:17) if they "labor in the word and doctrine." However, let us not place them on a pedestal as an idol. Rather, we need to never forget that our allegiance is to Jesus Christ. May we never divide Christ as we see has happened at the church in Corinth.

*Lord God, I thank You for those who teach and instruct in Your word and in proper doctrine. But Lord, help me to not place any person in a position which would exalt them*

*at the expense of my devotion and allegiance to You. In the end, all people are fallible and are susceptible to error. Remind me to check with Your instruction manual on all matters of faith and doctrine. Thank You for being with me as I keep my eyes on Jesus! Amen.*

### **Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 1 Corinthians 1:13**

Based on the divisions which have arisen in the church at Corinth which were noted in the previous verse, Paul now asks, "Is Christ divided?" Is there one head of the church or not? If there is, then why are we making divisions which don't actually exist within the body? Is it right to follow after a teacher, preacher, apostle, pope, etc. as if that person was the object of our faith? The answer is obviously "No."

But there is another consideration to the opening of this verse, Vincent's Word Studies notes that "Some of the best expositors render [this] as an assertion." In other words, and based on the structure of the Greek, they place this not as a question - "Is Christ divided?", but as a statement of fact - "Christ is divided." The Corinthians had already lost the object of their faith and they had already brought the divisions. Now, it was up to Paul's instructions to return them to the proper path. In order to do this then, he continues with the second thought of the verse - "Was Paul crucified for you?"

His question is rhetorical and it demands a negative response. The cross of Jesus Christ is the only acceptable crucifixion for the sins of anyone, including Paul. The crucifixion of Paul would have simply been the end of Paul without the crucifixion of Christ. And Christ was not only crucified for Paul, but He was crucified for all. To somehow place an allegiance in Paul only diminishes the importance of the cross of Christ. Only He was sinless and only His blood can atone for the sins of the world.

What follows then is another rhetorical question, with another obvious "No" for a response. "Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" If Paul wasn't crucified for anyone, then no one was baptized in the name of Paul! Baptism is a picture of the work of Christ. One is immersed as a picture of the death (which resulted from the crucifixion) of Christ. Paul wasn't crucified for anyone; Paul didn't die for anyone; therefore, no one was baptized into Paul.

The work of God in resurrecting Jesus is the second half of the picture of baptism. One isn't merely submerged and left under the water. They are raised out of the water as a picture of the newness of life found in the resurrection of Christ. Paul's newness of life

came from Christ. And the same is true with anyone who has been reborn by the Spirit. Therefore to "follow Paul" or to "follow Calvin" or to "follow Pope Francis" is simply nuts. Only Christ has accomplished the work necessary to save a soul.

Life application: Let us not divide Christ, but let us always honor Him alone. At best, let us acknowledge the instruction of others without exalting them in an unnecessary way.

*Lord God, thank You for Jesus my Savior. Because of His cross I am granted His sinless perfection. Through His death I am restored to You. And in His resurrection I stand justified and sure of eternal life in Your presence. Now Lord, grant me the willing heart and desire to live up to that which I have received. Help me to reflect the glory which is found in Christ and to share this good news with the world. Thank You for Jesus! Amen.*

### **I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius...**

1 Corinthians 1:14

In what seems an unusual statement at first, Paul notes his great thanks to God that he didn't baptize any of those at Corinth with the exception of a few he will name. He will give the reason in the verses ahead though and we will see that it bears directly on what he has said in the previous three verses concerning divisions and contentions.

If Paul was the one to have baptized all of these people, then those who were instigating the contentions could state that he was setting himself up as some type of figurehead to be more greatly honored or followed. Instead however, he pursued his job without looking for the notoriety that he could have attached to it by being the "chief baptizer" of the flock.

Baptism is one of the most precious and memorable moments in a believer's life and it certainly is an honor to participate in the baptism of someone. This is why families often gather around, pictures are taken, and special care is often used to decide who will get the honor of conducting the rite. It could be comparable in importance to choosing who will marry a couple or perform a funeral.

Regarding this highly notable honor of conducting baptisms, Paul states that "I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius." Crispus was the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth as is noted in Acts 18:8 -

"Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized."

This baptism by Paul certainly made sense. As the ruler of the synagogue and a person in a prominent position to convince others of the truth of the gospel, he himself would then be qualified to perform the rite on others. It would make no sense to not baptize him because then who would do so? But once he was baptized, then he could take over this solemn responsibility for the others who chose Christ.

Concerning Gaius, there is a Gaius seen in Acts 19 during a time of trouble in Ephesus. Then, a "Gaius of Derbe" is noted in Acts 20. Paul notes a Gaius in Romans 16:23 also. And finally, there is a Gaius to whom the letter 3 John is written to. The Gaius being referred to by Paul here is certainly the one mentioned in Romans and he may be the one whom John wrote to. He was Paul's host and so he probably baptized him personally because of the care he had taken for him as his host.

As a side note to Paul's statement here, baptism in the New Testament always follows conversion. The doctrine of "infant baptism," though going back to very early times, is not a scriptural tenet. The claim by adherents to infant baptism is that it is comparable to the Old Testament rite of circumcision. This is a complete misreading of the precept and cannot be so identified with any teaching in the Bible.

Abraham first believed God and then he was given the rite of circumcision for those who followed him. As Abraham is the example of justification by faith, it only follows that those who are justified by faith will receive their external sign after, not before, that justification. Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians, and his statements even here in the first chapter, fully support the concept of baptism only *after* faith in Christ.

Life application: In whatever capacity we serve the Lord, as an evangelist, a teacher, a preacher, or whatever, it should be for the honor of the Lord, not to promote self-notoriety. Paul is an excellent example to follow in this. He was constantly redirecting those around him to Jesus. In the end, the Lord sees our works and will reward us for them.

*Lord, thank You for the many opportunities You place in our path to serve You. Help us to keep our eyes open for these moments and not to let them slip by. Remind us that we have such a short time to walk here and to tell others about You. Let us not look back in regret at missed opportunities to lead others to You while we have the chance. This I pray to Your glory. Amen.*

**...lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. 1 Corinthians 1:15**

Paul had a unique commission which transitioned the church from almost a solely Jewish entity into one which was quickly growing in gentile converts. At some point, a majority of gentiles would inevitably exist, thus the church would be considered a gentile entity. And this would have been brought about by the instruction and writings of Paul. If he were to have been out baptizing people in large numbers, others who disliked this move to gentile predominance could easily make the charge that Paul had baptized these people into his own name.

Thus, this would become "the church of Paul" regardless of whether he directed the disciples to Christ or not. As noted in verses 10 and 12, such divisions exist in today's church. Rightly or wrongly, we identify ourselves among a host of lines. Some are by name - "I am a Lutheran." Some are by doctrine - "I am a Baptist." Some are by a member of the Godhead other than Jesus, "I belong to the Church of the Holy Spirit." Within the church there is misdirection, there is division, and there is boasting in individual names. Paul tried to waive this type of thing off from the start by not making the work of Christ about himself. Instead, he proclaimed Christ and made his sole boasting in the cross of Christ (Galatians 6:14). In some ways, divisions are inevitable and even healthy. When Paul and Barnabas divided over an argument, they were able to accomplish twice the work that had previously been done.

Dividing from a church because it is straying from the truth of Christ is a good thing. However, in the process of division, care needs to be taken that the division doesn't produce another idol. Paul's example is one that will keep such things from occurring. His continuous boasting in Christ is the right approach at all times and in all seasons!

Life application: He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Lord Jesus, help me to continuously and forever redirect my heart to You. It is You alone who fulfilled the Scriptures, died for me, and was resurrected to life again. If I am to boast in another's preaching, may it only be because he preaches about You. May the song on my lips be one which brings You honor. And may my every step be one securely planted on the truth of Your superior word. Amen.*

**Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 1 Corinthians 1:16**

As Paul is putting forth his thoughts for the epistle, he realizes that when he had just stated that, "I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius..." wasn't exactly correct. And so he amends his thoughts here using the Greek term *de*. As Vincent's Word Studies

indicates, "The *de* ... has a slightly corrective force." It would then be something like writing, "I only like chocolate ice cream. Oh, and I also like vanilla and strawberry too." It isn't an untruth, but a thought based on reflection.

In the process of his thoughts came the reminder of "the household of Stephanas," and suddenly he realized that he had "also baptized" them. In 1 Corinthians 16:15, Paul will call the household of Stephanas "the firstfruits of Achaia." They had readily come to Christ at the first preaching of the gospel and Paul had baptized them. Because it was at such an early point, certainly before any formal church or meeting place had been established, it had slipped his mind. Then, to ward off any other omissions as intentional deceit, he finally adds in, "Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other."

There could have been someone that he had simply forgotten about. Maybe there was someone there in Stephanas' household that wasn't a member of the family or servants who could later state that what Paul said wasn't accurate. He has thus preempted such a charge. In the coming verse, he will explain further the reason for his detailed words concerning baptism.

This is a good verse to stop and consider what "household" means in connection with "baptism." This is especially needed because the doctrine of "infant baptism" is often tied to this and several other verses because the term "household" seems all inclusive. The word rendered "household" is *oikos* and generally covers the two greater concepts of (a) a house, the material building, and (b) a household, family, lineage, nation. Depending on the context, it refers to any of the following: descendants, families, family, home, homes, house, household, households, itself, palaces, or place.

In Titus 1:10, 11 Paul makes the following statement -

"For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain."

Speaking of those who are disruptive and destructive, he says that they "subvert whole households." In this, he uses the adjective translated as "whole" in order to show that entire households can be swept up into false teachings. If the term "households" was intended as all-inclusive for baptism (including infants), one would think that a similar adjective would be used. Being baptized into the faith is surely as important as being apostatized!

Therefore, the term "household" which is a general term, should be considered in a general sense unless it is accompanied by an adjective to further refine what is being stated. It is only a presupposition at best to state that infant baptism is intended by passages such as this one. Further, because baptism reflects a personal commitment to the Lord, it should be on the more conservative interpretation of "household" that an interpretation should be made; it is general in nature, not specific and all-inclusive.

Finally, the wording in today's verse which shows that Paul isn't completely sure of a matter (meaning who he had baptized) in no way diminishes the doctrine of "divine inspiration." Just because something isn't known by the human author of an epistle has no bearing on whether or not the Holy Spirit knows. There are ten jillion times ten jillion things (and more!) known to the Holy Spirit which are unknown to any human. What He chooses to include in His word is at His prerogative, including human failings and uncertainties.

Life application: Seemingly insignificant verses found in the Bible often contain some of the most theologically important concepts for us to consider. As you read the Bible, take time to think on "why" certain things are mentioned and why the Holy Spirit allowed their inclusion in the Bible. Don't listen to liberal-minded scholars who would try to diminish the importance of what is stated, but think on what God is conveying to you. Every word is pure and perfect and is given to us to learn more about God's wonderful plan for us.

*O God, I often read Your word and wonder why certain things are included in it. Some things seem harsh, some seem confusing, and some seem without purpose. It is at these times that I know I need to stop and consider why You would include them. When I attempt to look at things from the greater perspective, I often realize that what I thought at first was wrong... Instead, I see things from a different way and realize that every word is so perfectly placed. What a wondrous joy it is to read and think on Your word. Thank You for it, O God. Amen.*

**For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. 1 Corinthians 1:17**

In Matthew 28:19, 20 we read what is known as the Great Commission - "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."

However, this doesn't mean that Paul is being disobedient in his words to the Corinthians. Rather, he has already indicated that he baptized some at Corinth and surely others elsewhere. In addition to this, there are those who are evangelists, there are those who disciple, there are those who serve in other ways, etc. Even Jesus is noted as not being the one to baptize others during His ministry. This is seen in John 4:1, 2 –

"Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John <sup>2</sup> (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples)."

Paul's primary mission then wasn't to baptize. He probably had others do this. It was time consuming, especially because full immersion baptism is what the Bible implies. Also, it is intended to follow acceptance of Christ. Paul, as an evangelist, would move often whereas those in the church would be available to baptize new converts at a convenient time and location, even if Paul moved on. And also, as he already noted in his previous comments, baptizing people can lead to divisions and strife. This would be especially so if a competent visitor came to town. If he was gaining converts and baptizing them also, then there would be a division in allegiances; something that actually occurred at Corinth even without baptisms being added in.

Rather than being one who baptized, Paul said his commission was "to preach the gospel." And this is what he tirelessly did. The record of Acts especially shows that Paul preached to kings, jailers, nobles, and common folk. He preached at an open-air stadium and in synagogues. He preached with words and he preached with actions. He preached to Jew and he preached to Gentile. He met each person on their level and he never missed the chance to tell the wondrous news of salvation through Jesus Christ. This was his main calling and the motivation behind his very life.

And as he preached, he did so "not with wisdom of words." In other words, he used the common language and experiences of those around him. It is noted that the Greeks were a society of deep philosophy and mental contemplation. They were often practiced in smooth oral deliveries and were able to tie in high emotional peaks in order to capture the attention and hearts of their listeners. This is very common in modern churches once again. There is an appeal to emotion and there is a high value placed on flashy deliveries and impressive effects to pull the audience in.

But Paul dismissed these tactics. The message of Christ isn't one of philosophical depth or emotional manipulation. It is a message of the consequences of sin and the mercy of God in dealing with those consequences through the cross of His own Son. For this

reason, Paul dismissed the dramatic "lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect." In other words, if people can be satisfied in their lives without the cross, then that satisfaction would seemingly negate the need for it. But the cross demonstrates that there are real consequences for sin and that a real penalty is therefore demanded.

Paul's only desire was that his message would be clearly and competently stated so that those who heard it wouldn't be misdirected by a false gospel and a belief that the cross was somehow unnecessary for them. In fact, Paul's desire to stick to the very basics when transmitting his message made him appear extraordinarily boring. In his second letter to the Corinthians, we read this from his hand -

*"For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."* 2 Corinthians 10:10

This almost sounds like a theologian who is locked away in a library and only comes out once in a while to share his new discoveries - "weighty and powerful" letters, but "contemptible" speech because he never bothered with training in flashy oration. But this is exactly what is needed in our Christian world today, not ostentatious sermons with showy backdrops, but sound theology and words directed to Jesus and His work.

Life application: There is one Lord and one gospel. The good news is that Jesus Christ went to the cross to pay our sin debt and that there is no other way to heaven than through His work. Sin has real consequences that must be considered in light of His cross. Let us not get so caught up in the hype of a gaudy church presentation that we miss the wonder of God's word.

*Lord, I'd rather hear a monotone discourse explaining Your word, than hear the finest speaker on earth who would tickle my ears and give me no instruction from the pages of the Bible. Thank You for preachers who lack flash, but profess Your glory. Bless them and prosper them in their souls. Amen.*

**For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.** 1 Corinthians 1:18

"For the message of the cross" is a phrase which needs to be considered in the context of what Paul just noted, which was "the preaching of the gospel." In Greek, he now states *Ho logos gar ho tou staurou* – "For the doctrine (word) of the cross..." In this phrase, the second article is definite and it is emphatic. The message is the essence and the very purpose of the cross he is referring to.

Therefore, the cross is the gospel, but it isn't the piece of wood which is erected in the form of an instrument of torture. The cross has been used on criminal and martyr alike thousands upon thousands of times. On the day Christ was crucified, there were two others on crosses next to Him. The instrument of the cross itself then isn't what Paul is referring to.

It also is not the message of the one who follows Christ, picking up and carrying his cross daily. In other words, it isn't the burden that we have as a follower of Christ. Though it may seem foolish to the world around us that we would be willing to give ourselves in this way, this is not what Paul is referring to either.

The "message" or "doctrine" of the cross is the truth that Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, died on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for those who trust His work. To the world, this message is nonsense because they don't see sin as a problem. But the cross of Jesus Christ shows that sin is an infinitely great problem; one of such magnitude that there is no way for us to bridge it in order to be restored to God. Instead, God had to provide the bridge. Jesus Christ, fully human, could mediate for His human followers. Jesus Christ, fully God, could mediate to His infinite Father.

But the message of the cross doesn't stop there. It is true that we believe Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, but the cross is also *the only* atoning sacrifice for sin. Apart from the cross of Jesus Christ, there is no other way to be reconciled to God. Because of this, those who aren't "in Christ" because of His work, are destined for eternal condemnation. This... this is what is foolishness to the world.

The world looks to self for righteousness before God. The cross bestows God's righteousness upon undeserving self - apart from any personal merit. This glorious "message of the cross is" indeed "foolishness to those who are perishing." The verb for "perishing" in the Greek is a present participle which indicates the current process of what is happening - they are "on their way" to destruction. Because they find what God has done for them as foolish, they are enemies of God and heading towards a bad end. However, until one dies, they have the opportunity to change the course which they have taken.

In contrast to them, Paul then explains the believer's state when he says "but to us who are being saved." There are those who perceive the doctrine of the cross as foolishness and they are on the way to destruction, but there are those who believe this message and they have moved to another category - "being saved."

Again, this verb is a present participle which indicates that we are in the process of what is occurring. Unlike those who don't believe though, this status will not change. The Bible consistently proclaims eternal salvation. And so the believer's on-going process is one with the certain happy end intended by that act of faith in the ability of the Lord to completely save us through His cross.

And this is because the cross to us "is the power of God." As Paul says in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

The message of the cross is "salvation for everyone who believes." It isn't limited in ability only in scope. Anyone who turns and believes can and will be saved. The limiting factor of the cross is a simple lack of faith. One must turn *from* self and *to* Christ, accepting that what God has done is in fact not foolishness, but glorious. From that moment on, God's power can and will save the once wayward soul.

Life application: Sin is what necessitated the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross of Jesus Christ is what is capable of atoning for sin. No other thing can atone for sin. Therefore, there is no other way to be reconciled to God except through the cross of Jesus Christ. Believe in the message of the cross and be saved.

*Glorious Lord Jesus, when I reflect on why You went to the cross, it amazes me all the more. Our sin and our unrighteousness have placed a wall between us and our Creator. Your cross was necessary to atone for our sin and to break through that impassable wall. Our sin... my sin... Lord, I believe that what You did is fully sufficient to wipe away that which once separated me from God. Thank You for Your cross. Thank You! Amen.*

**For it is written:**

**"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,**

**And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." 1 Corinthians 1:19**

As Paul does often in his epistles, he now refers to the Scriptures which testified to the work of Christ, the wisdom of God, and the instruction for proper conduct of the redeemed. "For it is written" implies that God's words have been recorded and are absolutely authoritative. In his quoting of the Scriptures, he turns to Isaiah 29:14 and freely cites it, showing the overall intent without an exact quote.

"I will destroy" shows God's sovereignty over the matter to be addressed. It also shows His power to accomplish it as well. No power can stand against the tide of God's

judgment. In the case of this verse from Isaiah, it is God's decision to abolish what is otherwise worthless, which is...

"The wisdom of the wise." Isaiah's words were directed to "Ariel," the city of Jerusalem. The people in the city had moved to religion without relationship; to knowledge without wisdom; and to a life of ease without gratitude to the One who provided it. They felt secure; they were "fat, dumb, and happy." Because of this easy life, they felt that nothing could assail them. They boasted that God must be on their side because of the easy life, even though they wanted nothing to do with God. As a side note, this sounds a lot like the nation of America today. This type of behavior in Jerusalem led to God's decision to bring the enemy against them and destroy them –

"I will encamp against you all around,  
I will lay siege against you with a mound,  
And I will raise siegeworks against you.  
You shall be brought down,  
You shall speak out of the ground;  
Your speech shall be low, out of the dust;  
Your voice shall be like a medium's, out of the ground;  
And your speech shall whisper out of the dust." Isaiah 29:3, 4

The wise would perish in their "wisdom." The same can be expected for those today who reject God's offer of the cross (refer again to the previous verse of 1 Corinthians for context).

"And bring to nothing" means that He will so eradicate what He judges that there will be nothing left of it to remember; it will be completely swept away.

"The understanding of the prudent." It doesn't matter what the issue is - moral, philosophical, religious, governmental, etc. No matter what the "wise" or "prudent" man conceives, if it is against God's divinely established order, and if it is contrary to the message of the cross of Christ, it will be shown deficient. Such things will be utterly swept away by God.

Life application: What God looks for in His creatures is gratitude, respect for His holiness, a belief that what He has created is good and proper, etc. To shun His word and to shake our fist in His face, particularly against His work in Jesus Christ, can only lead to judgment.

*Lord God, I know in my heart that You have complete control over the world. I don't need to fear when the weather changes, because You are the One who directs it. If we have a cold winter, it is because You so ordained it. If we have a hurricane, that was because You determined it to be so. You, O God, are sovereign over all things. Our future is in Your capable hands. Watch over us according to Your wisdom. Amen.*

**Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 1 Corinthians 1:20**

Paul now brings in a set of four questions in response to his quoting of Scripture in the previous verse. That verse said -

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

This is reflected in the rhetorical questions of Isaiah 33:18 -

"Your heart will meditate on terror:  
'Where *is* the scribe?  
Where *is* he who weighs?  
Where *is* he who counts the towers?'"

When asking such questions, a dumb silence or an ineffective retort is the expected response. The same is true with Paul's questions here. His first inquiry is to ask, "Where is the wise?" Here he uses the term *sophos* which is equivalent to a sage. This would be the instructor of knowledge; a person who was filled with supposed wisdom and is sought out to answer the deep problems of life for those around Him. But in the end, there are no true answers to the most important questions of life apart from Jesus Christ. This takes us back to what Paul said in verse 18, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Only in Christ Jesus are the answers of reconciliation with God and the granting of eternal life to be found.

Building on the terms "the wise" and "the prudent" from his quote from Isaiah, he next asks, "Where is the scribe?" The scribe was originally designated as the person who transcribed the law. Eventually, the term was applied to someone who not only transcribed it, but also was knowledgeable and even a scholar of it. With one exception, the Jewish concept of this word in the New Testament always indicates one who interprets the law. But Paul asks, where is he? On the doctrines of atonement, salvation,

peace with God, etc., the scribe is a completely ineffectual interpreter if he looks to the law apart from Jesus Christ.

After mentioning the scribe, we are now asked to consider "the disputer of this age." This is a person we might call a sophist; one who makes an inquiry into the cause of things and how they relate to other things. Their investigations would follow through with the minutest details and bring them together into a grand resolution of the greatest mysteries. They would be the "Sherlock Holmes" of investigating philosophical matters.

In the Greek mind, these would be the ones who could reason out what seemed impossible to reason. Within the Jewish context, it would be those who would split the hairs of every verse of Scripture, looking for the ins and outs of theological inquiries. Where is such a disputer? Without reasoning life from the context of Jesus Christ, they are lost in a philosophical conundrum and a set of Scriptures which are actually murky and unclear. Nothing, from either a philosophical or scriptural investigation, makes sense without the plan which God has worked out in Jesus Christ. Instead the true purpose of existence and of Scripture are hidden and unattainable.

Finally, as an answer to the first three questions, Paul asks another rhetorical question - "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" The answer demands a "Yes" response. For all of the immense logic and philosophy which had been contemplated by the Greeks (and many subsequent generations since then), and for all of the intensive study of the Scriptures by the Jews, there remains no final answer to the greatest questions of all. Instead, because they cannot answer the ultimate questions, their great learning actually is futile. God has, in fact, made their wisdom foolish. Why? Because even a mere child can understand the simple gospel and be saved. Apart from Jesus Christ, the greatest minds in human history lack what the little child can know and be granted. Their futile efforts are well-reflected by Isaiah 6:9 -

"And He said, "Go, and tell this people:  
'Keep on hearing, but do not understand;  
Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'"

Life application: Don't spend all of your life looking for the deeper mysteries of the world without evaluating them through the lens of Christ. Without Him, the greatest knowledge is lacking purpose. Without Him, there can be no true wisdom. But once you understand and seek Him, then all other wisdom finds its proper perspective.

*Lord God, Your word says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Help me daily to humble myself before Your greatness, to acknowledge Your sovereignty, and to look at all of life's mysteries, challenges, and trials through the lens of Jesus Christ. I know that if I follow this path, all things will make sense. And so keep reminding me of this my Lord. To Your glory I pray, amen.*

**For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 1 Corinthians 1:21**

Paul introduced the main thought of this section showing that the cross is the power of God unto salvation and that the thoughts of man, no matter how high and lofty, are foolishness when considered apart from the cross.

Thinking on the great mental achievements of man - philosophical, logical, scientific, etc., we find that none of them bring us any closer to how to actually be saved. They may be filled with incredible amounts of knowledge and yet still not explain what is truly important. Yes, it's interesting to know about quasars in the farthest reaches of the galaxies, but if we are destined to perish apart from God, what difference does the knowledge of them make?

And so Paul begins verse 21 with "For since..." Because the sage, the scribe, and the disputer could never attain to the highest and most important knowledge of all, "in the wisdom of God" another path was chosen to reveal that knowledge. Why is that important? The reason is that salvation is completely separate from human ability, endeavor, or determination. If the very highest aspect of man (the intellectual mind) cannot attain to God, then whatever God gives to bring that reconciliation is greater than that highest aspect of man.

Though "the world through wisdom did not know God" is reaffirming the concept that the sage, the scribe, and the disputer (these highest offices in man's understanding) still don't know Him. They may be able to deduce there is a God. They may be able to deduce things about this God. They may even be able to know that there is a disconnect between this God and themselves. However, they have absolutely no idea how to resolve the disconnect.

The sage who gives advice can only say, "I think" this is the answer (while being wrong), or he can simply lie and make up a religion, which is why there are so many false religions.

The scribe can pull out his many texts on science, logic, philosophy, etc. and say "these don't resolve that particular problem." Again, when this fails, he can make up a fib - "The universe created itself. There is no God. Problem solved!" Unfortunately, the problem isn't solved.

The disputer can argue back and forth with a classroom full of inquisitive minds about a relationship with God, but the answers will always fall short of satisfying those inquisitive minds. Like the scribe, he can make up a tale and tell the world the problem is solved - "We evolved from lower species. Natural selection and evolution have brought us to where we are." But again, we know that there is sin in the world and one cannot evolve into "sin." There would be no consideration of wrongdoing if natural selection were true.

No matter what approach is considered, without God's special revelation, the wisdom of the world cannot know God. And so because of this, God demonstrates His ultimate wisdom in a way which thus confounds the greatest thinking of man. In this "it pleased God." In other words, God is satisfied in the method that He chose because it demonstrates His omniscient authority over every man and over all men. This isn't God "lording" his wisdom over us in an arrogant way, but His demonstration to us that this way is the perfect way. It allows the young child, the jungle dweller, the man on the street, and the business executive - and any other person who so chooses to accept it - to rely wholly and solely on Him. In it His grace is seen because there is a total and absolute reliance on Him.

And this beautiful, marvelous demonstration of God's wisdom is "the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." It isn't the preaching which saves, it is the message contained in the preaching. Therefore, the preacher is wholly dependent on the accuracy of the message. This again demonstrates that even the preacher and the listener are altogether dependent on God for salvation. If the preacher preaches a wrong message, intentionally or through incompetence, then there is no salvation. Thus, there is the responsibility on the listener to check up on the preacher.

In this, Paul calls the message preached "foolishness." He will explain this in the coming verses, particularly verse 25. But to consider the context now will help us think through what he means. If the greatest minds in humanity, pursuing God through the greatest disciplines, cannot find how to be reconciled to Him, then whatever He devises for our reconciliation is higher than what those great minds with their great achievements can attain. And if that immensely great plan of God is mere "foolishness," then imagine how stunningly awesome is the overall wisdom of God!

Life application: Never underestimate the greatness of God.

*Lord God, the greatest minds of humanity can solve the most complex questions concerning science, logic, philosophy, and mathematics, but they cannot conceive of how we can be right with You. And yet, the message is so simple - the cross of Jesus Christ. If this message is beyond the most intellectual of all humans without You giving it, then how great You are! The message a child can understand is out of the reach of the genius until he receives it by faith. Thank You for demonstrating Your wisdom, even to me - a mere child. Amen.*

**For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 1 Corinthians 1:22**

This verse expands on what was just said by Paul, that "it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." The term "for" means "since" and therefore this is less of an explanation than a continued rendering of the same idea. In this then, he details the categories of those who would reject "the foolishness of the message preached" and why they would reject it.

The first are the Jews. They "request a sign" in order to believe a message. However, the term "request" doesn't fit with our concept of what the word means. When we think of "request" in modern English, we think of someone asking for more soup in a polite way. What the Jews wanted in a sign was more of a demand. In essence, "We will believe you only after we see a sign." This is seen several times in the gospel records, such as in Matthew 12:38 - "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.'"

By receiving such a sign, they certainly felt that it validated their status as a people before God as much as it validated the authenticity of the one to provide the sign. As the covenant people, they had the oracles of God, the prophecies of a great future kingdom, etc. They could refer to the great signs and miracles of the past which showed that they were God's favored. And so they expected them to be shown as continued evidence of this. However, a sign from a person, if a true sign, is ultimately a sign from God. If it is, then what the one who reveals the sign proclaims is expected to be listened to and acted upon.

In Jesus' ministry, He performed a specific group of signs, beginning with turning water into wine and culminating with the resurrection. And yet, despite this proof, they rejected the message that accompanied the signs. Paul, and all of the apostles, preached the message of the cross. The cross implies that there was a sin-debt to be

paid before one was right with God. But the Jews, believing that they were already right with God, rejected their crucified Messiah - the message was "foolishness" to them. Thus, the signs that accompanied the message were rejected. Because the signs were rejected, the One (God) from whom the signs came was also rejected.

Unlike the Jews, the "and Greeks seek after wisdom." The Greek approach to enlightenment was to go deeper and deeper into the heart of a matter, searching out the nature of things. New ideas were constantly received and evaluated. This is seen in the book of Acts when Paul went to Athens. There Luke records, "For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing." (Acts 17:21)

Ever in search of new things, new ideas, and new concepts of the workings of the world around them, the Greeks sought out answers to everything in exacting detail. This is equivalent to the world of scientists today. They are looking for the exact details of the Big Bang, they are searching for the "God particle," they want to know everything about everything because they believe that through knowledge alone, they can identify the meaning of life and the reason for our existence.

Because of this, the message of the cross is utter foolishness. How could everything be so intricately balanced, so marvelously timed, and so exactingly researchable and yet require an act of grace from God in order for us to be made right with Him? If He existed at all, then certainly He would find us acceptable because we have spent our time searching out His creation so carefully. Wouldn't He?

But searching out creation is not the same as searching out God. The creation declares the glory of God, but it is separate and distinct from Him. We don't worship the Creator through His creation, we worship Him because of it and because He is the Originator of it. As the psalmist said -

"Of old You laid the foundation of the earth,  
And the heavens *are* the work of Your hands.  
They will perish, but You will endure;  
Yes, they will all grow old like a garment;  
Like a cloak You will change them,  
And they will be changed.  
But You *are* the same,  
And Your years will have no end." Psalm 102:25-27

The Greeks, like the intellectuals of the world, search after wisdom through the creation and miss the One who gave the creation. The message of the cross has no place in their minds because it doesn't fit with their presuppositions about how things should work in a universe which is so organized and seemingly understandable.

In both approaches, the problem is a misunderstanding of self. Sin is a barrier to the message of the cross. For the Jew, sin is discounted because of Jewish-ness. For the Greek, sin is discounted because an orderly universe demands an orderly answer to all things in a way which is reconcilable apart from God.

Life application: The message of the cross is God's way of telling Jew and Greek that sin is a real problem and that it can only be fixed by Him. Don't over-analyze the situation to the point where you miss the grace. And don't expect the grace to be granted through a miraculous sign. Accept the grace and be reconciled to God.

*Lord, I love the message of the cross because it takes away my need to correct the mess that I am. If evolution were true, then I'm at the top of the ladder - as a mess; that is a depressing thought. But Your word says that I'm a mess because of sin and You have handled my sin-problem all by Yourself. I accept the premise, I receive the payment, I choose Jesus. The sinless Lamb of God has proved that the mess I am is healed and headed for an unmessy future. Hallelujah to the Lamb. Amen.*

**...but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 1 Corinthians 1:23**

This verse is given as a contrast to what was just stated. Taken together, they read -

"For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness..."

Whereas the Jews request a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom, those who hold to the doctrine of Christ have a different view of a relationship with God. "But" is the contrasting conjunction, "we however preach Christ crucified." Signs are unnecessary for a right relationship with God. Abraham is the pattern of those declared righteous by faith. He was given a promise which would otherwise seem impossible and he believed. In his belief, God credited it to him for righteousness.

The work of God in Christ is that He would be crucified for our sins, but the Jews were looking for something outwardly great in their Messiah. Surely he would be a grand

king, a conquering ruler who would vanquish their enemies. Instead, He was a humble servant who was nailed to a tree. This would be particularly offensive because the law which established them says explicitly, "he who is hanged *is* accursed of God." (Deuteronomy 21:23)

Because of the way in which Christ died, as much as anything else, they simply couldn't believe. Where a sign was expected, a dead man on a tree was displayed. This then became a "stumbling-block" to their understanding of God's redemptive work. A stumbling-block (Greek: skandalon) is something which trips one up. When one walks and there is a large block in front of them, they walk over or around it. But when there is just a slightly-raised and almost imperceptible bump, it isn't noticed. Because of this, one trips up because of it. This is what happened with the Jews. They simply tripped over the work of Christ, not seeing it for what it was.

For the Greeks who looked to wisdom as the ultimate goal of existence, the cross was simply foolishness. The body of Christ was crucified and died. How could God's redemptive plan include something so base, so not mind-centered. Wouldn't the Christ be able to speak out wisdom that was hidden concerning all things? Wouldn't He be able to explain why we were here and what our purpose was? If He died as He was nailed to a tree, then obviously He didn't understand the way to living forever! And if He was dead, then He was gone. The resurrection must be the foolish delusions of His followers.

This is why Christ is rejected by Jew and by intellectual. They are looking at the world around them with presuppositions about how God *would* do things. But we are men and not God and we cannot fathom what God would do. All we can do is look at what He does and accept His work by faith.

Life application: Christ's death atones for sin. Christ's resurrection proves that His death atones for our sin. Have faith in these things and be reconciled to God.

*Lord, I love to see Your wisdom displayed in Your creation. Different things bud and bloom at different times so that there is always a supply of food for the creatures of the world. The ice floats so that even in winter fish can swim underneath it in warmer waters. Ammonia becomes Nitrite and then it turns to Nitrate. After that it converts to Nitrogen and off it goes into the air. Everything is balanced so beautifully. What a great, wise, and caring God You are. Amen!*

**...but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 1 Corinthians 1:24**

In the previous verse, we read that the apostles preached "Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness." Without the crucifixion of Christ, there would be no atonement, no forgiveness, and no reconciliation with God. But the message seems foolish to the majority of those who hear it, both Jew and Gentile. However, Paul tells us that "to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks," there is an understanding that what God has done in Christ is of the utmost value and importance.

Because he mentions "Jews and Greeks" in one verse it is saying that regardless of heritage, there is one body in Christ. We are shown in Romans 3 that there is no difference between Jew and Greek because both are bound under sin. In Galatians 3:28, he tells us that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In Ephesians 2:14, he says that the "middle wall of separation" is broken down. The middle wall was a barrier at the temple which separated the Jews from the Gentiles. These distinctions are now erased in Christ.

But it goes further. The term "Greeks" here is used to represent all Gentiles. Paul is saying that it makes absolutely no difference where one is from, what their lineage is, nor the color of their skin. There is one body comprised of people from all groups, male and female alike. And they have all come to the same glorious conclusion, which is "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Because all are bound under sin, then there must be a level playing field on how that sin is removed. As we cannot do it, then it is obviously beyond our power and our wisdom. As this is certain, then it truly is a demonstration of "the power of God and the wisdom of God." Jew and Greek alike fall short of the remedy, but God makes the offer. Therefore, the person who accepts the gift, though possibly with a mental defect, has more wisdom than the most intelligent minds of humanity who reject it.

Think of it! A mentally-challenged person who is ridiculed by those around him has the ability to grasp what they cannot. The little child who receives Jesus by faith has a greater understanding of God's salvation than the scientist who works on nuclear physics but who shuns Christ. And the believing slave who is beaten and scorned by the master, has a greater position by far than the non-believing master will ever imagine! This is the wisdom of God and the foolishness of man. It is the glory of God revealed in

an instrument of scorn and shame. It is the cross of Jesus Christ - power, wisdom, and majesty from heaven's throne!

Life application: Do you feel snubbed by the world sometimes because of your faith? So what! You have access to heaven's riches. All they have is temporary access to earth's vanishing vapors. Stand fast in your faith in Jesus Christ - the power of God, and the wisdom of God for all who believe.

*Lord, You know that I'm not the brightest bulb in the world. You fashioned me and You know my every limitation and fault. But Lord, You also know my heart... I love You, I cherish You, and I cling to Your cross. Though all the world mocks me to shame, I will never let go of this glorious display of love, power, wisdom, and life. I will never let go of my faith in You. Amen.*

**Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 1 Corinthians 1:25**

This verse needs to be considered from the perspective of man rather than the reality found in God. It is speaking of *perception*, not in *actual* terms. In other words, "Because the foolishness of God" is a *perception* of what God has done, is doing, or will do rather than the *actuality* of those things.

God's plan is anything but foolish, but when man sees it (meaning "man" in general) he finds it foolish.

"Taking thousands of years to save the world? What about all those who died in the flood? How stupid!"

"Picking a bunch of tent dwellers to reveal His plans to the world... How stupid!"

"Hanging someone on a tree to save someone else... how stupid!"

"Going away after being 'resurrected' from the dead? And still being gone 2000 years later? How stupid!"

Unregenerate man sees these things as "foolishness." Picking up the Bible and turning to any page will reveal more "foolishness" to them because they simply cannot grasp the enormity of the plan, the perfection behind it, and the wisdom that is involved. To the logical statistician, the numbers don't add up. To the scientist, the data seems to suggest chaos rather than order. To the philosopher, there is always the question of how evil fits into the picture and how unjust God must be to send so many people to hell.

All of these seemingly foolish things have purpose, they have order, they have sure and just resolutions, but the individual man cannot see beyond his particular shortcomings. In this "foolishness," as *perceived* by man, the one who understands the gravity of the situation and the perfection of the cross will find that truly "God is wiser than man." Again, in the second half of the verse Paul speaks of *perception* rather than *actuality*. "The weakness of God" is how man sees this plan.

"How could God use someone like Jacob who supposedly saw Him on several occasions, wrestled with Him in the night, was carried along all his days, and yet was so weak in his faith as to worry about losing his son Benjamin? What kind of God would use him?"

"In the line of the 'Messiah' are prostitutes, fornicators, murderers, adulterers, and on and on. What kind of plan is that? A bunch of weak and useless sorts leading to someone great... I think not!"

"The 'Messiah of the world' hung on a cross! You must be kidding. If He is so great, why didn't He actually call down the angels He claimed He had available? Why doesn't He write His name in the sky so that we can all see it? What a weak God...!"

Again, to the one who hasn't seen sin for what it is; to the unregenerate man; to the one looking for external displays of power and might - to all of these the plan seems filled with weakness. But the *perceived* weakness of God is *actually* stronger than men. What He has done is of such a magnitude of power more than any person could conceive that it is simply astonishing. Every drop of rain in the upper Nile was calculated into what would become a famine in the middle-east so that Israel would need to travel to Egypt.

Every grain of grass is monitored to ensure that all things work out as they should. Every galaxy and star in the heavens has an exact place to keep the universe properly balanced for the life on earth. What man fails to consider is held tightly under control by the God who knows all things, sees all things, and directs all things according to His wisdom and might.

Life application: When Paul says in Romans 8:28 that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose," we can be 100% sure this is true. The wisdom of God and the power of God are so far beyond our comprehension that we cannot come close to perceiving it. Rest in the knowledge that God is God and He will take care of you according to His promise.

*Lord God, I know that every drop of water that filled the earth during the Flood of Noah was controlled by You. If You were aware of the exact amount of water that would execute Your plan, even down to the last ounce, then why should I worry about the ten zillion things I have no control over? I believe Your word which tells me that You have it all under control. I will rest in that knowledge. Amen.*

**For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 1 Corinthians 1:26**

For the past 8 verses, Paul has been speaking about the perceived foolishness of the message of the cross. Because it is something the intellectual can't grasp apart from God's divine revelation, it is considered foolish. Surely if there is a way to be saved, God would have revealed it within creation itself, right? And because the religious man can't understand it apart from being viewed through the lens of Christ, it seems foolish. Likewise, because the philosopher can't figure out how to be saved through mental ruminations, it seems foolish.

However, these types of people are generally the mighty, the noble, and the wealthy. They are the ones who have the smarts to make things happen. Despite this, they don't have the ability to perceive that God may actually be smarter than they are; that the depths of His wisdom can never be fully sought out.

And so, based on these things, Paul says, "For you see your calling, brethren..." He is speaking to those who have heard the calling of God through the message of the cross and have received it. This is certain because he calls them "brethren." To them, he continues with "that not many wise according to the flesh, not many noble, are called." This doesn't mean that the wise can't be saved. Nor does it mean that a great number of them won't be saved. But in comparison to the vast majority who are saved, they are few in number.

Some people are "too smart" to be saved. Some are certain God must favor them because of their bloodline. The thought is, "If I was born into a great and wealthy family, then God must really like me." Such thoughts about self-obscurer the message of the cross which says that we must die to self and put on the garment of Christ - having a righteousness that is not our own. Mental ability, wealth, position, good looks, fame, etc. are all roadblocks to that right and personal relationship with God that can only come through calling on the name of the Lord and being saved by Him - apart from any personal merit.

Life application: When you see the rich, famous, and wealthy making a mockery of God, pity them. They have a short life of ease and notoriety and an eternity of regret ahead of them. Pray that they will turn, humble themselves, and call out to Christ for salvation.

*Lord God, I look around me and see those who mock You and arrogantly shake their fists in Your face. And yet, You loved them enough to send Jesus to save them too. I would pray that many would turn away from their hatred of You and be saved through the precious blood of Christ. I know this is what You desire and this is also what I pray for. May the hearts of the boastful be brought low before the glorious cross of Calvary. Amen.*

**But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;**  
1 Corinthians 1:27

Verse 27 begins with "but" to show support for what he just stated in the preceding verse which said, "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called.*"

Though many of the "brethren" aren't wise, mighty, or noble, all they need to do is reflect on the fact that they are of the called despite their worldly state. Instead of skipping over them for those others, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise." How many out there with doctoral degrees think ever-so highly of themselves? Professors teach in colleges and seminaries with impressive insights into academic matters and yet they are devoid of any personal relationship with God through Christ. And yet, there are millions of high-school dropouts who have called on Christ and are of the redeemed. Though they are looked down on by those of high learning, they are in fact the ones who have been granted the grace of eternal life.

In addition to them, "God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty." There are many great athletes who boast in their strength. Because they are so exceptional by worldly standards, they often have great wealth and even move into politics or business later in life. But the puny weaklings who are overlooked have had time to reflect on the more important matters of life. While the athlete is exercising, the weakling is home reading the Bible.

The same is true with the mighty in military, political, or financial power in comparison to the average person who works a regular job and quietly lives his life. Might of any sort is an opiate which replaces one's instinctive need for God with feelings of self-

worth and greatness. Instead of such sorts, God has revealed Himself to those who simply and humbly live their lives and take time to seek Him out.

Life application: Just because someone is prettier, stronger, more intellectual, or more powerful than you, there is no reason to be envious of them. In the end, beauty fades, the strong tire and age, the intellectual become forgetful, and the mighty go to the same grave as the rest. Those who have called on Jesus though have the sure promise that the grave isn't the end of the story. By the power of Christ, we shall be raised to eternal life. What more could we hope for!

*The message is so simple, O God. We need a Savior and You sent Jesus. We have sinned; He is sinless. And the surest proof that my faith is in the right place is the resurrection. I believe the word; I accept the premise - Jesus is Lord. Hallelujah and Amen!*

**...and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,...**

1 Corinthians 1:28

Continuing on in the same line of thought as the previous verse, Paul shows that the things God decides upon and uses can be the least of all. And this is for a reason. If He chose the great things of the world, then the world could boast of their greatness before God. But by choosing those things which are weak and foolish, then God is exalted when He uses them to put to shame the mighty and the wise. Such is also true when He chooses "the base things of the world."

The "base things" are exactly the opposite of those things which are considered noble. Instead of choosing the blue-blooded, He goes to the uneducated and the lowly. Such people know how they are accounted to those in the world around them. But when they find that God has a purpose for them and that He loves them, they become the greatest example of His tender-mercies. Those who were once drug addicts or prostitutes realize the magnitude of the riches of Jesus Christ and so their hearts will be radically changed in turning to Him. The gratitude will never cease throughout the eternal ages.

This is also true with "the things which are despised." These "God has chosen" according to His wisdom. This is true with His original selection of Israel. We read of it in Deuteronomy 7:7 -

"The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples."

Surely, the surrounding nations looked upon them with contempt and thought they could snuff them out in a moment. And the Bible bears this out. Great nations came against Israel and yet Israel prevailed. Gideon and 300 men triumphed over 120,000 Midianites - a number like the sand of the seashore. And how could this have been conceived of? Even Gideon, when given his commission responded to the Lord with incredulity -

“O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan *is* the weakest in Manasseh, and I *am* the least in my father’s house.” Judges 6:15

However, God used him - the least of his father's house, from the weakest clan of Manasseh - and he was victorious. Such is the case, time and time again in the Bible. And such is the case again in the world today. Little Israel is hemmed in by enemies and even her "friends" are working to tear her apart. And yes, she again will prevail over the nations. You, like Israel and those who are despised and weak, can too prevail when the Lord is at your right hand. Be encouraged by this.

Finally, Paul adds in, that God also uses "the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are." The Pulpit Commentary notes that "The *not* is the Greek subjective negative; things of which men conceived as not existing - 'nonentities.'" In other words, that which appears to be absolutely nothing can be used by God as if it is something. John the Baptist spoke this way to those who came to him -

"Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as *our* father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones." Matthew 3:8, 9

God can raise up children from mere stones and He can raise you up and use you as well. This is the marvelous working of God in redemptive history. From the very dust of the earth, God formed the majestic being known as man - intricately woven together and capable of amazing feats of intelligence and strength. From one man who was old and childless came a group of people who have lasted and endured for 4000 years. And from that line of people, which included some of the worst sort, came the human genealogy of the Messiah of the world.

With God, nothing is impossible. If you are the called of the Lord, He may have chosen something weak, foolish, base, despised, or even considered as "nothing." But if He has called you, then you are of more value than all of the high-minded, noble, and powerful

people who have rejected Him. Think of your position of honor in His eternal home and be satisfied with what the future holds.

Life application: In Christ, you are a glorious jewel within heaven's treasure box, radiant and precious.

*Heavenly Father, though I am little and of no account to the great, noble, and learned of the world, I am Yours because of my faith in Jesus. No greater treasure, no higher achievement, and nothing else of this world can compare to that. I belong to You and have an eternal inheritance. Let the world despise me. Your favor is all I need. Hallelujah and Amen!*

**...that no flesh should glory in His presence.** 1 Corinthians 1:29

For several verses, Paul has been explaining how God chooses the weak, the foolish, and the despised to shame the mighty, the intellectual, and the noble. Because of this, there is no boasting before Him. If such as these are chosen and not the others, then they are obviously considered lesser in any given category than those others and so they can't boast that they were somehow great.

But there is also the fact that some nobles are Christians, some mighty are Christians, and some highly intellectual people are as well. How then can this statement be considered an all-encompassing truth? The reason is that those who are in such positions had to step down from where they were - away from those around them, and humble themselves just like those of lesser status. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. All are bound under sin and so no one can reach higher than any other in expectation of being saved. Therefore, those who are of the higher position on earth were actually more humbled in their status before being saved than those of lower position.

As Paul tells us in Romans 3:27 - "Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith." In his ever-consistent way of explaining theology, Paul shows that it is faith which saves and so regardless of status, or works of the law, or any other thing, all must ultimately and completely credit God for their salvation.

For this reason, "no flesh should glory in His presence." The term "flesh" is being used to consider the whole man. All who stand before God have nothing in and of themselves which they can glory (or boast) in. When the redeemed stand in His presence, we will not glory in ourselves, we will give the glory to God. As this is absolutely truthful for us

now and certain for us at that time, then let us endeavor to live as if it is true. In all things, let us give glory to God.

Life application: If you feel that you somehow merit your salvation (because of who you are), or if you feel that you must somehow merit your salvation (through works), then you probably aren't saved. Salvation is a gift bestowed upon one who does not deserve it. Accept the gift and rest in the work of Christ alone.

*Lord, Your word says that I am saved by grace through faith and that this is a gift. I accept that I stand justified before You completely and wholly on the merits of Jesus Christ alone. I rest in what You have done. Thank You for the cross of Christ. Amen.*

**But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— 1 Corinthians 1:30**

In the past four verses, Paul has written about the workings of God, specifically mentioning "God" three times:

- God has chosen the foolish things of the world
- God has chosen the weak things of the world
- The base things of the world and the things which are despised, God has chosen

After that, he noted that because of God's efforts "no flesh should glory in His presence." Because all was a work of God, then we come before Him with empty hands. There can be no boasting in self because of the work of Another.

And so in verse 30, he begins with "But of Him." This is speaking of God who has been noted as the One who has accomplished the work of reconciliation which began with His selection of us. It is "of Him," meaning God, that "you are in Christ Jesus." God selected us and God did the work for us through His Son. Because we have received the work of Christ, we are "in" Christ. We move from Adam to Christ, from death to life, from condemnation to salvation.

We have moved into a positional relationship with God by being in Christ Jesus "who became for us wisdom from God." As seen in the previous verses, the calling of God is predominantly among the weak, the base, the despised, and etc., according to the world's standards. And even those who are highly intellectual, mighty, or noble had to let go of self and humble themselves before God. This is because the great attribute they possess is actually nothing before Him. Rather than our own wisdom, we find the

wisdom from God when we find Christ. All things make sense: life has purpose, the reason why we are here suddenly becomes clear, the Scriptures with their unusual stories suddenly clear up and are understandable. It is in Christ, and only in Him, that such wisdom can be obtained.

And along with the wisdom, we also receive more. In Christ there is:

- "Righteousness." Before coming to Christ, we were unrighteous. As humans we bear sin, both inherited and committed. Sin is an offense to God and thus we are born in and continue in unrighteousness until it is removed in Christ. At the cross, a transfer is made. Our unrighteousness is transferred to Him to be removed at His death and His righteousness is imputed to us (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- "Sanctification." Because of our position in Christ, we are sanctified by His Spirit. Prior to Christ, we were deemed unholy and unclean before God. But our position in Him means that we are considered holy and pure. This doesn't mean that we have actually attained this state, but that we are regarded as such because of Christ. In position, we are sanctified.
- "Redemption." Jesus said that the one who sins is a slave to sin (John 8:34). John confirms that he who sins is of the devil (1 John 3:8). Because we are born into sin and continue in a life of sin, the devil is our master. But Christ Jesus can redeem us from this through His work. When we receive Him by faith, we are redeemed from the power of the devil. Because we are so redeemed, we are in Christ and can never lose this position. This truth is noted in 2 Corinthians 5:19 -
- "For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And He gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation."

If we falter, it doesn't change our position because God is "no longer counting" our sins against us. The doctrine of eternal salvation is written all over this concept. What kind of a Savior would come only to provide eternal insecurity? Rather, in Him we are declared righteous, we are sanctified, and we are redeemed. This is the marvelous work of God in Christ for us!

Life application: To be in Christ is the sweetest place to be.

*Lord God, You sent Jesus to justify a sinner such as I. I receive Him. You sent Jesus to sanctify us from our impurity. I receive Him. And You sent Jesus to redeem us from the*

*power of sin. I receive Him. Thank You for the work of Christ. In Him, I have found peace with You. Thank You for the infinitely glorious work of Jesus my Lord. Amen.*

**...that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD." 1 Corinthians 1:31**

The last verse of Chapter 1 begins with, "as it is written." Thus Paul is going back to the only Scriptures of his day (the Old Testament) in order to make a summary point concerning his thoughts of the past 21 verses. His quote is a condensed citation of Jeremiah 9:23, 24 -

"Thus says the LORD:

'Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom,

Let not the mighty *man* glory in his might,

Nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches;

But let him who glories glory in this,

That he understands and knows Me,

That I *am* the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.

For in these I delight,' says the LORD."

In Christ alone is where our boasting is to lie. It does not belong to any given man:

There should be no divisions within the church, i.e. "I am of Paul" or "I am of Cephas."  
Etc.

There should be no following after the great and learned of the world - whether a pagan or a well-trained and faithful follower of Christ, i.e. "I follow Aristotle," or "I follow John Calvin," or "I follow Albert Einstein," or "I follow Billy Graham."

There should be no desire to emulate the mighty.

Our goal shouldn't be to seek after a nobleman, a politician, or a movie star.

Rather than these things, or any other potential division in our allegiance concerning our spiritual life in Christ, we should direct our hearts, our souls, our minds, and our attention to what God has done in Him. In essence, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD." It is Christ who is the head of the church; it is Christ who demonstrates and reveals to us the wisdom of God; in Christ are found the otherwise unsearchable riches of knowledge and understanding - both in the created order and in Scripture; in Christ is

all power and strength; and in Christ is all greatness and majesty. Surely then, if these things are true, let us boast in and glory in the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Life application: Why trade your allegiances for something less than what is the greatest of all. As Jesus Christ is the epitome of perfection in all that is good and wonderful, let Him alone be your hope, desire, aspiration, and love.

*Supreme and all-glorious God - You alone are worthy of our adoration and emulation. Give us a heart to follow after You and to use as our role model Jesus Christ our Lord who fully reveals You to us. Thank You for the endless, ceaseless display of glory which You make known through Him as we walk in Your light and in Your holiness. Help us always to fix our eyes, hearts, and thoughts on Jesus. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 2

**And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 1 Corinthians 2:1**

Paul begins chapter 2 with a comparison of himself to what he had just given concerning the called in Christ. In 1:26-31, he showed that God chose the foolish, the weak, the base, and the despised as opposed to the high and lofty, mighty, noble, and etc. And the reason He did this was so that "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord." This is the basis for his words "And I..."

Instead of having come as a great orator, or a captivating persona, he reminds them of the type of person he is and was. "And I, brethren" then makes a double comparison. First is the "And I" which is the comparison to his previous words, and "brethren" is his way of demonstrating that he is just like they - brethren. They are not subjects or otherwise lesser in some way.

After so presenting himself he reminds them of "when I came to you." Paul is now in Ephesus and is calling to memory the manner in which he presented himself to the Corinthians. With his arrival, he "did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom" to declare to them "the testimony of God." The Greek word for "excellence" indicates elevation or superiority. His speech wasn't in such a self-authoritative manner. Instead, it was of the authority of the cross and the resurrection. Paul directed his listeners not to himself, but to the One he proclaimed. The Greek word for "declaring" implies an authoritative proclamation. In other words, the substance of his words, not the manner in which they were presented, was where the authority rested.

Unfortunately, the substance of the message had been forgotten, at least in part, as we will continue to see throughout the epistle. And unfortunately, it continues to be forgotten or disregarded in the world today. Congregations follow after exactly the opposite of what Paul states in this verse. Rather than the authority of the gospel, congregants look to the presentation of the messenger. Instead of the power of the message of cross, the eloquence of the preacher is of paramount importance. This is truly sad - that after 2000 years of holding the Bible open in churches for eyes to see and perceive, the preacher is valued more than the message.

Life application: Better a dispassionate speaker with the message of Christ, than the greatest orator with something else...

*Heavenly Father, guide me to preachers and teachers who are right in their theology regardless of how well they present their message. I would rather sit and be instructed by the drone of bees than the calming sound of butterflies if the bees preach the truth of Your word. How I cherish Your message and how I long after right instruction. Hear me Lord, and direct me to those whose doctrine is sound. Amen.*

**For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 1 Corinthians 2:2**

"For" builds upon what he has just said, that he "did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom..." In other words, when going to the Greeks who looked for polished speech and fine oratory skills, or when going to the Jews who looked for a competent evaluation of the Scriptures (and being a Pharisee, he could easily provide this), he determined that these wouldn't be his means of proclaiming Christ. Instead of being caught up in a flashy presentation or in a detailed and hair-splitting study of scriptural subtleties, he would be consumed with the contents of the message itself.

It was Paul's determination "not to know anything among you." In this phrase, "to know" is the Greek *eidenai*. Based on verse 1, he is indicating that he wouldn't be engaged in or regard anything other than what he had predetermined to proclaim. There would be nothing flashy, there wouldn't be anything sensational, nor anything without one sole and determined purpose. And that purpose included nothing "except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

In a world which looked for (and still looks for today) eloquence and a composure in oral delivery, Paul overlooked these things. He had a specific message which didn't need flash. Later in 2 Corinthians 10, it will be noted that his "bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible." To him, refining these things for his delivery could only subtract from, not add to, the message. His message was Jesus Christ - the Son of God and the fulfiller of the law. But even more specific, his message was "Him crucified."

The word "crucified" here is emphatic. The very thing which is "to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness" (1:23) is the same thing that he asserted above all else. Before the cross, all eloquence fades away; before the cross, all wisdom is weighed; before the cross - only before the cross, Scripture becomes clear. Without the cross, nothing can ultimately make sense because without it, sin remains. What Jews overlooked and what Greeks snubbed their minds at and turned their eyes from is the most excellent of all of God's workings. As Paul says in Philippians 3:8 -

"Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ."

Life application: What shames a church isn't the preacher's delivery, be he an eloquent orator or a monotone speaker. It isn't derived from a beautiful presentation of music, order, and intriguing detail from life lessons, or a haphazardly put together gathering. A church's shame isn't realized in a small dirty building or a large exquisite cathedral. Instead, it is found in a message which fails to proclaim the cross of Jesus Christ. Every time a congregation meets as a church, if the Person of Jesus Christ isn't exalted and if the cross isn't highlighted, that church has failed to glorify God.

*Lord, the beauty of Your church is found in the shame of the cross. Keep me, Lord, from being wooed by a peaceful message, an exciting oration, or lively music which fails to proclaim Jesus Christ and Him crucified. May my heart long for, may my eyes look to, and may my thoughts be centered on Jesus Christ alone. With this, I know You will be well-pleased. Amen.*

**I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.** 1 Corinthians 2:3

Building on his last two sentences which said that he came to Corinth not with "excellence of speech or of wisdom," but he came only proclaiming "Jesus Christ and Him crucified," Paul will now add in a note concerning his own dependency on the Lord. As he came, he states that he "was with you." Vincent's Word Studies says that this should rather be "I became" instead of "I was." In other words, what he will describe is something that either grew out of his time there or that was increased during his time there. As he was there for over one and one half years, this is not unlikely.

Regardless of the tense used to describe him, the facts were evident to his readers as he calls them to mind. He was "in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling." Paul, contrasting himself to the fine orators and bold proclaimers of the world, was a much more feeble and timid person.

His weakness was probably a defect of the eyes. He once stood in the same room with a group of people, including the High Priest, and the following exchange took place -

"Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, 'Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.' And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said

to him, 'God will strike you, *you* whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?' And those who stood by said, 'Do you revile God's high priest?' Then Paul said, 'I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" Acts 23:1-5

Also, in his letter to the Galatians, he made this statement –

"For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me." Galatians 4:15

Additionally, Paul was known to write with unusually large letters, a sign of bad eyesight (Galatians 6:11).

Finally, Paul notes in his second letter to the Corinthians that he had an affliction which he asked the Lord to remove. Three times he implored the Lord. However, Christ told Him that His grace would be sufficient for him; that His "strength is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9

With this probable weakness of the eyes, or something which was comparable to it which he openly writes about, he preached the gospel to those in Corinth. But more - he did so "in fear." He was a man continuously targeted by those around him. Again, in his second letter to the Corinthians, he will describe some of those fears -

"From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches." 2 Corinthians 11:24-28

His troubles and fears became so great while he was at Corinth, that the Lord personally came to him to reassure him that He was being watched over. This is seen in Acts 18:9, 11 -

"Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you;

for I have many people in this city.' And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.'"

And finally, Paul notes not only the "weakness" and the "fear," but also "much trembling." Above all, Paul was a man who trembled. This wasn't a result of the bodily harms which came his way, but in the thought that he would fail the Lord who called him and thus he would grieve the Spirit with whom he was sealed. It was his strongest passion to proclaim Christ, finish the race, and in whatever manner the Lord was so pleased for his end, to accept that end with confidence. If only he could be faithful, he would be pleased with the life he led. This constant battle against his own weakness caused him to tremble.

Life application: Have you determined to exalt the Lord at all costs and to never diminish His glory in the eyes of another? This is our highest calling in life. Let us not fail in this endeavor.

*Lord Jesus, if I have but one request, it is that I glorify You with my life and never tarnish Your bright glory in the eyes of another. Though those around me fail to see Your holiness and Your majesty, let me continuously bring it to mind as I properly handle Your word to demonstrate who You are to a lost and dying world. This is my plea to You - be glorified through my conduct. Amen.*

**And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power... 1 Corinthians 2:4**

Still building on his previous three verses, Paul continues with his manner of personal delivery of the message he brought to Corinth. The fact that he has spoken about himself and continues to in this verse in this way will be explained in the verses ahead, but it's obviously important that he reminds them of it in order to ensure that they mentally go back and see the truth of what he is saying.

And so, in his continued thought he says that "my speech and preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom." His "speech" would include his private conversations and his witnessing to individuals, etc. When he sat and spoke together with others, he didn't try to bamboozle them with a lot of overly-intellectual words. His "preaching" would be his public discourses. Whether preaching to an entire group, or standing on a street corner proclaiming Christ, he kept his message simple, concise, and clear.

In fact, in both his private and public speaking, it was "not with persuasive words of human wisdom." When wooing a potential spouse, we may use words we wouldn't use towards a general friend. When trying to sell a product, the salesman will talk in an excited manner about the product and not leave a chance for interruptions. When a politician speaks, it is unheard of for them to give negative impressions about themselves; instead, they act as if they are the epitome of integrity and capability.

In these, and many other such instances, we use "human wisdom" to effect a change in those we are targeting. The silver-tongued young man wants to obtain the lovely bride; the industrious salesman wants to be promoted and get his commissions; and the politician desires to be in his position of authority. Because there are external motivators, crafty speech of human design is employed. But Paul rejected this method when presenting the gospel to others.

Instead, he came to them "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." His words, unlike the eager lover, may have had words directly cutting to the heart of the listener - "You have violated God's law." His words, unlike the salesman, may have had words which would normally blow a sale - "Without Jesus, you cannot be saved." And, his words, unlike the politician, may have had thoughts which were self-debasing - "I too am a sinner, like you. I rely solely on the merits of Jesus Christ my Lord."

In any words he spoke, his thoughts would have been contrary to what one would expect to obtain the desired results when dealing in non-spiritual related matters. But in the case of the gospel, it is the Spirit who authored Scripture; it is the Spirit who gives the plan of salvation; and it is the Spirit who calls the lost soul to come and be saved. Paul's words were in line with the Spirit's intent for those who would hear and believe and they were filled with the power to save.

As he writes in Romans 1:16 –

" For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

Life application: Marilyn McCoo, once a member of the pop band the Fifth Dimension, had been presented the message of Jesus on several occasions, but to no avail. Then someone brought the Bible along when they talked to her. In showing her the Word of God and allowing her to look at it directly, she saw in it the wisdom of God and the power of God; she was converted. When witnessing, stick to the gospel and stick to what the Spirit has provided. He will affect His purposes without us getting in the way.

*Lord God, please help me to remember that Your word has the power to change hearts and bring lost souls back to You. Keep me from getting so caught up in the wisdom of the world that I forget to simply use what You have already given to tell folks about Jesus. In Your word is all the wisdom I need to tell others the wondrous message of Christ. May Your word and Your Spirit work in them - to Your glory. Amen.*

**...that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.**

1 Corinthians 2:5

In the preceding verse Paul spoke of his speech and preaching. When he came to those at Corinth, it wasn't with "persuasive words of human wisdom." Instead, he came with a "demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Now in this verse he explains why - it was for the benefit of his audience. If he came preaching with eloquence and the wisdom of men, they would have been swayed to him and to a message which was devoid of the gospel. But in order to show that his words were to glorify God, he kept them directed to the message of Jesus.

When we hear a message and are swayed by it, we place our faith in it. If we hear a great presentation about the newest product that will help us lose weight, we are bound to put our faith in what we've heard and buy the product. If we hear a politician with an ear-tickling message of wealth and prosperity, we may put our faith in him and cast our vote for him.

Whatever the presentation, if it is smooth and properly targeted, we may exercise our faith in what has been said and accept the premise. People do it with products, people, and even religions - all regardless of whether the message is true or not. This is the reason why Paul wrote these words in Galatians 1:6-9 -

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."

In his words to the Galatians, he uses the term "we or an angel from heaven." Paul was an apostle. Should another apostle come with another message, it is to be rejected. Only the message of the true gospel is acceptable. This is important because even today

many claim to be apostles, and yet their message isn't directed to Jesus. The Bible is written and we are accountable to compare what we hear with the words which have been written.

Angels are considered authoritative speakers who carry heavenly messages. Both Islam and Mormonism claim their message was received by angels. And yet both of them proclaim a message other than the one recorded in the Bible and therefore they cannot be of God. Unfortunately, many are swept up into these false religions because they don't check with the Bible.

Only through the one true message of Jesus Christ can we avoid falling into a pit of false religion. In the gospel, however, is found the true "power of God." When the message is received, the believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit and the soul is converted to everlasting life. Paul speaks of this again in 2 Corinthians 4:7 -

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."

Life Application: Test all things and hold fast to what is good. Stand firmly on the truth of the Bible and in the gospel of Jesus Christ alone.

*Lord, there are so many people who claim they have seen a vision, heard from an angel, or been taken to heaven and given a tour of glory. But me, ... I have Your word. That is sufficient for me. I know that if I keep my eyes directed to its words, my mind contemplating its truths, and my heart directed to Jesus, whom it proclaims, that I will be in good shape. Keep me from being misdirected from the truth of Your word. Amen.*

**However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 1 Corinthians 2:6**

Verse 6 begins with "However." This is given to contrast his preceding argument which encompassed verses 1-5. Without words that were persuasive or which contain merely human wisdom, he notes that "we speak wisdom among those who are mature." The "we" is specifically speaking of the apostles, but it is inclusive of the body of believers. This is certain because in verse 10, he will use the term "us" when speaking about spiritual matters revealed to the body. He will continue with the use of "we" and "us" throughout the chapter. What is available to Paul, is also available to all in the body - it is the knowledge of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

This wisdom is "among those who are mature." What he is implying is that what we know as believers is more mature than all of the other heady knowledge of the world which he has been speaking about. He has relayed to us the various wisdoms which people hold to. The first was the wisdom of the Greeks which relied on the philosophic disciplines, mentioned in 1:22. Next in 2:7, he mentioned the "wisdom of God" which is the message he preached. And now, in this verse he speaks of the "wisdom of this age."

There are intellectual wisdoms, of which there is nothing wrong in knowing, but they are wisdoms which are futile when devoid of the truth of God. Only when those wisdoms are combined with a knowledge of our Creator do they become true wisdom. As the Bible states on several occasions, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). This is why Paul says that the message of the gospel is for those "who are mature." It is the highest type of knowledge because it gives the highest form of understanding to all things. The reason for every "what" or "why" is ultimately found in God. Apart from Him, there is always going to be a disconnect to the final resolution of any intellectual matter.

Therefore, the gospel is "not the wisdom of this age." It is a wisdom which transcends time and goes directly to the mind of God. It is something which cannot be found in the thoughts "of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing." These people, the "rulers of this age," implies anyone who bears a high degree of intellectual knowledge, but which is devoid of God. If we were to equate them to people of today, we would call them the "evolutionists," the "global warming scientists," the "big-bang theorists," and etc.

These are people who are working on agendas which have removed God from the picture. They are pursuing knowledge, but doing so without including the ultimate reason for all that has or will happen. And therefore, their findings will always "come to nothing." In the end, without considering God as the "first Cause" there can be no foundation for how things started or where they will end.

Life application: The universe didn't create itself. If it did, it would have had to exist before it existed; a logical contradiction. This is the type of stupidity which the "rulers of this age" must rely on in order to deny God. Have a little faith, use a little common sense, and be assured that God created, God sustains, and God will keep His promises to those whom He has called.

*Lord God, I see Your hand in everything around me. The beauty of the flower from bud to bloom; the intelligence of the bee as it gathers its nectar; the marvel of the rain cycle*

*which nourishes the earth; the intricately balanced spin of the universe and all it contains... wisdom! This is what I see as I behold Your creation - wisdom. I stand in awe of Your greatness. Amen.*

**But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory... 1 Corinthians 2:7**

"But" is given to contrast "the wisdom of this age" and also "the rulers of this age" which he had just mentioned. Those so noted are, despite their high status now, those "who are coming to nothing." Many arguments and philosophies come and go which attempt to answer how we got here, why we are here, what our purpose is, and even how we can control our surroundings and our destiny. But without including God in the equation, the ruminations are futile and ultimately lack true wisdom because they lack the final answers. Understanding this, Paul says "But..."

On the other hand, and completely different from their futile contemplations, "we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery." As noted in the preceding verse, "we" is speaking of the true believer in Christ. It is not speaking of the "mature" in Christ, nor the "learned" in Christ, but all Christians. This is because all Christians possess the necessary starting point and finishing point of all wisdom - Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word. This then is not referring to "deep knowledge" but simply the gospel message which Paul has been referring to all along and which is summed up in verse 2:2 - "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

It is true that there is much deep and intellectual study which can be obtained from the Bible and the many disciplines it reveals, but every one of those disciplines finds its true meaning and fullness in Christ. Apart from Jesus, the most intellectual person on earth can pick up the Bible and find interesting things - interesting patterns of many sorts for example, but they cannot be properly understood without knowing Christ personally.

Because of this, Paul calls it "the wisdom of God in a mystery." A "mystery" in the Bible is something that was once concealed but is now revealed. It is not something attainable only to certain enlightened people, but something which is attainable to all who are found in Christ; that Christ died for our sins and was resurrected for our justification.

This truth is "the hidden wisdom of God ordained before the ages for our glory." And this is the "mystery" which is rejected by those who think that they have all of the great answers available without God. They become so blinded by their own intellect, power,

understanding, or nobility that they cannot see the work of Jesus for what it truly is. And thus, they are excluded from the wisest information of all. And yet, it is wisdom that truly even a young child can grasp. This wisdom from God turns the world upside down. This is the wisdom from God which Paul speaks of.

Life application: Don't get sidetracked by folks who use Paul's terminology concerning the wisdom of God to place themselves above others as if they have secrets others can't perceive. Paul always brings his theology back to the cross of Jesus Christ. If you have this knowledge, and have accepted Jesus' work based on it, then you have the most important knowledge of all.

*Lord, I know that big computers can track my every phone call, my every text and email, and even my location. If a crummy machine made by man can do this, how much more You, who created all things, must know about me - my every fault, my heart's desire, my thoughts in the night. It is both terrifying and uplifting at the same time. Apart from You there must be terror at such knowledge. In Christ, You have washed away the bad and are attentive to the needs. My God! How great You are. Thank You for Jesus who covers my sin and reconciles me to You. Amen.*

**...which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 1 Corinthians 2:8**

Paul is continuing the thought from the previous verse which said, "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, ..."

This "wisdom of God" was hidden from the eyes of the "rulers of this age," both Jew and Gentile. Paul says that if they, in fact, knew what was coming, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." And yet, this is exactly what was needed in order for we as humans to be saved from our sins. There had to be a perfect Substitute to take our place.

The question then arises, "What does it mean that if they had 'known, they would not have' done what they did?" The reason this is important is because it can be looked at from two different perspectives:

If they knew that Jesus was the incarnate Word, the Son of God, they wouldn't have dared to crucify Him, knowing who He truly was.

If they knew that His crucifixion would prove that He is Lord, they would never have crucified Him; thus, they would have attempted to thwart God's plans.

In Acts 2:36, it states this, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Knowing this even after the resurrection, they still rejected him for the most part, though many believed. So, the question remains open. What does it mean that if they knew the outcome of the cross of Christ, they wouldn't have crucified Him? These people were utterly and completely ignorant of the wisdom of God revealed in Christ, but today the "wise" of the world have heard the message of Christ and they still reject it. In fact, from time to time someone will utter the immensely stupid words, "When Jesus comes back, kill Him again."

If Jesus is to come back, it implies a few things:

- He is alive (and thus over 2000 years old in His humanity);
- He really came out of the grave, having prevailed over death;
- Death cannot hold him (see Acts 2:24) and so "killing Him again" is utterly ridiculous;
- He must be God incarnate;
- If He is God incarnate, then the words of the Bible which testify about Him must be true;
- He then is the only way to be saved.

And yet, despite these logical deductions, His rule and authority are still rejected! Thus, it is not inconceivable that Paul is saying that rather than not crucifying Christ because they would have loved Him, instead they may not have crucified Him in order to thwart the plans God had to exalt Him because of His work; in essence they would have hated what the cross meant, just as the world hates it and fights against it today.

The leaders of Israel knew Him to be a man of God, they saw His miracles, they heard His words, and yet they rejected Him. But the very rejection that they planned was a part of God's own plans for them, or for anyone who would be willing to drop their fists, humble their hearts, and call on this wonderful Lord of glory. This is the amazing thing about the work of God in Christ. Even those who participated in His crucifixion could only be saved *because* of His crucifixion. What an amazing demonstration of the wisdom of God in Christ.

Life application: Never underestimate the hardness of the human heart. Those who reject Christ are at enmity with God. Even knowing who Jesus is and what He did for us, many hate Him all the more. Be ready to defend your faith, proclaim it boldly, and sometimes to do so many times. With witness, prayer, and perseverance even the hardest heart may soften.

*Heavenly Father, my prayer today is for those who have heard of Your immense love in the giving of Your Son and who have yet to receive this beautiful gift. Help me to be a strong witness of the great change that can take place in even the hardest heart. Be glorified in calling them to Yourself through Jesus. This is my prayer to You this day. Amen.*

**But as it is written:**

**"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,**

**Nor have entered into the heart of man**

**The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." 1 Corinthians 2:9**

This is one of the many verses which is more often than not misapplied by those who quote it. It is not speaking of the future state of the Christian in heaven. From the surrounding context, we see that it is speaking of the same continuous thought which Paul has been writing about for quite a while - the wisdom of God displayed in the gospel message.

Turning again to Scripture, Paul loosely cites Isaiah 64:4 -

"For since the beginning of the world  
*Men* have not heard nor perceived by the ear,  
Nor has the eye seen any God besides You,  
Who acts for the one who waits for Him."

"But" surely confirms the analysis of the preceding verse which indicated that if the rulers of this age knew that Jesus' crucifixion would prove that He is Lord, they would never have crucified Him; thus, they would have attempted to thwart God's plans. The "rulers of this age" were mentioned twice, in verses 6 and 7, as being those who lived by "the wisdom of this age" which is referred to in detail in chapter 1. Paul is giving a contrast to that very notion, one hinted at in the Old Testament.

Paul speaks of "the things which God has prepared for those who love him." It is evident that the "rulers of this age" didn't love Him and continued to fight against Him during

Paul's time; and for the most part, they still do to this day. Therefore, it is likely that had they known the fullness of the plan of Christ in advance, they would have worked to undermine it. But God kept the details hidden, veiled in seemingly obscure passages within the Old Testament. They only become evident in hindsight.

Even those who love Him were unable to clearly see what was coming. Jesus explained much of His work to the apostles and yet they couldn't understand what He was saying. The plan was so incredible that it could never have been comprehended. Even after the resurrection, Thomas doubted the words of the other apostles, seeking tangible proof before he would believe.

The true blessedness of the gospel is set apart then for those who have not seen but still believe. It is by grace through faith that we are reconciled to God. The many wondrous facets of the gospel then are "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." It is the current state of the believing soul that is being referred to in this verse, not the future heavenly state.

Life application: In order to avoid misusing verses, ensure that the context of the verses you cite is always considered. By doing this, the hearer won't be misdirected by an improper use of what God intends.

*Heavenly Father, there is no more wondrous state for me to consider than the one I find myself in now. I am a sinner saved by grace, having faith in the work of Another - a sinless Lamb. The eternal wonder of heaven's glory cannot be more astonishing than the place in which I now find myself... reconciled to You through the work of Jesus. Thank You for my Lord, Amen.*

**But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 1 Corinthians 2:10**

"But God" is given as a contrast to "the rulers of this age" who are emblematic of all the learned, wise, noble, mighty, etc. These people may have worldly advantages over others, but apart from understanding the work of Christ, they are devoid of the most important knowledge of all. Despite everything they can accomplish, they cannot attain the precious facets of the "wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory."

However, those who hear and receive the message can attain them because He "has revealed them to us through His Spirit." Again, a verse arises which is often manipulated and used in a way which is unintended by Paul. This verse is not speaking about a

sudden illumination in the individual concerning a spiritual revelation apart from the Bible. Rather the Bible is the key to understanding these things because it was authored by the Spirit for our benefit.

Albert Barnes wisely notes the following three points concerning what is being relayed in this verse -

1. That people by nature are not able to discover the deep things of God - the truths which are needful to salvation.
2. That the apostles were inspired by the Holy Spirit; and if so, then the Scriptures are inspired.
3. That all Christians are the subjects of the teaching of the Holy Spirit; that these truths are made known to them by his illumination; and that but for this, they would remain in the same darkness as other men.

God spoke in times past through the apostles and prophets concerning the truths of Christ. As Peter explains in his second epistle to us that, "knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit." 2 Peter 1:20, 21

These writings are, as Jesus Himself says, what testify to Him. It is the Bible which is to be our standard concerning all spiritual matters. To rely on the Holy Spirit for spiritual matters without reading and knowing the Bible is a category mistake. It can only lead to bad theology which will, by necessity, devolve into heresy.

Because the Spirit is the one who guided the prophets and apostles as they wrote, we have the very depths of the wisdom of God revealed to us in the Bible. And the reason is given by Paul - "For the Spirit searches all things, yes the deep things of God." Everything within the Godhead is available to the Spirit of God.

This tells us a few things about the Spirit:

- He has all the knowledge of God (omniscience);
- Only God is omniscient;
- Therefore, He is, like the Father and the Son, an independent Person within the Godhead; but in no way separate - thus the doctrine of the Trinity is confirmed.

When Paul says that the Spirit "searches all things" it doesn't mean that He is looking for something. The word *erauna* is used. It indicates a continuous, complete, and detailed

knowledge and enlightenment of "the deep things of God." Those things that are to be revealed by God in the Bible are from the eternal mind of God. Though some parts of the Bible were penned by Moses and some by John 1500 years later, and many authors in between them, they reflect a wisdom that is fixed, firm, unchanging, complete, accurate, harmonious, etc.

Because this is so, let us take special care to pay attention in our church gatherings. If something is spoken or taught that contradicts any portion of the Bible, then it cannot be of God. If God says that no more than three may speak in tongues and there must be an interpreter, then any presentation of tongues which doesn't match this is not of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible explicitly states that women are not to teach or have authority over men. Therefore, if a church has a female pastor, though she may be knowledgeable, eloquent, or uplifting, she is not being directed by the Spirit and the meeting is not authorized by God. In our pursuit of God, we must allow God to be God and be attentive to His words lest we be found disobedient.

Life application: God has spoken and His word is written, other than what is recorded there, what more do we need for the development and practice in our spiritual life? The answer can only be, "Nothing."

*Lord God, if the Bible is Your word, then surely it is sufficient to instruct me in all aspects of my spiritual life. What more do I need than what You have spoken? Surely You have given sufficient instructions for those things. So, Lord, help me to understand Your word and be obedient to it. To Your glory I pray. Amen.*

**For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 1 Corinthians 2:11**

Paul is tying what he just said in with this thought. He has been writing about the wisdom of God which has been hidden and unknown to man until it was revealed by the Spirit of God. If the Spirit of God had not revealed these things (which are now found in the proclamation of the prophets and apostles, and which speak of the work of Christ - all as recorded in Scripture) we never would have been able to discern them. They belonged alone to God, in His eternal mind.

To show us something more easily understandable, he uses the thoughts of the individual man as a comparison. Nobody can get "truly get" into another man's

thoughts. All we can do is make deductions about what someone is thinking, but we can never know for sure the details and sum of his mind. The same is true with God. He has created, and we can make deductions about Him from His creation, but we can never fully attain to the thoughts of God - and we surely cannot speak for Him about what His thoughts are.

Only can the spirit in a man know the things of that man and in like manner, only the Spirit of God can know "the things of God." Unless the man reveals his thoughts to another, they remain his alone. As this is true with someone just like us, and it is true with all humans who have ever lived, how much more God! Unless God reveals His intentions to us we cannot ever probe those things which are hidden in Him.

Paul is going to continue with this thought in the verses ahead, but it is important to remember that what He has been speaking about, and what he will continue to speak about, is the message of the gospel. He is not indicating that we have something available to us that is unavailable to others. He is not saying that because we have the Spirit, we are able to obtain a level of spiritual knowledge that others cannot. Nor is he saying that we can now "speak for God" in prophetic utterances. He is clearly explaining how the message of the gospel was unknown until it was known and that it is God's incomparable way of bringing salvation to man.

Later, when speaking of those who are not in Christ, he will explain why they cannot perceive the gospel. It is not because they don't have it available to them, but because they don't have faith to receive it. When faith is exercised, they will receive the Spirit and the gospel will suddenly make sense.

Life application: Faith in the gospel is not a step into darkness, it is stepping into God's revealed light. This light is found in the Bible which contains the words of the prophets and apostles. These words proclaim Jesus Christ. The things of God necessary for salvation have been revealed by the Spirit of God to us. Let us continue to read and cherish this treasure of wisdom and love all our days.

*Lord God, I don't need to climb the highest mountain to find You. I don't need to cross oceans or walk in the hot and arid desert to get close to You. And I don't need to sell all my possessions and give the money to the poor to be pleasing to You. What I need is to fix my eyes and thoughts on Jesus and place my faith in Him. And You have revealed Him to me in Your word. Thank You for Your word which shows me Your love for us in Your Son. Thank You. Amen.*

**Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 1 Corinthians 2:12**

Paul just spoke of the Spirit of God being the only One who can truly know the things of God. Now he builds upon this, stating that "we have received." In the original sense, he is surely writing about himself and the other apostles as they received instruction concerning the work of God in Christ (the very subject he has been speaking about). In other words, the reception of the things of God was limited to the apostles who have then given us what they received. Through them, this was revealed to those who accepted the message and believed. When faith is exercised in the true gospel, the believer is then sealed with "the Spirit who is from God;" the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 14).

Therefore, Paul's "we" is ultimately referring to all true believers. What we receive "is not the spirit of the world." In this, he is probably thinking on two separate lines. The first is the Jew who was looking at the Scriptures from a worldly, kingly sense. Their idea of a Messiah was one who would deliver them from their enemies and set up a kingdom over the world in which they would be the head of the nations. They couldn't understand that "all are bound under sin" and therefore sin is the greatest enemy. Before the Messiah could reign as King, He had to suffer as the Servant.

The second line Paul is probably speaking of is the wisdom and philosophy of the Greek which looked for a rational, natural explanation for all things. Their knowledge excluded the thought of sin needing to be dealt with by God personally. Such knowledge could never understand the deep things of God which necessitated His divine intervention to reconcile us to Him. Along with the wisdom of the Greek was certainly the inclusion of all of the gentile systems which always look to self and to works for reconciliation with God. In all, the "spirit of the world" is at enmity with God.

But in His grace, God provides His Spirit to those who believe "that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God." Again, as noted in previous verses, this is not speaking of divine inspiration of new things and prophetic utterances which people claim all the time in churches today. It is speaking about those things that were revealed through the apostles and given to us in Scripture. It is the word of God which tells of Jesus. Though lacking the sensation of charismatic churches, it is the Bible and only the Bible by which we are given insights into what God has done, is doing, and will do in the world. The apostles received the word directly from God; we receive the word directly from the Bible.

Life application: Ever since the completion of the Bible, people have continued to proclaim prophecies and claim that they have had dreams and visions concerning divine revelation from God. And yet, in those 2000 years, none of them have added anything of value to the truth of the Bible. Instead, they have been diversions away from biblical truth. Don't get swept up in the vain imaginings of others, but hold fast to what God has revealed. What more does He need to say?

*Lord, I trust in Your word alone to be my source of knowledge concerning You in all spiritual matters. Thank You for the Holy Bible. Amen.*

**These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 1 Corinthians 2:13**

Again, Paul continues to build on his previous thoughts. "These things" refers to "the things that have been freely given to us by God" from the previous verse. The Spirit was upon the apostles, including Paul, for the reception of the word of God. In this, he shows that they were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as they spoke out the message of Christ. Those words which were put to pen and compiled for us became the word of God, the Holy Bible.

It is this cherished book that is "not in words which man's wisdom teaches." No other book has its source directly in God. Instead, they have their source in the created rather than the Creator; man's wisdom is involved. But those prophets and apostles whose work is included in the Bible "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

As "man's wisdom" is excluded, only the truth of God remains. It is true that the styles of the individual writers of the Bible come through, but each word was selected by God, moving harmoniously with the writer so that His perfect intent is realized. When a musician plays from a sheet of music, his style may come through, and yet the musical notes were each selected by the composer. If the musician is faithful to follow the score, then the style and intent of the composer will be known, despite who the musician is. So, both the musician and the composer can be discerned at the same time.

If Eddie Van Halen were to play Bach, anyone who knew Van Halen's style could say, "That is Eddie Van Halen." At the same time, anyone who knew Bach's writing style could say, "That was written by Bach." In the Bible, man's wisdom is excluded, but the words of the divine Author and the style of the human writer remains. Thus, the Bible can be, and is, the word of God.

Finally, in Paul's words today he says that this process is noted as "comparing spiritual things with spiritual." This is an immensely complex phrase which is highly debated concerning its exact meaning. Many possibilities exist as to how Paul's words are rightly translated. One possibility which seems appropriate based on the next verse would be "Explaining spiritual things to spiritual persons" (Adam Clarke). This will continue to be evaluated in verse 14.

Life application: God's word is sealed. The prophets and apostles have received God's revelation which has been recorded for us and which is our guide for life and conduct as Christians. Extra-biblical revelation is not only unnecessary, it would be a diversion away from the very word which God has given us. Don't be swayed by those who claim prophecies or "a word" from the Lord. The Lord has given us His word - did He somehow miss something? No!

*Lord God, You have given us Your word; I will hold to it alone. You have sent Your Son to reveal You to us; I will look to Your Son. You have told us He is our One Mediator between us and You; I will pray through no other. Thank You for Your word which tells of Your love for us in Christ my Lord. And thank You for Christ my Lord. Amen.*

**But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.**

1 Corinthians 2:14

This is another highly abused verse within common Christian speech. It needs to be viewed from within the context given and with reasonable contemplation. Far too often, Christians will cite it as a demonstration of the impossibility of a non-believer being able to know, understand, or perceive anything found in the Bible. Likewise, they will cite it to demonstrate that they have access to all knowledge and are therefore authorities on the subject matter they desire to speak of. Both are immense misinterpretations of Paul's intent.

He has been speaking of the contrast between human wisdom and the wisdom of God (which is the work of God in Jesus Christ). He has demonstrated that His work - the cross, the resurrection, etc. is God's plan of salvation, something which is "foolishness" to those who reject this plan. To support this, he begins with "but." This is given as the contrast to those things "which the Holy Spirit teaches." The contrast is that "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God." The natural man is the Greek term *psychikos de anthropos*. The word *psychikos* is descriptive of the natural or lower aspect

of humanity. It is earthly rather than heavenly. The word *pneumatikos* on the other hand is used to describe the spiritual aspect of man.

A great comparison of these two words is found in 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul describes the contrast between the earthly and the spiritual man. In James' epistle, he uses the term to describe earthly wisdom –

"This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic."

-James 3:15

Jude speaks in similar terms as well. Understanding that this is a state of the person, it should be noted that there are many Christians who act anything but spiritual. They have accepted Christ, but they aren't focused on Him as Lord through much of their walk. This is exactly what James is talking about in his letter. Therefore, Paul's words here cannot be taken as an example that Christians suddenly become the possessors of all spiritual knowledge, nor can it be used to say that non-believers have no ability to discern the contents of the Bible.

Instead, and what should be perfectly clear from the context, is that Paul is speaking of the very same matter he has been speaking of throughout the chapter (and even in the previous chapter). It is that the wisdom of God is displayed in the work of Jesus Christ. This is God's special revelation concerning the redemptive process. Those who believe that one can answer all things through natural revelation (what can be perceived through creation), logic, and philosophy will inevitably reject the work of Jesus. To them it is foolishness that God would save people in such a way as this.

This is what Paul is referring to. Such things "are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Only through the spiritual knowledge imparted to us by God can we know the truth of the gospel. The Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets and apostles, testifying to the work of Jesus Christ. They in turn gave us the Bible to read, accept, and believe.

The problem with misinterpreting this verse as many people do, is that they suddenly act upon it as if they have all the spiritual insight they need and it is available to them by daily injections of Holy Spirit power. When in fact, what they have available to them is the Bible - given by the Holy Spirit. The Bible, however, is a big, complicated, and often hard to grasp book. It takes immense study, contemplation, meditation, and care to fully grasp - and in fact, no one can truly plumb its depths.

Study is hard work, and it involves expanding one's mind, even to exhaustion. It is time-consuming and it requires much perseverance and dedication. These things are not now, nor have they ever been, very popular. Interestingly, many non-Christians - Jews, agnostics, and even professing atheists, know the Bible far better than most Christians. They discern many truths from it and they use it as a valuable source of knowledge and history. Because of this, it is obvious that Paul isn't speaking on the terms of general knowledge and ability to perceive Scripture. He is speaking on the truth of what Scripture ultimately proclaims - Jesus Christ crucified.

Life application: Care needs to be taken to always keep verses in their proper context. Sometimes a whole chapter, or even more, is needed to properly discern the intent of just one verse. Running ahead with a verse like 1 Corinthians 2:14 without keeping it in its intended context can only lead to a pretext. It is harmful to sound interpretation and it inevitably will lead to know-it-alls who actually know very little. Be patient, studious, and determined in your pursuit of Bible knowledge and understanding.

*Lord, I am so thankful to You for Your word. Please grant to me the heart to never misuse it, misquote it, or mishandle it. Give me wisdom to apply all its truths to my life and to grow in my knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.*

**But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one.**  
1 Corinthians 2:15

Again, as before, care must be exercised in considering this verse. It is not an absolute that everyone who has called on Christ has the ability to judge all things rightly. Not every "every" in the Bible is an absolute and not all "alls" in the Bible are either. They are often general statements which are applied to biblical truths. This is perfectly evident by reading commentaries on any given verse, including this one. The amount of disagreement on what is meant by Paul reflects the certainty that the Holy Spirit doesn't externally inject us with the knowledge necessary to make right spiritual judgments.

What the Holy Spirit does do is give us the ability, for the first time in our lives, to look into the wisdom of God from a spiritual perspective. What once was nonsense and foolishness now is understandable in a different way. We may not have, and no one certainly possesses, all the knowledge that is presented in the Bible, but we do have the spiritual ability to learn it in the way in which God intended. Unfortunately, there are many hindrances to right spiritual discernment. Some are:

- Pride. We may have learned something in our biblical schooling and despite being presented with overwhelming evidence to the contrary, we remain close-minded to the truth lest we appear to look foolish.
- Lack of proper study. The more one reads the Bible and studies it, the more it weaves into a unified whole in our minds. We begin to perceive macro and micro structures which are contained throughout its pages. But this is hard, time-consuming, and often tiring work.
- Personal bias. We may have a presupposition about a matter (dispensationalism vs. preterism, for example) and we may find it impossible to overcome the mental barrier because of how we perceive God's working in the world.
- Source of authority bias. We may accept a source of authority concerning our understanding of the Bible which then affects our entire view of how to approach its truths. Roman Catholicism claims that the papacy is the authority on Bible interpretation. If we accept that, then we will follow in lock-step with whatever they say. This is true with others as well, including cults.

For these and other reasons, our ability to spiritually judge all things may be skewed from what God intends for us to see. Despite this, Paul continues with the thought that one who is able to view the Bible from its proper spiritual perspective, that person "is rightly judged by no one." The one who has accepted Christ and is viewing Scripture from that perspective is, at least in the overall sense, coming at it from the proper perspective. If a non-believer comes along and attempts to refute their interpretation of the Bible which is presented from this spiritual perspective, they will obviously be incorrect in their judgment of them.

How can someone who isn't in Christ judge someone who is in Christ concerning their knowledge of the source of their faith (meaning the words of the Bible given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit) which they themselves don't accept? It would make no sense. It would be like an artist arguing with a mathematician about calculations in numbers because the numbers were the wrong color. It would make no sense because it is a category mistake. The color of a number (if written) is irrelevant to the content of the calculation because the substance of what numbers represent has nothing to do with color.

The same is true with the Bible. The substance of the Bible is spiritual in nature. To argue concerning the Bible apart from its spiritual message is a category mistake and

therefore, the non-spiritual person cannot judge the spiritual interpretation of God's word.

Life application: Although there are differing views on the meaning and intent of scriptural verses and passages, ultimately, they must be viewed from the spiritual perspective intended by God. Only a person viewing them from such a perspective will be able to rightly deduce the true meaning of the passage. But competence, study, and prayer are needed. We cannot assume we have pure knowledge of Scripture without much effort and the accompaniment of the Spirit's illumination.

*Heavenly Father, a warm shower revives my weary body after a day of hard work. A bite of food gives me strength to re-engage my duties. A friendly smile or a word of encouragement enlivens me and gives me stamina to meet the foes of the world. All of these are a part of Your creation, given as gifts of Your love. If these things are such a help, how much more heartening is the Source of them... how much more wonderful is Your fellowship than all other things. How my soul longs for You, the Living God. Amen.*

**For “who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ. 1 Corinthians 2:16**

In Isaiah 40, the Lord puts forth a series of rhetorical questions for us to consider. Paul uses the thought of Isaiah 40:13 to close out this chapter of 1 Corinthians -

"Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD,  
Or as His counselor has taught Him?"

The answer is that no one can know the thoughts of the Lord unless He reveals them to us. As he said in verse 11, "Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God." Because no one can know the things of God unless God reveals them to us, then without Him doing so, we are left with the most important questions of all unanswered and unknowable. Further, because He is God and thus the Source of all wisdom, no one can instruct Him. He alone is the bearer of all wisdom and knowledge. That wisdom and knowledge which we possess is only that which has been made available through His creation, of which we are a part.

Therefore, there is an infinite gap between the two unless the Spirit of God reveals His mind to us. And He has done so through the Person and testimony of Jesus Christ. The Lord (Jehovah) of the Old Testament is revealed in Him, so that by the Spirit of God "we have the mind of Christ." In other words, Paul is tying the Lord (Jehovah) directly to the Person of Jesus; they are One. Because the Spirit of God has spoken through the

prophets and apostles, whose words are now provided in the Bible, and because we have received Christ and understand that the Bible is speaking of God's work in Him, the mystery is revealed. We have the mind of Christ.

The People's New Testament sums up Chapter 2 this way -

"Two things are learned from this chapter:

- There is a divine wisdom or philosophy.
- This divine wisdom, or mystery, is an absurdity or perplexity to the world, but the wisdom of God to the saints."

It should be repeated that though we have "the mind of Christ," this doesn't mean we automatically have all of it in its fullness. It means that it is available to us. It is up to each of us to study, contemplate, and meditate on the word of God. God's revelation to us isn't with a "spiritual hypodermic needle." It is the Bible. This is where our instruction is to be derived from.

One other point of note concerning chapter 2 is that Paul began it by highlighting his ministry as one which proclaimed Christ and Him crucified. It wasn't with elegant words to woo his audience, nor was it with persuasive words. It was in direct and simple language which accurately and responsibly handled God's word. Let each preacher of the Bible put away the frills and the fluff and focus on God's Word!

*Would I describe a preacher,*

\* \* \* \*

*I would express him simple, grave, sincere;  
In doctrine uncorrupt; in language plain,  
And plain in manner; decent, solemn, chaste,  
And natural in gesture; much impress'd  
Himself, as conscious of his awful charge,  
And anxious mainly that the flock he feeds  
May feel it too; affectionate in look,  
And tender in address, as well becomes  
A messenger of grace to guilty men.*

*William Cowper, The Task (1785)*

Life application: To have the mind of Christ is to know Christ, but to have it in its fullness is to know the word which speaks of Him. Know your Bible.

*O Precious God Almighty - use me to Your glory, keep me from bringing dishonor upon Your name, and lead me in paths of righteousness all my days - for Your name's sake. With these things, You will be glorified, those around me will be edified, and I... I, Lord, will be satisfied. For Your name's sake and to Your glory, this I pray. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 3

**And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:1**

Paul is referring back to the words of the previous chapter, where he is comparing the natural to the spiritual. In verse 2:14, he said this -

"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned."

It is important to understand that there is a difference between the word "natural" which is the Greek *psychikos*, and the word "carnal" in this verse. It is the Greek word *sarkinois*. The first word, natural, is not one applied to Christians - regardless of their spiritual maturity. It is a person who has never received Christ and is unregenerate.

Instead of this when speaking of the Corinthians, he uses a word which indicates a lack of spiritual maturity in Christ, but not a lack of spiritual nature. They have not developed in their walk and remain no more than spiritual babies. This state of immaturity is well-described by the author of Hebrews -

"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Hebrews 5:12-14

And this is how Paul now speaks to those in Corinth. "And I" is Paul's introduction to the coming rebuke based on his previous words concerning spiritual matters. "Brethren" indicates that Paul is writing to the body of saved believers. This is a very important point to understand because by the time he gets to chapter 5, there will be a "brother" who is conducting his affairs in such an inappropriate manner that he will actually advise the body to "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Paul's words in times like this, and in a host of other instances, indicate the eternity of salvation; one cannot lose what has been bestowed by the grace of God. But they can

lose rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Paul is hoping to impart spiritual instruction to these immature believers so that they will grow, mature, and be found acceptable in their walk with Christ.

Though these are "brethren," he says to them that he "could not speak to [you] as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ." Though they are brethren, saved by the blood of Christ, he was unable to impart to them anything beyond the first milk of their spiritual meal. Unfortunately, this is a chronic condition in many. There is little desire to ever be weaned off the basics and to dig deeper into spiritual matters. What is all the more saddening is that in our modern world, we have the Bible available at our fingertips at any given moment and yet we find it too much effort to pick it up, study it, and mature in our faith.

Life application: Spiritual maturity can only come through spiritual growth. Spiritual growth can only come through proper instruction in the tools available to the student. And the main tool that we have for spiritual growth and understanding is the Holy Bible. Logic, philosophy, etc. are only effective for spiritual growth if they are combined with understanding the nature of God revealed in the Bible. Apart from this, they are ineffective for spiritual maturity. All things must be brought back to harmony with the word of God for spiritual growth to occur.

*Lord God, I commit to reading my Bible every morning when I rise and every evening before I go to bed. Amen.*

**I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 1 Corinthians 3:2**

In the preceding verse, Paul said to the Corinthians that he had to speak to them "as babes in Christ." This makes his comment in verse 2 understandable - "I fed you with milk and not solid food" is a metaphor for his speech to them. Because they were uneducated in the things of Christ, he spoke to them about the elementary tenets of the faith.

Babies don't come out of the womb and start chewing on steak. Instead, they require milk in order to develop. Eventually, through growth, they can start nibbling on pieces of bread or a bit of rice. As teeth develop, they can start to chew on tougher foods, like meat. This is also how we should develop spiritually, a little bit at a time. Unfortunately, those in Corinth stayed in a state of infancy and failed to move to adolescence and

beyond. Paul tells them that they "were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able."

Again, the writer of Hebrews provides a parallel thought to this in Hebrews 6:1-3 -

"Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary *principles* of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits."

Here, the author of Hebrews cites all of these as "elementary principles." They are things that even the novice in Christianity should be able to explain competently. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, found that they were unable to handle even these basic principles and so he was obliged to continue to feed them milk, not meat. In chapter 14, he will relay to them their state of infancy when explaining to them about speaking in tongues. They were using tongues in church the way many churches still do today. There he says to them -

"Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature." 1 Corinthians 14:20

In the coming verse, Paul will give a list of other areas where the Corinthians were weak. By reviewing those things, we will see a congregation that still had one foot in the outside world. They were carnal and lacking Christian maturity. Two thousand years later, the faith is still full of such people - not because there are so many new believers, but because so many don't take time to faithfully read and study their Bibles. When they do, they continue to forget the context of the passage and only disorder results in their biblical understanding. Through Paul's hand, God is showing us how to keep this from occurring.

Life application: Go back up and read the list of "elementary principles" noted above by the author of Hebrews. Ask yourself if you can rightly explain each of them and why you believe them. If not, take extra time to learn them in a way that solidifies your understanding of them.

*Heavenly Father, help me to grow in Your word to the point where I can defend the principle doctrines of the faith. The Bible is Your word and what it teaches has been given to me so that I can grow in spiritual maturity. And so, help me to properly handle*

*it, be able to explain it, and defend its truths when it is attacked. I know that with this, You will be pleased. Amen.*

**...for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere men*?** 1 Corinthians 3:3

This verse explains the comments of the preceding verse very clearly. Paul just stated, "I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able." He notes that they "are still carnal" which indicates that though they are saved, they are immature believers who are living in the flesh more than under the influence of the Spirit. To explain what he means, he then provides three specific examples of their carnality:

There is envy. When someone possesses something that another desires in an unhealthy way, it causes them to resent the one who possesses that thing - be it a physical attribute such as beauty, strength, hair color, etc., or be it a tangible possession, such as jewelry, clothing, etc. It can also involve positions of power, social standing, and so on. Whatever leads one to be envious of another is unhealthy and this will surely lead to strife. In the case of the church, envy can lead to a whole host of problems which includes both of the other two examples Paul mentions.

- Strife. This involves in-fighting and contention. It is an outward demonstration of people unwilling to live in harmony with each other. Proverbs speaks about strife in great detail. One example is the cause of it -

"A perverse man sows strife,  
And a whisperer separates the best of friends." Proverbs 16:28

Another proverb shows its effect, but also provides a remedy -

"The beginning of strife *is like* releasing water;  
Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts." Proverbs 17:14

Studying strife in the book of proverbs is a recommended tool for churches such as those at Corinth who are still living in a carnal manner.

- Divisions. Paul spoke in chapter 1 about some of the divisions he was aware of at Corinth. Thus, his note to them about being carnal is supported by what he has already said. Divisions, if not resolved, will naturally lead to people quitting the

church, completely separating the church into smaller bodies, or a host of other sad situations. It takes care, prayer, and wisdom to overcome them.

Because of these things occurring right there in the church, it demonstrated that they weren't living by the Spirit. And so, Paul asks rhetorically, "are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?" The answer is "Yes." Instead of living in the Spirit and relying on the wisdom of God, they were living in the flesh and failing to pursue what was right and appropriate for holy living within the body.

Life application: Are you spending your time and energy within the church as a part of the problem or a part of the solution? Paul identifies those things which are disruptive and then he explains how to properly conduct oneself. Without reading and applying his epistles to our lives, we will inevitably find ourselves being a part of the problem.

*Lord Jesus... You are the Head of the church and You have given us the Bible to understand how to responsibly conduct ourselves within it. Help me Lord to apply what You have given us so that I will be a part of what is good and right, rather than a part of the problems which arise. Help me to be discerning in all matters of right faith and practice Lord. Thank You for hearing me. Amen.*

**For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?  
1 Corinthians 3:4**

This is a fuller explanation of verse 3. He noted that there was "envy, strife, and divisions among" those at Corinth and then he reminded them of what he wrote in Chapter 1, verses 10-13. They were claiming allegiance to one person over another when the two proclaimed the same message. Some liked Apollos, maybe because he had better speaking skills. Some liked Paul, maybe because he was the first to bring the message to the lost in Corinth. Whatever the reason for their divisions, Paul says it is "carnal" thinking.

By placing a person in higher esteem than another when both are conducting the same service - a proclamation of the gospel, they were actually lowering their standards to that of the messenger rather than the message. Their allegiance was no longer to Christ, but on the one who was proclaiming Christ.

Has anything different arisen in the past 2000 years? No. And it has only increased with the advent of radio, TV, and now the internet. We long for flashy orators, great concerts of music set to lights and showmanship, and comfy side rooms where lattes are served.

The vast majority of people don't come to church to worship the Lord and learn the word. Instead, they come to be allured by flash.

Life application: Let us remember what the purpose of church is. Above all, it is to worship the Creator and Redeemer of our souls. It is also intended for us to learn the word that He has given to us. And church is for fellowship and participation with others in the worship and instruction. Those things which divert our attention from these only cause a return to the carnal side of who we are.

*Glorious and beautiful Creator - You who fashioned man to bear Your image. Help me to reflect Your goodness, Your majesty, and Your glory to others. When people see me, let them look past my faults and failures and see You instead. Keep me from secret faults and open rebellion. Instead, let me radiate You... only You. Amen.*

**Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 1 Corinthians 3:5**

There is the thought of individual subordination by Paul all over this verse. He begins with "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos...?" The word used for "who" is *ti*. It is an indefinite pronoun which means "who," "what," "which," or "why" based on the context. Though translated "who" by the NKJV, it is more likely "what" as many others so translate. It is a personal subordination that is intended as a deprecation of the ones being named.

He is referring again back to the first chapter of the letter where there were divisions based on individuals who carried the message of Christ. Some wanted to follow Paul, some Apollos, and some Cephas. But Paul prompts the Corinthians to think their allegiances through to their logical end. To help them along, he says that they are "but ministers."

In this, the word "ministers" is *diakonoi*. It is intended to convey the idea of "servants" rather than "lords" or "masters." Jesus uses the term in Mark 9:35 -

"And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.'" Mark 9:35

If Paul and Apollos, or any other person is a servant, then they are ultimately responsible to a higher authority. In the case of a Christian, they are servants of the Lord Jesus. So how can someone rationally throw an unfounded allegiance behind the

servant of the Lord? Within a military or political structure, there are many levels of responsibility, but there is ultimately a leader over all.

In the case of the United States government, there are hundreds and even thousands of levels within the government, but their authority ultimately rests in the three branches of government which derive their power from the people. And each person is under a higher authority. The choice for selecting leaders comes down to choices about what direction the nation should go and therefore, whether we logically think it through or not, moral choices are made in each election. As God is the ultimate moral Being, our political choices are actually choices for or against over-arching moral principles that we feel should go in one direction or another.

Therefore, even our political choices involve a sense of "servant hood." We don't always think this way, but this is what Paul is relaying to the Corinthians. And in turn, his letter is asking us to think the same way when elevating those in the ministry to positions which are actually unreasonable. And how many of us do this as we watch figures on TV or talk about the pastor that we follow in our home town!

Next Paul, when speaking of such ministers, uses the term "through whom you believed." If you have believed the message of Christ "through" someone, then they obviously aren't the source of the message. Rather, in the case of Paul and Apollos, they are servants of the Source for the transmission of the message. If they aren't the Source, then what sense does it make to elevate them to an exalted status? It is Christ who saves and it is the message of Christ that they convey.

Paul finishes this thought with the fact that they are ministers of the message "as the Lord gave to each one." It is the Lord who gave the authority; it is the Lord who is the Source of the message; and it is the Lord that the message proclaims. Nothing about Paul or Apollos is worthy of boasting or misdirected allegiance. It is the Lord in whom we boast, and it is the message of the Lord that we should hold fast to. The minister is but a servant. He has a duty to perform, he is to be recompensed for his duty (Galatians 6:6), and he can even be accorded "double honor" (1 Timothy 5:17), but he is not to be elevated in an unhealthy way.

Life application: Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.

*Lord Jesus, I ask for the wisdom to remember that all pastors, elders, and ministers are merely servants who carry a message. Help me to keep from getting so caught up in the messenger that I forget where my allegiance is actually due. You are the Source of the*

*message and You are the One who grants the ability for the message to be proclaimed. It is You in whom I will boast, only You. Amen.*

**I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.** 1 Corinthians 3:6

Paul, like many of the writers, and of hundreds of instances in the Bible, uses an agricultural theme to present a spiritual truth. He has been discussing the division of the church based on individual preferences of one person over another. Some were following Paul, some Apollos, etc. However, Paul has already asked, "Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Corinthians 1:13).

Such divisions are illogical because only Christ accomplished the work necessary to found the church. All the others did was help to relay the message. In his agricultural example, Paul begins with "I planted." To this day, the term "planting a church" is used to indicate the starting of a new church in an area. When a farmer or a forester plants a seed, they are using something that already exists, whose original Creator was God -

"Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed, *and* the fruit tree *that* yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed *is* in itself, on the earth'; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed according to its kind, and the tree *that* yields fruit, whose seed *is* in itself according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good. So the evening and the morning were the third day." Genesis 1:11-13

Like those agricultural things, God, through Jesus Christ, began the work of the church. Jesus alludes to this in John 12 –

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain." John 12:24

Paul merely planted what Christ had originated, having gone to Corinth to tell the good news of the gospel. There he planted a church. Eventually, Apollos came into the area and continued to build up the church. He, in essence, watered the seed that Paul had planted. What Paul established, Apollos tended to and cared for. The plant was being cultivated; the church was growing.

However, despite their work, and despite the work of any other who had come to assist in the process, it was "God who gave the increase." God is the Creator of the tree with its seed. He is the Creator of the water. He is the One who continues to provide water.

He is the One who sustains the life of the tree. God is the One to provide favorable conditions for growth - wind, temperature, etc. Every aspect of the tree is completely dependent on Him. And this includes having called Paul and Apollos and providing them with their abilities, the time they would live, the place they would live, etc. In the end it is all God's doing.

And this is seen all the more clearly in the tense of the verbs Paul uses. The first two, "planted" and "watered," are aorist indicative active verbs. They mark definite acts done at set times. However, the third verb, "gave the increase," is imperfect indicative active. It reveals a continued activity which certainly encompasses the work of Paul and Apollos.

God is always the agency behind the worker and He is the agency behind all aspects of the growth or decline of any church which belongs to Him. However, there is also the simultaneous activity conducted by the devil to thwart the work of those in the church. This is seen in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. As Jesus says in verse 19, "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside." Paul likewise speaks of the continued work of the devil in Ephesians 6:10-20.

Life application: To God alone be the glory for the church and all it does and continues to do.

*Lord God, thank You for the church I attend and those I worship with. Thank You for having established us and for continuing to be with us. I know that any good thing which comes from it is ultimately from You. Use us then, to Your glory, and help us to be a light in our neighborhood and a continued source of fellowship, learning, and love. To You be the glory as we continue on in Your good graces. Amen.*

**So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.** 1 Corinthians 3:7

Taking his thought from the preceding verse, Paul shows that though he "planted" and Apollos "watered" their efforts were but nothing. Instead, it is "God who gives the increase." This is a comparative verse where their accomplished works are put in relation to the continued unfolding of what God has accomplished, is accomplishing, and will accomplish through the plan He has so wisely ordained.

Paul is not saying that he (and thus we) shouldn't work. Nor is he saying that what we do isn't worth note in and of itself. We know this is so because in just another verse he is going to speak about rewards for the work we do, work which includes what he is speaking of now. But even this shows the supremacy of what God is doing. If we are rewarded by God, then it demonstrates that what we have done was a part of what God had ordained. In other words, the things we accomplish were set in His mind as a part of His unfolding plan.

And so, in a comparative sense, what we do is to be counted as nothing in relation to what His plan fully involves. From seed to mature tree, everything in the process which the foresters participated in and which was beneficial was a part of producing God's finished product; a product which started from the seed, nutrients, and water He originally created and which He continues to increase. Take to heart these words from Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 -

"Here is what I have seen: *It is good and fitting for one* to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it *is* his heritage. As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this *is* the gift of God. For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps *him* busy with the joy of his heart."

Life application: All that we do and all that we accomplish is actually a gift of God. If it is a gift, then it came from Him and boasting is excluded. Likewise, praise for the work of another is to be acknowledged as ultimately from the Lord. By keeping these things in perspective, then we will rightly direct all praise, boasting, and adoration to the ultimate Source of what is done.

*Lord God, why should I be disheartened by a job that seems menial? Why should I be frustrated by low pay, having an old car, or wearing a uniform when I work? My life is a gift from You and You have directed my steps. If what I do is a gift, then being upset with it would bring discredit on the Giver. May it never be so! Help me to be content with all things and yet to strive forward to improve my lot through Your good graces. I love You and thank You for all You have given me. Amen.*

**Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 1 Corinthians 3:8**

In the preceding verse, Paul said "neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters..." As noted, this was not intended to mean that those who plant and those who water shouldn't work at all, as if their work was futile, but rather their duties are pale in comparison to the supreme and overarching work of God. What the laborers do is to use what God provides so that both "he who plants and he who waters are one." They complement each other rather than compete against one another. Therefore, to divide allegiance in the church between Paul or Apollos is misunderstanding their ultimate purpose.

They are cohesively working for the same end goal. Not only that, but one is merely building upon the other and therefore they are both filling necessary roles - not independent, but interdependent. And as noted, the tense of the verbs in verse 6 showed that they are a part of God's overall work. Dividing loyalties as the Corinthians were doing accomplished nothing except to mar a process that is being worked, from beginning to end, by God.

A question could arise then, if these divisions are marring a process in which Paul and Apollos are engaged in, and that process is being directed by God, are the Corinthians thwarting the plan of God? The answer must be, "No." God knows in advance all things. Therefore, the divisions had and have sound purposes. A few to be considered are -

The divisions in Corinth led to Paul's letter, a part of the Bible. As it is a part of Scripture used by all who read and apply their Bible - personally and within a church, then God's purposes were met through this schism. God provided the increase.

The division at Corinth, and many divisions since, have been used to turn one church into two (or more) and thus the gospel can spread more quickly. God provides the increase.

Such divisions may cause a church to expel those who are unsound, thus protecting the integrity of the church and causing improved spiritual growth. God provides the increase.

These and many other problems which may seem to thwart God's work, never can. In the end, the united efforts of Paul and Apollos, the supposed divisions by the Corinthians, and the continued process of spreading the gospel - both by competent people and even incompetent people has and will result in God's plan being brought to a successful completion.

And once this wondrous church is taken home to glory, all members of it will "appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). At that time "each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor."

Paul will receive his reward for what he did, Apollos will receive his reward for what he accomplished, and you and me... we will stand before the Lord as well. So don't waste the time you have here, but instead whatever work your hands find to do for Him, do it with all your heart and soul. The rewards will be heavenly!

Life application: Good or bad, your actions are being used by God as He directs the building of His church. Make every effort to accomplish good and honorable results so that you will receive a good and blessed reward.

*Glorious, wonderful Lord. Your church has been in the making for 2000 years. My moment here is short and will pass away quickly. So, remind me that eternity's rewards are based on this short and fleeting piece of time. Give me wisdom to contemplate this, gumption to get up and act, and the ability to persevere in this race of life to the finish line, never letting up in my determination to serve You. This is my prayer today. Amen.*

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

1 Corinthians 3:9

In one verse, there are three clauses given by Paul in rapid succession. In each of them, "God" is emphatic. He begins with his continued use of agricultural themes found in the previous verses with "For we are God's fellow workers." Two possibilities come to mind:

We are synergistically working with God towards a common end; God does something and we cooperate with Him in producing the desired effect.

We aren't working with Him as a partner, but rather we (those below Him) are fellow workers with each other. He then is the Director of the operation and those who are involved in what He has directed are working together for that desired end.

Based on what he has said about himself and Apollos in the previous verses, the second option is certainly what is intended. Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase because He is the Initiator, Planner, Sustainer, and Overseer of the process.

The second option is correct, but it could be looked at in one of two ways as well:

That God is conducting the labor through us at His will without our choices in the matter. It would be comparable to a farmer using a tool to do his work. The tool is directed solely at the farmer's will.

Our volitional choices are involved in the process.

The second option is certain. All we need to do is look at the conduct of those in Corinth, or at the conduct of any other Christian person. Peter, for example, was the Apostle to the Jews and yet at times his actions were not in line with the gospel as Paul notes in Galatians 2:11-16.

If the first view were true, we would be limited to ascribing only the appropriate actions to God. However, Peter's failures (and those incorrect actions of the congregation in Corinth which necessitated this epistle) have been used by Paul as instruction in his letters which are now included in the Bible. As *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* notes - "He regards them as responsible beings, responsible to Him for the work they do. But the results are still God's and God's alone."

Continuing on in his tri-fold thought, Paul next says that "you are God's field." He retains his agricultural theme to indicate that the work being conducted by him and any other instructors is being worked out in a larger context, inclusive of all believers. And this context has continued on for 2000 years. The ministers of the gospel are laboring in a field to raise good crops; a crop which belongs to God. Having said this, he suddenly moves from agricultural to architectural... "you are God's building."

This is not happenstance or an attempt by Paul to simply make a fine sounding repetition, but it is an intentional change to substantiate the thoughts considered above concerning his first two statements. A building doesn't build itself. It requires an architect, materials, and a host of competent workmen who have a wide variety of skills.

In many other passages of the Bible, a builder, or the concept of building, is used in a moral sense. It indicates edification and exhortation in proper understanding and conduct. Therefore, like the parable of the sower and the seed which Jesus gives in Matthew 13:1-23, and the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24-30, we can know that God's building only includes those who were selected by Him beforehand and who were properly fitted into the structure. God knew in advance all the materials that would be needed for His building and He knew what would be discarded as worthless material in advance as well.

Interestingly, in His great building, the greatest Stone of all is the one that was rejected by those who are outside attempting to build their own structure; it is Jesus. As the Bible proclaims -

"The stone *which* the builders rejected  
Has become the chief cornerstone.  
This was the LORD's doing;  
It is marvelous in our eyes." Psalm 118:22, 23

One final side note concerning this verse. The word for "field" is the Greek word *geōrgion*. It has been noted that the high use of the name "George" within Christianity is a result of Paul's use of this word here. If you know someone named George, you now have something fun to share with him.

Life application: We are responsible to God for our actions and we will be held accountable to Him for the life we live. Work for heavenly rewards which never fade rather than earthly gain which perishes.

*Lord Jesus, direct the steps I take, the things I choose, and the desires of my heart so that they will be pleasing to You, suitable for the things that edify others, and worthy of note and commendation when I someday stand in Your presence for my evaluation on the life I have lived. Keep me away from the earthly pursuits which fade away and direct me towards that which is lasting and good. Thank You Lord. Amen.*

**According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 1 Corinthians 3:10**

In this verse, Paul begins with "According to the grace of God which was given to me..." Paul was, as he states himself several times in his writings, a soul needing God's grace and mercy. In 1 Timothy 1:12-14, he describes his former life this way -

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."

Despite his previous life, God bestowed His great grace on Paul, calling him as an apostle. But more than that, he called him to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. The very thing which would have been most repugnant to him at one time, became the passion of his soul. In his calling, he became "a wise master builder." Here the Greek word is *architektōn*; an architect. He was given the responsibility to design the new structure of the gentile church by the wisdom God had ordained him with. His personal instruction, followed up by his letters are what provide that structure for churches even today.

In this solemn task, he "laid the foundation." There at Corinth (the body he is addressing), he proclaimed Jesus Christ. This is the one and only foundation of any true church. He describes this in detail elsewhere -

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." Ephesians 2:19-22

"The foundation of the apostles and prophets" is the word pronounced throughout the Bible which speaks of Jesus Christ. The entire body of Scripture testifies to Him. Therefore, the foundation Paul laid in Corinth is that foundation he writes about to them now (as will be seen in the next verse).

He laid that foundation, "and another builds on it." This is referring back to what he stated earlier, that he planted and Apollos watered. Each had his own role and neither is to be exalted above the other. All are working toward the same goal which is a mature church founded on, and which proclaims Jesus Christ. Because of this, care was and is required. Any departure from this truth can only lead to eventual apostasy. And so, he warns them with the words, "But let each one take heed how he builds on it."

Throughout the history of the church, people have crept in with personal agendas, unbiblical teachings and traditions, and the mixing-in of false worship. As churches are so influenced, they degrade to the point where very little is left of true worship and pursuit of Christ. When this occurs, people either stagnate and fail to grow, or the congregation simply dies off as a Christian entity (see Revelation 2:5). Those who love Jesus Christ and His word will move to start a new church body which returns to the foundation which Paul speaks of here, Jesus Christ.

Life application: Without adherence to the Bible, and a sound interpretation of it, churches will very quickly fall away from the truth. "Jesus Christ" may be on their lips, but He is far from their hearts. Be attentive to the word of God and be ready to defend it.

*Lord God, there is one Foundation to the faith, Jesus Christ. I will pray to no other, I will praise no other, and I will stand on the truth of the Bible rather than the traditions of man. Give me courage to defend its truths, wisdom to properly explain them, and the ability to turn wayward souls away from misguided religion and back to the pure worship of You through Jesus my Lord. Amen.*

**For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**

1 Corinthians 3:11

In verse 10, Paul said "I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it." As a wise master-builder, he began the church at Corinth with a solid foundation; the solid foundation. Had he come as a philosopher with the wisdom of the Greeks or as a Jewish rabbi with the traditions of the Pharisees in order to build the church, there would be nothing truly solid for others to build on. But he came with the one Foundation that all of Scripture points to, Jesus.

"For" refers directly to the preceding verse which said, "let each one take heed how he builds on it." If Paul laid the foundation and others came with conflicting instruction, there would be no cohesion in the building. If one is to build a solid foundation and put up a house of reeds, the house will simply blow off the solid rock. He has wisely laid the foundation on what all of Scripture points to. Isaiah 28:16 shows us a hint of what was coming -

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD:  
'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation,  
A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation;  
Whoever believes will not act hastily.'"

This idea is cited at least five times in the New Testament and it is speaking of Jesus Christ. He is the cornerstone which is the foundation of the work of God. From this, there must be a harmonious erection of the rest of the building using the same material. This then speaks of the principle doctrines of the faith - the Trinity (which implies the Deity of Christ), the virgin birth, the incarnation, the all-sufficient atoning death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the surety of His coming again, etc.

If these principle doctrines are denied or skewed, they cannot be a part of the house which God is building. Nothing else can be added as well. It is heretical to teach a "sinless" state in Mary for example. We can have no other Mediator between us and God. And so on. It is all Christ, only Christ, and the properly-proclaimed Christ which must be the building materials upon the foundation, which is Christ.

Life application: Be careful to always return to the core teachings of Christ, never adding to, subtracting from, or twisting them as you go.

*Lord God, help me to think clearly on the all-important matter of biblical doctrine and not to replace Your intent with my own. Keep me from the sin of bad doctrine. Keep me focused on Jesus - without addition, subtraction, or manipulation. What a precious word, O God. Help me to never diminish its luster. Amen.*

**Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw*, ... 1 Corinthians 3:12**

Paul has been speaking of his laying the foundation at Corinth, the foundation which is Jesus Christ. In time, others like Apollos, had or would come to build upon that message he proclaimed. It is to their work that Paul now directs his attention. He begins with "Now if anyone builds on this foundation..." Again, the foundation is Christ Jesus.

In time, teachers will come and present their words and doctrine concerning Christ. Some will be well-trained; some will be not-so-well trained. Some may be opportunists (Philippians 1:15-18), some may be so far out in left-field that they completely botch their presentation of Christ. However, all are building "on this foundation." This implies that they are true believers and not heretics proclaiming a false gospel. They *are* building on the foundation of Christ.

With this in mind, Paul gives six possibilities for their proclamation. In successive order he begins with the most precious and enduring and ends with the least. In each there is a quality that will be measured by a trial. This trial will be seen in the verses ahead. How that quality stands up to the trial is what his words are directed to. But until we arrive there, we can discern a few things about what has been presented. As we look at their qualities, think of them as a sermon, a teaching on doctrine, or the work of someone within the church (even the person in the pew who shares the simple gospel):

The first two are metals. They are strong and enduring. They will stand up to heat, constant use, time, the elements, quality tests, molding for specific occasions, etc. They

serve multi-purposes, are beautiful, and are treasured by those who own them and those who use them. They are more uncommon than any of the following things. It usually takes much effort to obtain them as they are hidden in the ground or in otherwise hard to access places. They must be refined in order to remove impurities and the refining process can continue to improve them until the metal is of the finest quality of all. When they are so refined, they reflect back the beauty of the beholder perfectly.

The third, precious stones, are beautiful. They will stand up to heat, they often become more lustrous through constant use (polishing them), or they can be marred and chipped through over-use. They can withstand the elements very well. They cannot be molded, but are fixed in their makeup. Depending on what stone, they may be suited to multi-purposes, but not all are. They are treasured by those who possess them and are a delight to the eyes of those who see them. Depending on the type of stone, it may be difficult to find, or it may be easy to remove from an outcropping of such stones and surrounding material. They do not need to be refined as much as they need to be shaped and polished for maximum luster. When they are so polished, they will often radiate the glory of light through them in a dazzling array of colors.

The fourth, wood, is more common than the first three, but there are many types of wood and some are rarer than others. Each wood is suitable for different uses. They will not stand up to high heat well, but some can stand up to the elements better than others. They can be cut and formed into an unlimited number of shapes. They can be left coarse or polished to an immensely high luster. With a protective coating, they can shine like precious stones. Most woods are easy to obtain and work with. They can be plain to the eye, radiantly adorned with knots or grain, or they can be astonishingly beautiful in natural color with even little grain being noticed. Other than the wood itself, much of what it entails when added into a building is of human effort and shaping. In the end, very few woods last for many ages but eventually degrade over time.

The last two, hay and straw, are actually used as building materials, but they are temporary and will not stand up to any excessive heat. Instead they will quickly burn up. The elements will degrade them, they can be easily molded into shapes, even twisted in an unnatural way in order to be used. In and of themselves, they don't really leave anything to stir either the imagination or please the eye, but if twisted and contorted, they can be woven into marvelously beautiful patterns which direct our attention toward them. Such patterns though are only the result of man's efforts and were not inherently a part of their makeup. Other than very limited and often showy, temporary uses, they are not good for building on a solid foundation.

Life application: In evaluating the elements described above, remember that the qualities of them are being used by Paul in a metaphorical way to describe what we as servants of the Lord either add to the foundation or enjoy once they are added to the foundation. Everything we do for the Lord, or enjoy concerning the Lord (such as a particular form of worship or type of sermon) is considered an addition to the foundation. But every addition will be tested for value and endurance. Let us add wisely.

*Heavenly Father, You have shown that everything I do for the cause of Christ has a specific value. It may be very precious, semi-precious, common but acceptable, or very common and not so useful. Help me to wisely use the abilities You have given me to be of the highest quality and value so that they will endure the test at my judgment and come through it as something that was pleasing to You. Help me to use this one life to Your glory. Amen.*

**...each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.**

1 Corinthians 3:13

Paul is now speaking of anyone who builds on the foundation, which is Christ. Therefore, as noted in the preceding verse, he is speaking of saved believers regardless of the soundness of their work. Having noted six different metaphors concerning their work, he now says that "each one's work will become clear." Those people who teach incorrectly will be shown where their faults were; those who taught what is right and in accord with sound doctrine will likewise be so informed.

A great example of what Paul is speaking of today is how modern Israel is perceived. The doctrine of dispensationalism teaches that despite being out of God's favor due to their rejection of Christ, Israel's time of punishment will end and Christ will return to Israel after the Tribulation period refines them. From Jerusalem, and in the midst of His people Israel, He will reign for a thousand years.

Reformed theologians, for the most part, dismiss this and believe that the church has replaced Israel. To them, the 1000-year reign of Christ mentioned in Revelation is merely symbolic of the entire church age; not a literal time-frame, but simply a number which represents "fullness."

Both of these cannot be right. Both sides truly believe they are correct and they find the opposing view incredible to even contemplate. In the end, proponents of both views will stand before the Lord and this, along with all their other correct or incorrect doctrine,

will be evaluated. At that time "the Day will declare it." This means that when the judgment of believers for rewards and losses are handed out, in that Day, the declaration for right doctrine will be proclaimed and the declaration for the faulty will also be called out.

Paul says that the reason it will occur is "because it will be revealed by fire." In Revelation 2:18, we read this comment about the Lord -

"These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass."

The "eyes like a flame of fire" speak of His ability to seek out and determine all things, burning away that which is of no value. The "feet like fine brass" speaks of judgment. It is at the Judgment Seat of Christ that the evaluation of each man's efforts will be made. He alone will determine the truth of matters such as dispensationalism by "the fire" which "will test each one's work, of what sort it is."

The marvelous thing about Christ's judgment is that it will be perfectly fair and it will be perfectly just. No soul will come before Him for judgment and leave feeling as if he had received unfair treatment. Instead, he will realize the error of his faults. Another beautiful aspect of what is involved in this judgment is the fact that we were given, in advance, the necessary tools to determine what our judgment will be!

In the giving of the Bible, we have been handed His instruction manual for life, doctrine, and practice. It is up to us to rationally, fairly, and competently evaluate those doctrines which are presented and then to reject those which are faulty. In the end, we can be as right as we want or as wrong as we want. We can pray about, study, meditate on, and proclaim God's word competently, or we can trust other's findings and hope they were right.

Of what eternal value is sitting on the computer playing games, watching an endless succession of television shows, or heading out to the mall day after day for shopping? And yet, we pursue these at the expense of right doctrine! Let us be prepared at our judgment, which is coming, for that which lasts.

Life application: How sure are you about which type of baptism is correct? Are you trusting the Bible or tradition? If the Bible, are you properly evaluating baptism's symbolism and purpose? This is one of a zillion things that you will be evaluated on. Read, study, be approved!

*Magnificent and splendid God! Someday I will stand before Jesus Christ for my judgment. On that day, the doctrine I held to, the things I taught concerning Your word, and the decisions I made about the standards You have given in Your word will all be exposed before me. Those things of value will stand. The others will be burned away in the fire. Give me the heart now, Lord, to study and be approved on that awesome Day. Amen.*

**If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.**

1 Corinthians 3:14

Paul has been speaking of the building of the church upon the foundation, which is Christ Jesus. He noted six different materials of varying quality which one could use to continue the building process and then he noted that whatever we use, something of value or something worthless, it will be seen for what it truly is in the end.

Now he notes that "if anyone's work which he has built on it endures..." Obviously, those more valuable and lasting materials will endure while those of lesser quality won't. Using these metaphors, he is certainly speaking primarily of teachers, preachers, and ministers who take and build upon the foundation. However, could it not be said of the mother who sits with and instructs her children on Christ? Could this same principle not be applied to the cashier behind the counter who takes time to share about the Lord who saved her? And could it not be applied to the electrician who speaks to his fellow workers about Christ?

Each of these examples are people who are building upon the foundation. Their knowledge may be less than trained teachers, but it may actually be of better quality. One does not have to be a theologian to get the principle tenets of the faith right and then to properly repeat them to others. Even a person who is confined to a wheelchair and has no other ministry than posting on Facebook or doing other internet work can build upon the foundation.

No one is truly exempt from participating in the work for Christ and each has a role that can and should be filled. As long as the words are correct and correspond to the doctrines of the Bible, it will endure. And if it endures, "he will receive a reward."

Christians are saved by grace through faith. It is a done deal and it is a guarantee. What occurs after salvation is up to the individual. Those things that we do, be they many or be they few, are to be of the highest quality if they are to be rewarded. Let us, therefore, endeavor to hold fast to the principle tenets of the faith and thus bring glory to God. And we can do so in the hopes of a reward from our gracious Lord.

Life application: You are a minister of the gospel to those around you. Fulfill your commission to the best of your ability and be pleased to do it... the rewards are heavenly.

*Lord, Your word promises a reward to me for those things which I do in Your name which are enduring. I will endeavor to conduct myself and my work in a manner which is pleasing to You, edifying of others, and lasting in nature. But the reward which matters the most to me is to simply hear from You the words "Well done." With this, I will be eternally pleased. Amen.*

**If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.** 1 Corinthians 3:15

Paul, speaking of the quality of work which is built upon the foundation of Christ, gives us direct and exacting insights into what will happen when we face Jesus. To understand the timing, one needs to understand the sequence of events concerning church-age believers as the Bible lays them out. First, we are saved at some point in our lives and sealed with the Holy Spirit - our guarantee of eternal life from that moment on. We can never lose this status. From the moment of our salvation, everything we do will be a part of our judgment before Jesus. It is our choice how we build upon the foundation.

Eventually, we die and await our call to glory. Or, if we are those alive at the coming of the Lord (the moment known as the rapture), we will be translated to be with Him forever. After our translation from the earthly to the spiritual, we must then face our trial for the things we have done in our lives since coming to Christ. This is known as the judgment seat of Christ and it is detailed for us in 2 Corinthians 5:9-11 -

"Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences."

This is the biblical sequence of events for the saved believer. There is no such concept as "purgatory" as taught by the Roman Catholic Church. It is a made-up lie which was inculcated into their teachings for financial profit and as a tool to keep congregants in bondage. There is also no such thing as "loss of salvation" as taught by those who follow the doctrine of Arminius or other such teachers. There is eternal security in the Lord, but there is the sure coming judgment for the life we lived in Him.

And this judgment is explained clearly here. Remembering that Paul has already described our works as gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw will help us to understand our judgment before Christ. He says, "if anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss." Fire merely refines (or has no effect) on the first three types of work. However, it will consume the last three depending on its amount of heat and duration. Wood may make it through a temporary fire, but it will be marred. The final two will certainly be burned up.

Paul's words then are a metaphor not for condemnation, but for purification. The term *mulct* is a good description of what will occur at this judgment. To mulct means "to penalize by fining or demanding forfeiture." The things we could have enjoyed in our eternal state will be lessened if our works don't pass muster. If they do, we will receive our reward for them. In the end, all will be completely satisfied with the results because they will be based on the choices we made. There will be no impartiality nor unfairness in what occurs.

Whatever cannot withstand the judgment will certainly be burned away. However, despite this scary sentiment, Paul next gives words of a most blessed assurance. Each person will be judged and face whatever loss is due, "but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." The meaning of this is perfectly clear and only someone with a perverse agenda could come to any other conclusion than that this is a judgment solely for rewards and losses, but not condemnation - "he himself will be saved." The immense grace and mercy of Christ means that even a person who has done absolutely nothing for Him after salvation will continue on in his saved state forever.

However, he will bear the sadness of having lived a life which could have done so much more. He will be saved "as through fire." When one is pulled alive from a burning house, they may bear the pains of the ordeal, the smell of the ordeal, and the sad memories of it as well, but they will be saved.

Life application: The wise soul will take 1 Corinthians 3:15 to heart and will endeavor to work for eternal rewards, putting aside that which is earthly, temporary, and destined to perish. The smell of the smoke at the judgment for such an ill-used life may linger for all eternity.

*Lord, Your word makes it clear that there is a judgment coming for all who are in Christ, not one of condemnation, but one for rewards and loss. Help me each day to ponder this and to put aside that which is temporary and useless and to work diligently as a*

*productive member of Your church. I desire that my judgment will be one of rewards and a smile, not loss accompanied by a frown. Help me to consider this always. Amen.*

**Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?** 1 Corinthians 3:16

In a smooth transition from his thoughts about having "laid the foundation," and then us as workers continuing to build on the foundation, Paul asks rhetorically, directly, and with an exacting purpose the question in this verse. He starts with, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God?" If thought through logically, the answer necessitates us to think on what he has said about us being builders. If we are the temple of God, then why would we build in a way which our efforts would be of no value and thus be burnt up.

This thought is reflected in Jesus' parable about building a house upon the sand or upon the rock in Matthew 7:24-27. Why would someone build a house that would crash down around them? But this is what we tend to do in our spiritual walk and this is what Paul asks us to consider. In this, he uses the term "temple of God." The Greek word for temple is *naos*. It is equivalent to the temple in Jerusalem where the glory of God dwelt. And specifically, it is referring to the Most Holy Place where His glory was manifest.

This is now the state of the believer in Christ. God is dwelling within us and so our efforts, our conduct, even our whole demeanor should be reflective of this high and exalted position. And to show that this is a true and accurate analogy, he says that "the Spirit of God dwells in you." This confirms that God is residing with man in a unique way and that what once occurred in the temple in Jerusalem is now occurring in each believer.

In Ephesians 1:13, we are told that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit upon belief in Christ. This in-dwelling then is different than God's interactions with others. God is everywhere (omni-present) and therefore our in-dwelling is a special act of God which is not available to others. Just as His divine glory was seen in the temple in Jerusalem, He is now revealed in us. Because of this, our actions take on a new significance.

When the people of Israel defiled the temple, God destroyed the temple and His presence departed. What then would be the consequences of our disobedience? Paul will continue with his thoughts on this in the coming verse.

Life application: If you have called on Jesus, you are sealed with God's Holy Spirit. If you are so sealed, then you have an obligation to that special honor. As you conduct your daily affairs, be prepared to act in a manner which acknowledges your exalted state and which will bring eternal rewards, not the fire of judgment and loss.

*Glorious God... my Redeemer who saved me and has sealed me for the Day of Redemption. Help me to walk rightly in this life, building upon the foundation of Christ in a true manner. Help my every action to be directed to the purpose of bringing You glory. On my own, I'm prone to bad decisions and walking in an unfaithful way, so be with me and keep me from myself. May You alone be seen in me and in my every action. To Your glory I pray. Amen!*

**If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are.** 1 Corinthians 3:17

Paul has been speaking consistently in this chapter concerning right instruction, especially about the building up of the church upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. In writing to the Corinthians, he made the analogy of building upon the foundation with various materials, some would last at the judgment and some would not. After this, he noted in speaking to them collectively that "you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you."

Because you (the individual believers) are the temple of God, he now makes a sobering statement concerning that position. "If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him." He has not introduced a new group of people; he is speaking to believers within the church - saved people. This context needs to be maintained in order to understand what is being referred to.

As he has been speaking of the building of the church, the intent is that those who build in an inappropriate manner, therefore, defile the temple. (Some versions say "destroy", "violate", "waste", or "ruin"). In taking such a course of action, retribution from God can be expected. In a literal rendering from the Pulpit Commentary, "God shall ruin the ruiner of his temple."

Too often this verse is used by interpreters concerning an action, such as suicide or some other personal harm. If we so act, then God will destroy us. This is illogical and doesn't fit with the context, nor with the fact that if someone has committed suicide, they have already destroyed their personal temple. This is not the intent of this verse. Rather, if someone is engaged in habits contrary to the truth of the gospel such as

sexual immorality, divisions (the very thing which Paul has been addressing), backbiting, etc., they can expect a penal judgment for their actions.

Likewise, if an instructor of doctrine, a pastor, elder, teacher, etc., is engaged in either consistently false teachings or in inappropriate behavior which will defile the temple of God, then God will also bring ruin upon them. A sad example of this is the long list of preachers and evangelists who have been caught up in adulterous affairs. When their actions come to light, they are brought to ruin, losing all credibility and usually they are banned from further preaching or teaching.

This verse then is not speaking of a loss of salvation. It is also not speaking of suicide. Instead, it is speaking of actions which bring discredit and defilement upon what God is doing. In such actions, God can be expected to bring the offenders to ruin for what they have done. This is certain because he finishes this verse with, "For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are." If these people are God's temple, then they are believers, not unbelievers.

As always, care in evaluating context must be given in order to avoid making a pretext. We are God's temple; set apart as holy. Therefore, let us endeavor to live up to that position and bring glory and honor to God.

Life application: Proper conduct is a requirement for holy living. If someone is engaged in improper behavior and nothing happens to them in regard to their downfall or chastisement, then they are probably not saved at all. As Hebrews 12:7, 8 says, "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons."

*Lord God, I fail You daily and it truly brings my heart sorrow. But I know that in Christ I am forgiven... this brings me relief. I pray that I never dull to sin's consequences, nor the guilt I feel for sin, but I also am grateful that the penalty for my sin was dealt with in a Substitute. I am free to move on, but constrained to continue to work towards holiness. Thank You for Jesus who alone has brought me to such a state. Thank You. Amen.*

**Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 1 Corinthians 3:18**

In chapters 1 & 2, Paul spoke in detail about human wisdom in contrast to spiritual wisdom. There we saw that true spiritual wisdom will always be centered on the Person and work of Jesus Christ. In chapter 1 we read this -

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:  
'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.'" 1 Corinthians 1:18, 19

Now returning to this thought concerning wisdom, after having discussed our building upon the foundation which is Christ, he reminds us the importance of the materials we use by beginning with, "Let no one deceive himself." Self-deception is an enormous problem. When people are puffed up with pride and are unwilling to focus on (or properly handle) the word of God, they will delude themselves concerning it.

A great example of this is when a person is asked a question to which they have no answer. Instead of saying, "I don't know" they will often start theorizing in their own mind, looking for anything that sounds acceptable so that they don't sound uneducated. In this, they begin to deceive themselves and thus deceive others in the process. Paul speaks about this type of thing in 2 Timothy 3:13 –

"But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."

Anytime we depart from the truth of Christ as revealed in Scripture, we head immediately in a perverse direction. However, this isn't limited to Christians with bad theology. It permeates the world of academia. It is more than common to invent fine sounding arguments concerning issues to which the specialists have no idea about and no answer to. Instead, they make up things in their head in order to sound wise and they carry many along in their deceit.

Paul gives a remedy for this when he says, "If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise." Rather than "seeming wise" by professing a wisdom other than Christ, the wisest course of all is to "become a fool." This means that taking the direction of Christ and running with the knowledge of Christ is foolishness to the world. When someone takes that direction, they are counted as a fool. But in reality, they have made the wisest choice of all because their instruction comes from the true Source of wisdom, God. In this, one will "become a fool that he may become wise."

What seems contradictory to the rest of the world is the soundest course of all. In Christ, there is an eternal fount of wisdom, reason, intelligence, and splendor. Apart from Him, there is only vain imaginings and self-deceit which results in the deceiving of others. It is an eternally sad choice to make.

Life application: New religious expressions pop up daily. Old religions are revived and reinstated as supposed sources of enlightenment. Philosophies are held in high esteem because they question reality or the ability to truly know anything. All such things seem wise to the world, but they are foolishness to God. On the contrary, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the true wisdom of God and in it all other machinations of man are made utterly foolish. Stand firm on the gospel of Christ and know that God is pleased with you looking "foolish" to the rest of the world!

*Lord God, I'd rather be a fool in the eyes of the world while standing on the gospel of Christ than to have all the accolades, honors, and awards that the world can tempt me with. I'd rather be the lowest worker in Your heavenly kingdom, than the smartest philosopher in hell. I'd rather be crucified next to my Lord, than die in peace in a bed of feathers and silk sheets if that meant losing You. Lord, use me, Your lowly servant, until I am used up. And then Lord, take me home to Your glorious place of rest. Amen.*

**For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their *own* craftiness"; 1 Corinthians 3:19**

As has been noted time and again in this epistle, care needs to be taken to ensure context is maintained. Without considering the surrounding thoughts, incorrect ideas about what is being discussed will naturally arise. The verse begins with "for" which asks us to consider what has been said in order to make the connection with the rest of the initial thought. Paul has been speaking about building upon the foundation, which is Christ, and that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

"For" then asks us to consider that in context with "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." This has nothing to do with appropriate studies of science, medicine, astronomy, geology, or any other discipline which God gave us the intelligence to pursue. For example, because of botany, we have grafts of hearty fruits which can withstand drought-like conditions and attacks by insects or other pests. We have flowers that bloom in a wild array of colors and durations that are not found in the natural world.

God is not asking believers to set aside their brains in this world. Cults and misguided sects ignorantly don't use medicine which has been developed by man and thus they bring on themselves prolonged sicknesses and even premature death. This type of bad analysis is inevitable when context isn't considered. But it is not what Paul is speaking of.

The "wisdom of the world" is speaking of that wisdom which *excludes* Christ in any of its considerations. If a scientist looks for natural explanations to the ultimate questions of life, science, or philosophy, then he will never find the correct answers to his questions, because God is the Source of all such wisdom. Johannes Kepler wisely said, "Science is thinking God's thoughts after Him." This then is wisdom. Without such an attitude, any pursuit of wisdom "is foolishness with God."

To build upon and validate this notion, Paul turns to Scripture and cites a portion of Job 5:13. "For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their *own* craftiness.'"

The word "catches" conveys the idea of grabbing with the fist. It is intended to express the notion that no matter what they pursue, apart from including God in the equation, they will never truly get away from the bonds which shackle them. They are pursuing ultimate knowledge, but they are bound by limitations which hinder their ability to discern it.

Life application: When contemplating anything of substance, include God in your thoughts. He is the purpose, hope, goal, and end-point of all we could ever consider. Keep Jesus Christ in the equation and the numbers will always add up as they should!

*Daily I rise and go about my life*

*But without including the Lord, no true purpose exists*

*Instead of peace, my soul only finds strife*

*As I attempt to accomplish my scholarly lists*

*And so, Lord God, help me never to do a thing in this life without including You in the*

*process. Help me never to forget that the wisdom of the world is mere foolishness to*

*You. But in Christ, all things make sense - pleasure time or while at work; study time or*

*simply thinking about the beauty around me - all of it has no purpose unless it includes the One who gave it all to me. Help me always to consider You, O God. Amen.*

**...and again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."**

1 Corinthians 3:20

Again, Paul returns to Scripture to confirm the point he has been making. This is a citation from Psalm 94:11. Directly quoted, it says this -

"The LORD knows the thoughts of man,  
That they *are* futile."

The substitution of "wise" instead of "men" is intended for those he has been speaking of who hold to the wisdom of the world without including God in their thoughts. The word he uses for "thoughts" is comparable to "reasonings." In other words, the search for the knowledge of things is futile when people do it apart from understanding that God is the ultimate Cause of all things.

A perfect example of this in the 21st century is the scientific study going on at CERN - the Large Hadron Collider which is on the Franco-Swiss border near Geneva. At this immense facility is a 27 kilometer long ring of superconducting magnets with accelerating structures to boost energy. These are used to bring matter close to the speed of light and smash it into other matter going in the opposite direction. In their research, they are attempting to find "the God-particle."

They believe that by finding a particular particle which results from this type of collision, they will be able to answer all of the questions concerning the creation of the universe. On their website, they begin by asking this -

"What is the universe made of? How did it start? Physicists at CERN are seeking answers, using some of the world's most powerful particle accelerators."

Rather than approaching their studies from the presupposition that there is a God and their research will help us to understand how God does things, they leave Him out of the equation. The ultimate answer, therefore, will always elude them and they will be kept from what they desire most. Someday, at the judgment of man unless they call on Christ first, they will be eternally separated from Him, but they will know that He exists. Thus, they will spend eternity lacking contact with what they now realize to be the truth. It is a sad thought, but it is the state of unregenerate man.

Life application: Without God, the smartest person is just a dolt, but with God, the least intelligent chap is a true genius. Be really smart; call on Christ!

*I would rather be shunned by the brightest and best of this world than to be without Jesus. Thank You, O God, for Jesus. Hallelujah and Amen.*

## **Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: 1 Corinthians 3:21**

"Therefore" is now stated for consideration of what he has been considering throughout the entire chapter. Paul is moving from his argument into an exhortation to those in Corinth (and thus to us who read this epistle). However, his following words are some of the most disregarded in the entire letter - "let no one boast in men."

It is with the greatest note of sadness that this simple sentence has gone almost completely unheeded in Christianity. Catholics boast in the pope; Lutherans boast in Luther; Calvinists boast in Calvin; modern followers of prophecy boast in individual analysts; people cling to TV evangelists and preachers as if they possessed the source of wisdom and knowledge. And yet... they are just people serving in a limited capacity for a limited time and their analyses are merely attempts to explain what has already been given.

Paul exhorts each of us to not boast in any man. Instead, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. Anything other than this merely diminishes what should be the sole and complete focus of our attention, Jesus Christ. In order to explain this, he follows up with an argument for his exhortation by stating "For all things are yours." This will be expanded upon in the verses ahead; it is not a stand-alone thought that we can run with and claim all-knowledge or all authority in and of ourselves. Instead, it is a precursor to what he will next explain.

Life application: It is commendable to recognize a sound theologian, commentator, preacher, evangelist, etc. But Paul warns us that we are not to boast in that individual. Be careful to heed these words lest your eyes be misdirected away from the Lord.

*I will fix my eyes on You, O Lord. My heart will be steadfast in my devotion to You, my God. Throughout my days, I will think on You, meditate on Your word, and speak of Your goodness to others. And when I get misdirected, please nudge me back onto the right way once again. You are my All in all and I wish to proclaim You - only You! Amen.*

**... whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. 1 Corinthians 3:22**

This verse is dependent on, and explains, the preceding verse which said, "Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours..." Included in "all things" is the list he now gives beginning with, "whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas." Interestingly, Cephas (Peter) hasn't been mentioned since 1 Corinthians 1:12, 13 when Paul said -

"Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

In the interim verses, he speaks about the work of Apollos and himself, but not Cephas. The reason why is clear when one understands that the Corinthian church is a predominantly gentile church. Whatever effect Cephas had on it was directed to the Jews as he is the "Apostle to the Jews." However, Paul laid the foundation of the church at Corinth as a gentile entity and Apollos then continued on in that respect.

Cephas did his part, Apollos did his part, and Paul did his part, but those in the church are the recipients of all of their labors which were united on the proclamation of Christ. The division of these into differing factions is pointless. And as the work of these three all belong to those at Corinth, so do -

the world, meaning all the created order that we can experience and search out in our attempts to know our Creator better;

life, which is speaking of the fullness of life in Christ rather than the vain and empty pursuits of life separate from Christ. Solomon, long before Paul, noted that "all is vanity" apart from God. Life ultimately has no meaning or purpose without Christ, but in Him there is the richness of knowing that we are but pilgrims on a journey to a far better place. It is a place which transcends even....

death, the termination of this earthly existence is not a foe to the believer, but rather it is a part of assuming our inheritance. As Paul says in Philippians 1:21 - "For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain." Peter explains it as "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3, 4);

things present, is the life we have been given. This is parallel to "life" noted above. Parallelism is used to reinforce a thought and asks the reader to reflect on it a second time. We are living in our present reality, but we have a hope in this reality which is beyond what we can fully grasp. And that will be revealed in the...

things to come, which is our heavenly inheritance and the fullness of eternal life granted by God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Without this hope, all life is futile and factions are the norm. But in Christ, there should be no such divisions. All these things are united in Him for our benefit and in anticipation of that great Day.

Paul says that "all are yours" and as we are also the recipients of his letter to the Corinthians, we also are included in the promises found in Christ. This is the wonder of our state and it shows the absurdity of clinging to single teachers or dividing the fellowship in unnatural ways. Our eyes and thoughts are to be focused on the goal; on the prize; on Christ.

Life application: We have a heavenly inheritance, but we also have to work out our earthly existence. Let us therefore do the latter with the former firmly entrenched in our duties and attitudes, to the glory of God.

*Lord, how good it is to arise and see the world unfold anew each day. As I see the little animals going about their lives, the birds flittering through the skies, and the plants and trees reaching toward the sunshine, I know that Your gracious hand has given these things for our enjoyment and care. Help me to be responsible as a part of this world, but ever-living with the notion that You have something even more wonderful in store for me as I wait upon that Day when Jesus takes me to my true home. Amen.*

**And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.** 1 Corinthians 3:23

To finish out his current thoughts concerning our allegiances and also to close chapter 3, Paul notes that "you are Christ's." We don't belong to Paul or Peter, nor to any other individual, sect, or denomination. We don't belong to a pope, pastor, or priest. Instead, we belong to Christ. He died for us, was resurrected proving that His work was accepted by God, and we have called on Him for salvation. We are His and to Him alone belongs our allegiance.

Understanding this, Paul finishes with "and Christ is God's." Christ is a member of the Godhead - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Because we belong to Him, we belong to God. Jesus is our Mediator to God; no one else can satisfy that role. If we belong to Christ, and He to God, then we are accountable to God and owe Him our allegiance through Christ.

Paul's order of argument and his logic have been exactly laid out to keep us from misguided allegiances and distractions. And yet, we in the church have continuously failed to heed his words. We throw our trust behind a given pastor as if he were the ultimate authority over us in all matters. Some, like Jim Jones, have even taken their flock to their deaths. All of this tragically occurs because we fail to simply heed the words of the Bible.

Life application: Fix your eyes on Jesus.

*Lord God, thank You for those pastors and teachers who have instructed me in my walk. But Lord, help me to remember that they are just men doing their job and not the objects of my allegiance. In Christ alone will I trust. I know that any person can falter or let me down, but Jesus never will. Thank You for my ever-faithful Lord! Amen.*

## CHAPTER 4

**Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.**

1 Corinthians 4:1

Paul has penned many words concerning divisions in the church, especially those based on following particular individuals. However, he understood the human proclivity toward this kind of action. And so, having shown that Christ is the foundation and every other person is merely building upon that foundation, he now goes to the task of defining exactly how individual ministers should be perceived. Though they are not to be exalted, they have a particular distinction which is of note.

And so he begins chapter 4 with "Let a man so consider us..." He is referring to Cephas, Apollos, and himself, along with any others who come to add upon the foundation. These are to be considered "as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." Paul elsewhere calls himself a "bondservant of Christ." In Romans 6, he shows that we are *all* slaves to something. We are either slaves to sin (as Jesus Himself noted in John 8:34) or we are slaves to God and to righteousness. Therefore, his terminology that they are "servants of Christ" is inclusive of all believers.

In this state, they are to be regarded as equals by the Corinthians. All are under one Master and therefore all owe their allegiance to Him alone. But he continues by stating that despite their common status, they are also "stewards of the mysteries of God." They, as apostles and teachers, carry the details of the faith for instruction and building up of the body. In this capacity, they are to be noted for their efforts. However, this type of note is to be shared among all who are in such a position. There shouldn't be unhealthy divisions within the category.

And there are many categories within the faith. Paul gives several lists throughout his writings, such as one which is coming up in 1 Corinthians 12:27, 28 -

"Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues."

Life application: The Bible asks us to give honor where it is due. In 1 Timothy 5:17, for example, elders are to be given "double honor" for their service. However, this is a form

of respect, not a point of exaltation and division within the body. Be careful to keep the integrity of the body through the exaltation of Christ alone.

*There is a place where I can go  
At any time of day or night  
When my soul feels worn down  
And I need the Lord to make things right  
Heavenly Father, because of Jesus, I know that I have continuous access to Your throne of grace. Help me to use this glorious blessing always, never forgetting that You are with me in the trials as well as in the times of joy. Thank You for the bubbling-over fountain of life and love that I have available to me. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.** 1 Corinthians 4:2

Verse 2 begins with "moreover." This builds upon verse 1 which said, "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." In addition to this, or "moreover," Paul now notes that "it is required..." Literally, this phrase is "it is sought for" or "it is expected." If one is a steward of another, then they are responsible to their master. Certain things must be accomplished, certain qualities are looked for, and certain standards must be maintained.

In such a state it is required "that one be found faithful." His words here certainly reflect the mindset of Jesus' words in Luke 12:42, 43 -

"And the Lord said, 'Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* master will make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of food in due season? Blessed *is* that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.'"

The logic is that

- Jesus Christ is the Master;
- He selects His stewards;
- He gives His instructions for proper stewardship (these are found in the Bible);
- He will search out our works, attitudes, and results to determine our faithfulness.

Life application: Have you received Jesus Christ as your Savior? If so, you have become a "steward" or "servant" of Christ. Are you learning His instruction manual? Are you executing your duties according to that manual? This is our one shot at doing these

things before we stand before His judgment seat. Make sure to do them diligently and correctly!

*How great, splendid, and awesome You are, O God. You placed the galaxies in the heavens and set them in motion. And yet You are aware of every bumblebee that goes about its business of collecting nectar to make honey. How can such wisdom and power be! How magnificent are Your ways. Thank You for allowing me to be a part of Your wondrous creation and to behold Your revealed glory with my two unworthy eyes. Amen!*

**But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 1 Corinthians 4:3**

Verse 3 begins with "but" to indicate a contrast in what he just said about being "found faithful" in the previous verse. In Paul's eyes, "it is a very small thing that" he should be judged by anyone except the true Judge of all righteous deeds and actions. The idea of being "judged" here implies the examination one would go through preliminary to a trial being held.

Speaking to those in Corinth, to him being found in this state had absolutely no importance at all when coming from "you or by a human court." He had already found them worldly and carnal and so noted it to them in the preceding chapter (see 1 Corinthians 3:3, 4). They had divided allegiances between individual teachers and were not focused on Christ. If this was so (and he showed them that it was), then any such inspection of his work by them would ultimately be irrelevant.

What should be noted is that the term "human court" is the Greek *anthrōpinēs hēmeras* - man's day; meaning the time from sunrise to sunset. It is translated as "court" because Paul is contrasting "the day of man" to the "Day of the Lord." This sentiment is seen in 1 Corinthians 3:13 -

"...each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is."

The brevity of human life and the lowliness of our knowledge in comparison to that of God finds man insufficient to make accurate and reasonable judgments concerning such awesome matters as Paul was blessed to impart by God's Spirit.

And so, this wasn't just the case with those in Corinth, but with any human court. If a human court were to make an investigation into Paul's imparting of "the mysteries of God" which he spoke of in 4:1, they could never correctly investigate the matter anyway. Such information and revelation would be beyond a human court's ability to properly discern. And to prove this he continues on with words concerning himself.

He was so sure that such an investigation would come up short, that he exclaimed, "In fact, I do not even judge myself." In his words, instead of the word *krino* - judge, he uses the term *ankrino* - examine. In other words, he is unable to examine these things himself, even though they were relayed through him. The mysteries of God were revealed to him by the Spirit of God. As he is a creature created by God, how could he examine something which was of a higher Source than himself? It would be impossible!

As the Pulpit Commentary notes, This "verse discourages all morbid self-introspection. It also shows that St. Paul is not arrogantly proclaiming himself superior to the opinion of the Corinthians, but is pointing out the necessary inadequacy of all human judgments." He, like they, was wholly unqualified to judge such high spiritual matters through earthly investigations.

Life application: Because the Bible is surely the word of God, having validated itself throughout history - both internally and externally, we must accept what has been received without judgment upon it. We are insufficient to judge what God has spoken. We may find it difficult, not suited to our taste in certain areas, or contrary to what we desire, but we must never attempt to find fault in it. God is God and God has spoken. Let us accept His word as it is written.

*Your word is so precious to me Lord. Many times, I've seen others in distress decide to pull it out and read its contents in order to find hope and encouragement there. Me... I will never wait until the time of anxiety arrives. I intend to stay ahead of the game, keeping it fresh in my mind and secure in my heart at all times. In this, I will be ready for any day of evil which comes my way. Thank You for Your word!! Amen.*

**For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. 1 Corinthians 4:4**

The sense of this verse is hard to understand in some translations. However, the NIV does a good job of it –

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

Paul, speaking of his work as an apostle, and in his ministerial duties in handling the mysteries of God (see verse 1 for context), felt convinced that he had done and was doing his best in presenting it properly. However, he acknowledged that just because he "felt" he had a clear conscience in no way implied that he was without guilt in the matter.

This verse is an important one in presenting to us, and the world at large, the fact that guilt has nothing to do with how we perceive our standing before God. We may be (and are because of the fall of man) guilty of an offense against God whether we realize it or not. This is no different than turning onto a road with a 35 mile-per-hour limit and going 45 even though we saw no sign at the point where we turned onto it. Ignorance of the law is no excuse and feelings of innocence are irrelevant. This is similar then to what Job said during his discussions. But in the end, he found that what he thought was correct was faulty -

My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go;  
My heart shall not reproach *me* as long as I live. Job 27:6

Paul understood that God is sovereign and that if he had done something wrong in his gospel ministry, even unknowingly, he bore the responsibility for his actions. In the end, he states his affirmation that "He who judges me is the Lord." We are His subjects and to Him we are accountable. Therefore, doctrine really does matter. People who dismiss this precept and arrogantly state that "doctrine doesn't matter" will face much loss at the judgment seat of Christ.

The Bible is a book of doctrine and it has been given to us for our learning, guidance, and instruction. When we fail to handle it properly, we are offending God who gave it.

Life application: Better to spend your time with your nose in the Bible in expectation of approval before Christ, than to ignorantly walk through your Christian life, hoping for a light sentence at the judgment of rewards and losses on that great Day.

*Lord God, Your word shows me that ignorance of Your law is no excuse. Whether my conscience is clear concerning my doctrine, it doesn't mean I am innocent in regards to it. You have spoken and it is up to me to properly handle what You have given. And so,*

*Lord, open my eyes to the truth of the word; give me a desire to approach it carefully and with respect. And thank You for allowing me to know Your mind through it! Amen.*

**Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.** 1 Corinthians 4:5

Paul has been speaking of matters of doctrine and he is continuing on in this regard. It is similar to what Jesus said in one of the most misapplied verses in all of Scripture, Matthew 7:1, 2 -

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

Jesus was not implying that we weren't to make judgments against others on matters of morals, ethics, or adherence to the word of God. In fact, within just a few short sentences of His words, he noted to us that we are to be firm and steadfast in making right moral judgments. Paul cites a similar thought in Romans 2:1 -

"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things."

Our judgments and our decisions are to be based on what God decides rather than on our own perverse machinations. Understanding this, Paul begins with "therefore." This is given in anticipation of us returning to see why he will now state what he states. He just finished indicating his belief in his innocence concerning proper doctrine, but just because he felt innocent, it didn't mean he actually was. Instead, the Lord would determine that.

Because of his uncertainty in this matter, even though he felt convinced, he now adds to that thought by saying "judge nothing before the time." Again, this isn't asking us to not make right judgments but to exercise care in our determination of why someone is taking a particular course of action. A good example of this is when Jesus sat and spoke with prostitutes and other "sinners." If one were to judge by mere appearances, they would think He was like them because of His association with them. However, the appearances would be faulty.

In like manner, Paul made his presentations, Apollos made his, and Peter made his. Divisions arose among those in Corinth based on who they approved of, but in fact all three were working towards the same end. Making such limited judgments only caused harm, not edification. In the end, each will receive his reward when "the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts."

These two thoughts parallel each other. "The hidden things of darkness" are those things we conceal. What we may put forth as our motivation for a deed may actually not be at all what truly motivates us. The "counsels of the heart" refers to this same concept. Our heart directs us, it guides our emotions and our desires, and it is what we cannot search out in another, only the Lord can (as the Bible shows numerous times and in both testaments.)

And so, it is the Lord who will do the searching and it is the Lord who will judge us for rewards and losses. At that time "each one's praise will come from God." This word "praise" is from the Greek *epainos* and denotes the idea of a reward which is due. When the Lord does His great search of our hearts, motivations, and doctrine, He will pronounce the sentence fairly and with justice based on that.

Life application: Truly, we cannot know the motivations behind the actions of another. At times we might feel certain, but in the end, we may actually be proven wrong. Therefore, let us withhold such judgments, allowing the Lord to do His work without our prior interference.

*Great and awesome God! How good it is to know that You have everything under control. I don't need to worry about the things the world finds troubling. I don't need to feel stress or concern about the sad direction of nations, governments, or society in general. In the end, these things are temporary, but You O God are eternal. In what shall I worry? My hope is in You, the Living God! Amen.*

**Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. 1 Corinthians 4:6**

"Now these things" is referring to everything from a certain point in his writings thus far. In other words, the context of everything that has been analyzed from that point has dealt with the same issue. This is important to understand, because many of the verses between that starting point and where Paul is now have been used incorrectly over the

ages as "stand-alone" verses to establish doctrine contrary to what is intended by Paul. These have been addressed individually as they have come up, and Paul's words here now confirm the context of this continuously running thought.

He goes on with "brethren." Again, he notes that his words are addressed to believers, not unbelievers. What he has been communicating then is doctrine for already saved people.

"I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes" shows us that the starting point for the context of Paul's discourse is the introduction of whatever issue involved both Paul and Apollos. This takes us all the way back to chapter 1 verse 12 where Apollos is first mentioned. And that verse included everything back to verse 1:10 which was speaking of "divisions."

Considering this, we see that the proper context of Paul's entire discourse thus far has been that of internal divisions within the church. One can truly see the need for applying proper context when evaluating Scripture by looking at Paul's words here which are noted as "for your sakes." They are words and examples given to the church for edification. They have been a continuous thought which has been figuratively applied to Apollos and himself.

And the reason for this... how important is his next statement! "That you may learn to not think beyond what is written." How different Christianity would be today if people took the time to read their Bibles and then apply proper context as they study. Some churches are very legalistic, some are far too liberal; some churches forbid that which is acceptable and some allow that which isn't. There are churches which deny the importance of doctrine at all and others which make doctrine up as they go along, not considering context. All of this stems from thinking "beyond what is written."

Paul is showing us that doctrine is of the highest value in our walk after salvation and he is indicating that proper doctrine is what is important, not "any" doctrine. And he gives the reason for it explicitly - "that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other." If one follows proper doctrine, by understanding the context of what is being said, then they will not be puffed up, meaning prideful. Instead, they will be standing on the authority of God's word, not their own individual division. And divisions are what have been the subject of everything Paul has said.

The metaphor, "puffed up," comes from yeast which is introduced into bread. When it is, the bread rises. Like a loaf of bread, where there is pride, we become boastful and

puffed up. The Corinthians were boasting in Paul or Apollos and not in Jesus. They were dividing over it and this had led to sin, which yeast pictures. This is the reason for Paul's words, and they indicate a man who is willing to go to great lengths to establish his case and defend his argument.

Life application: When evaluating Scripture, context is king. Always look for the proper context to a verse lest you be found misrepresenting what has been presented.

*I'm awake for another day Lord. Help me to use this day wisely, redeeming the time and pursuing that which is noble, good, and of eternal value. Keep me from faults that will hinder my walk with You or bring discredit upon Your glorious name. May my heart be directed aright and my steps be proper and firmly planted on truth, righteousness, and justice. To Your glory I make this morning prayer. Amen.*

**For who makes you differ *from another*? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive *it*, why do you boast as if you had not received *it*? 1 Corinthians 4:7**

"For" explains the thought in the previous verse which said, "that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other." Why should one be puffed up against another? If we think it through, it should never happen. To help us consider logically, Paul asks a series of questions to mull over.

First he asks, "Who makes you differ *from another*?" Paul and Apollos certainly differed from one another, as do all teachers. But who is it that made them different? Of course, it is the Lord. If Paul differs from Apollos and they are both proclaiming the same message, then obviously the Lord should get the credit for the difference because He gave them that ability or grace. As this is so, then why should those in Corinth boast about their superiority over one another in their allegiance to Paul or Apollos? Rather they should be boasting in the Lord who made each according to His own wisdom and purpose.

If a potter made two pots, one beautiful and one simple, each still has a particular purpose. The beautiful one can be put on a shelf to admire, but it may not be as good for transporting olive oil. However, we need olive oil for cooking. So, which is more important? And because the same potter made them both, do we praise the individual pot, or the potter who made them for various uses? Paul asks them to think.

He next asks, "And what do you have that you did not receive?" What predominate gift does Paul have? He was the one to plant. What predominate gift does Apollos have? He watered. Who gave them these gifts? Likewise, he would have them look to themselves as well. What do each of you have? And if you have it, you received it from elsewhere. Was it from Paul? Was it from Apollos? No! It was from God. So why then are you puffed up? Why are there such divisions?

If a group goes into a royal palace and the one on the throne has gifts prepared for each of them. Who will they thank, the attendant who brings them the gift, or the one on the throne who offered it? The answer is obvious. Paul asks them to think.

Finally, he asks a follow-up question to get them to consider their actions, "Now if you did indeed receive *it*, why do you boast as if you had not received *it*?" His words make it clear that what they have, they received. There can be no arguing against it and so his question is like a sharp knife, intended to cut away their pride. In essence, "Of course you have received all that you have, so why would you boast as if you had earned it?"

In the end, this is true for all things. If you have a big house and lots of money, it is because God gave you the time, place, intelligence, strength, etc. to earn these things. So, do you say how great you are, or do you thank God for His grace upon your life? If you understand properly, it is God who must be given the credit. Paul asks them to think.

Life application: No matter what you have, it ultimately came from God. Illogical divisions which fail to recognize this are sinful. If we in the US boast about our strength, but fail to give God the credit for it, we sin. If those in Japan boast about their technological prowess, but fail to give God the credit for it, they sin. In all things, "To God be the glory."

*Lord, I have a great family - You chose who I would be born to. I have a super job - You gave me this particular ability. My wife is tops - You chose my time and place of life and she came as a result of that. The people counted as my friends like me because You made me the person that I am. How can I boast in a single thing? In the end, it all came from You. Thank You for every good and gracious blessing that has adorned my life. Amen.*

**You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you! 1 Corinthians 4:8**

Paul makes a sudden transition from his words concerning the boasting of the Corinthians. In this verse his pen shouts out the irony of a man who sees their true state. And he does so in a way which shows his breaking heart over their childish behavior (something he will note directly in 1 Corinthians 14:20). In this then, he makes three statements which ascend in their tone and force.

In each of these thoughts, the emphasis is on the completed action indicated by the adverb or verb. As they are analyzed, stressing those words shows his intent. "You are *already* full! You are *already* rich! You *have reigned* as kings." Likewise, he has changed his wording from the previous verses which were singular to plural here. He is redirecting from the personal singular to the impersonal group to correspond with the emotion of his words.

And so, he begins with "You are already full!" The idea here is one who is fully sated. The only other time this phrase is used is in Acts 27:38 –

"So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea."

Those in Corinth acted as if they had all they needed of the word and instruction in order to continue on in faith and practice, but Paul is just beginning. He will write another 12 chapters to them in this letter and a second letter comprising 13 chapters. Adding in his other letters and those of the other apostles, it is quite apparent that they were far less than full; they were lacking in the extreme. As he noted to them earlier, they were still babes, not yet able to move from milk to solid food (1 Corinthians 3:1, 2).

Continuing with his thoughts, he next says "You are already rich!" Not only did they assume they were full and had enough to sustain them, they felt so comfortable that they were rich. The idea of richness is that of having taken the food that they had consumed and processed it into grand knowledge and understanding. So much so that they could rest easy in what they possessed. This is similar to Jesus' words to those in Laodicea in Revelation 3:17 -

"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'— and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."

However, Paul's continued instruction to them will show that they are in fact poor beggars needing a handout of spiritual doctrine. And finally, he takes them to the highest level of irony by telling that "You have reigned as kings without us..."

The idea of a king is one who is elevated to the highest position of all. They sit at the throne and direct others rather than taking orders. In this, he is literally mocking them over their boastings because their doctrine was obtained from Cephas, Paul, and Apollos, to whom they had broken into warring divisions. So how could they be kings if they were claiming allegiance to mere messengers! Their thinking is utterly nonsensical and they have only made themselves look like fools in the royal court rather than the king on the throne.

With these thoughts now stated, he lessens his charge against them to show them grace by saying "and indeed I could wish that you did reign, that we might also reign with you." They have assumed that they were kings with crowns and he has charged them otherwise, but his hope is that they will in fact be there to reign with him. He spoke in a similar manner to those in Thessalonica when he wrote to them -

"For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy."  
1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20

Paul wasn't looking for divisions, but for a united heart and attitude directed solely toward Jesus Christ. He is where the prize is. He is where the throne is. He is where the crown of rejoicing is. Their attitude about Paul is that they had entered the kingdom apart from him when he in fact was the one who had planted what they now possessed.

Life application: Running ahead in spiritual development without understanding the basics inevitably leads to unsound theology, prideful demonstrations which harm the fellowship, and leaders being exalted in an unhealthy way. One cannot be sound in their theology without much study and a complete focus on Jesus Christ.

*Lord God, a thousand prayer requests I could lay before You this morning - friends with trials, troubles, tribulations, and temptations. But what I would pray for them above all else is that You would impress upon them the need to study Your word. If they make the effort, those other things will find their proper place; many will disappear completely. Your word is a treasure of immeasurable worth. Open hearts to long for it, minds to understand it, and lives to rejoice in it. To Your glory I pray. Amen.*

**For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.**

1 Corinthians 4:9

"For" begins this verse and explains this statement made in the previous verse - "I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!" Paul was rebuking those in Corinth for their attitude of feeling full, rich, and reigning as kings when no such thing was the case. In those comments he added that he wished it was in fact true because if it were, then the apostles would also be right there with them. However, it was painfully apparent that this wasn't the case.

Rather, Paul felt that they (meaning the apostles) had been on display by God in several notable ways -

- last - there is a reference to the custom of the times where those who were to fight in the amphitheaters of the Roman Empire were brought in last, after all the other spectacles were finished, in order to fight to the death. They were the condemned about to die. Which is exactly what he then refers to.
- as men condemned to death - those who first went into the amphitheaters may be orators or actors, and maybe animal shows as well. Only after their displays were finished would those who fought to the death be brought in. Those condemned to die had but one chance which would be to fight so well that they would be pardoned. In this they were made....
- a spectacle to the whole world - the Roman Empire was the known world at the time. Amphitheaters were found throughout its borders and the condemned would be paraded through the streets to any and all of them as a sign of power of the empire and as a gory sport for those who watched.

Like these people, Paul found that the apostles were in a similar situation. In fact, all but John were actually killed for their faith and even John suffered greatly. For the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they lived their difficult lives as a "spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men." In the sight of both those on earth and those in the heavenly realms, they went about their business of witnessing to the splendor of the gospel, unafraid of even death for the sake of Christ.

Life application: Far too many see Christianity as a means to wealth, prosperity, ease, and a fist-bumping relationship with the Creator. In this, they see their faults as easily dismissed and feel they possess a guarantee of protection and safety. But this is because of the prosperous circumstances which surround them. In most of the world and for most of history, Christians have been the brunt of hatred, torture, and death. Our

pleasant surroundings are bound to end. How firm will we be in our faith at that time? Be prepared to serve the Lord through any and every trial.

*Heavenly Father, I admit my life has been one of ease and prosperity. You have blessed me with so much in the time, place, and circumstance in which I find myself. But I know that those things may end someday. Should they not be found nearby, I would ask for nothing more than the strength to continue to praise You. If all else is taken from me, don't take this desire and ability away. With this I will be pleased. Amen.*

**We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored!** 1 Corinthians 4:10

Paul again introduces irony into his thoughts as he did in verse 8. He is showing the folly of their boasting and divisions within the church. He, and the other apostles, have done nothing but proclaim Christ, and they have done it with complete and undivided loyalty. But among those in this world (and even among those in the faith) they have been taken as fools, men of weakness, and those who are dishonored. His words are confirmed throughout Acts and the other epistles.

He begins with "We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ." In his statement, he speaks in an ironical tone in order to highlight his words. His message is one which proclaims only Christ; theirs is in divisions within the body. Later, in his second letter to the Corinthians, he will repeat this sentiment -

"I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing." 2 Corinthians 12:11

Two examples from Acts shows that this wasn't limited to those at Corinth, but was a thought which permeated society at large as well -

"Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, 'What does this babbling man want to say?'" 17:18

"Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" 26:24

In opposition to how he is perceived, he ironically states that "you are wise in Christ." In verse 8, he told them that they were already full, a way of saying they were full of knowledge when in fact they were mere babes in what they knew.

He then shows another irony about being mature in Christ when he says, "We *are* weak, but you *are* strong!" Again, in 2 Corinthians, he will explain very carefully how one who is truly weak in the ways of the world can actually be full of strength in Christ -

"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

-2 Corinthians 12:10

This statement came after his explanation that only when relying solely on the Lord can one be truly strong. The paradox is explained in Jesus' words to Him which said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Because he had to rely on the grace of Christ, he possessed the greatest of all strengths. The Corinthians had failed to understand this and were busy in the art of division of Christ rather than total dependence on Him.

Finally, Paul again introduces a note of irony by stating "You *are* distinguished, but we *are* dishonored!" The natural result of division is to feel distinguished. When someone argues with another about their favorite pastor being better than the other person's pastor, there is a smug feeling of self-confidence. "I follow Pastor Pillowfeathers and he is all I need. I cannot see why you even listen to Preacher Pointypants."

The attempt is to be distinguished among a crowd, just as Paul noted about the divisions in chapter 1. And yet, it harmed rather than helped; it destroyed rather than developed. But instead of divisions and mis-directions, Paul kept his eyes on one Prize and held fast to one Hope. And that is to be found in Jesus Christ and Him alone. His previous words to the Corinthians show this singleness of mind and attitude -

"For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." 1 Corinthians 2:2-4

Life application: What the world sees as foolish, weak, and dishonorable is the only true Source of sanity, strength, and honor. Jesus Christ is the Source of wisdom. Reliance on Him is the position of highest power and might. And there is no more exalted place for any person in heaven or on earth than to be found in Him, covered with His garments of righteousness. Eyes on Jesus! Hearts on Jesus! Minds on Jesus! Rest in Christ alone!

*Glorious and exalted Lord, the sweetest sound of the finest singing bird can't compare to the beautiful music of Your precious word. The most delicious taste of the choicest pastry is nothing compared to waking up to the savor of You in my life. And the fantastic sensation of the most delightful bubble bath compares not-in-the-least to knowing Your guiding hand is upon me. How wonderfully precious it is to be called, fed, and covered by You, my precious Lord. Amen.*

**To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. 1 Corinthians 4:11**

In his words in this verse, Paul now contrasts the ironical statements made from verses 8-10 concerning how the Corinthians perceived themselves with the reality of how the apostles actually lived. The contrast is all the more striking when considering that the apostles were the schooled; they were the leaders; they were those who saw Jesus, were instructed by Him, and were granted His personal commission.

He notes their sad state and says that it persists "to the present hour." This means that the poor living conditions of the apostles didn't end with the establishment of churches, as if there were a sudden influx of power, prestige, and money flowing to them. Instead, despite what we today consider the exalted status of those early men of God, they lived in a state of deprivation. Paul says "we," indicating the general lot of the apostles, were:

In "both hunger and thirst" - Those at Corinth went to church at someone's home or elsewhere, they ate bread together, fellowshiped, and then returned to their homes for their regular life of food and drink, along with all the other benefits of a home. At the same time, the apostles were generally moving from place to place to spread the news of Christ. There were no guarantees of lodging and a meal and so hunger and thirst were a normal and expected part of their travels.

"Poorly clothed" - Some translations here say "naked." The idea is one of clothing which is worn out from continual use, even to the point of being ragged. As travelers, they wouldn't carry along a suitcase with changes of clothing, but would simply wear the same clothes continuously. In this state, they would enter a synagogue or congregation and speak to those who were wearing their normal clothes or even a set of clothes set apart for special occasions. Instead of being the height of fashion when attending, they would be the poorest dressers of all. This state wouldn't be unknown to the Corinthians and they couldn't claim Paul was making this up. They had seen him and Peter already and knew his words were so. As it was true with him, there is no reason to believe any other apostles were dressed any better.

"Beaten" - This is a customary theme of the book of Acts. It seems everywhere Paul went, someone was pulling at him, whipping him, slapping him, stoning him, or otherwise attacking him in some other physically offensive way. Even the high priest of Israel had him so abused -

"And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth." Acts 23:2

"Homeless" - The apostles were persecuted to the point where they would have to leave home and family. And the very concept of having a stable home was contrary to the type of ministry they conducted. They wandered about at the direction of the Spirit to whatever place was selected to hear the good news of the Gospel. The thought of a regular job and home probably never crossed their minds as they set their faces to the task ahead of them each day.

But Paul understood that these things had nothing to do with a right relationship with God. If anything, they strengthened it. Paul's words of Romans 8:35 show that none of these things have any bearing on their intimate fellowship with Christ -

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Romans 8:35

In his follow up to this, in Romans 8:39, Paul says that none of these things, nor any other thing in heaven or on earth would be effective "to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

He will continue with his sobering words to those in Corinth, and thus to us, of the conditions they suffered for Christ. Let us not worry if the latte machine is broken at church Sunday. It is of little consequence.

Life application: Are you timid to go to church because you don't have clothing which is as good as the others who attend? Or, do you wish the dirty person in the pew next to you would take a shower and put on better clothes when coming to church? It is with certainty that either perspective is wrong. The apostles themselves were surely in far worse clothing. Would they be accepted into your church today?

*Old clothes and raggedy shoes on his feet  
Who let this person into our church today?*

*When we shake hands and when we greet  
To that dirty fellow, I've nothing to say*

*But didn't Christ die for Him too?  
Weren't the apostles dressed worse than he?  
Lord forgive my heart for making such a to-do  
I'm sorry for such thoughts Lord, please forgive me*

*Lord God, help me to look past the externals of those around me - their clothes, their possessions, even their culture, color, shape, or smell. Whatever keeps me from seeing them as a person created in Your image, take that away and replace it with eyes that see them as You see them. And then give me the words to say which will lead them to You. Thank You Lord, Amen.*

**And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; 1 Corinthians 4:12**

Paul continues to relay the plight of the apostles as they set forth to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Not only did they hunger and thirst, wear poor clothes, and receive ill treatment, they also didn't impose upon others who may have recognized their plight. Instead, he says they "labor, working with our own hands."

In Act 18, it is noted that Paul was a tent-maker and worked in that job while travelling in order to pay his way. In Acts 20, he even notes to those in Ephesus that he "provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me" (Acts 20:34). In other words, he not only worked to pay his own way, he paid for those he travelled with as well.

In similar words, he wrote in both his epistles to those in Thessalonica concerning his personal labors and the reason for it. From his first letter, we read this –

"So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God." 1 Thessalonians 2:8, 9

Despite this, and maybe partly because of it, he notes to the Corinthians that they were "reviled." As common laborers, they would have been looked down on by many whom they encountered. All they would see is a poorly dressed, smelly person who claimed to

have a message of salvation and freedom. What a paradox! What a contradiction! They would have been the brunt of jokes and taunting. And yet, despite being reviled, they in turn would "bless."

Following the words of the Lord to those He instructed, they showed that this was the way to win true and sincere converts to the message they preached. In Matthew 5:44, Jesus gave this admonition to His followers -

"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

This blessing of those who came against them was from the wisest Counselor of all and proved to be the true door to opening hearts and minds. But not only did they bless when reviled, Paul continues by saying that "being persecuted, we endure." The blessings were given and regardless of whether the persecutions continued or not, they endured. They kept blessing, they kept praising God, and they continued to proclaim their message.

In their persecution a greater reward was promised. Again, from Matthew 5, we learn of the blessing for those who are so treated –

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

-Matthew 5:11, 12

Although these words were spoken by Jesus, under the law to those under the law, they are confirmed in the apostle's actions and by the words of Peter to those he addressed in his first epistle -

"If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter." 1 Peter 4:14-16

Though there are no apostles today, there are missionaries who carry on this type of work in areas which have never before heard the good news. They have the words of the Lord, the examples of the apostles, and the history of many generations of

missionaries who have gone before them to be assured that this is the right approach to evangelizing those who have never heard the good news before. It is an awesome and blessed life that far too few consider in this world of ease and luxury.

Life application: Take time to pray for those who are in the mission field. They are doing a task which has continued on for 2000 years and which is the only hope of life and blessing for those they encounter.

*Lord, as I sit at my desk, enjoying the morning and surrounded by the familiar sounds and smells of life, I know that there are some who have given up on these things for a great and awesome cause. They may be lonely, hungry, dirty, or in peril, but they are sharing Your word to a world which so desperately needs it. Today, I pray for those faithful souls who have given up so much for the wondrous gospel message. Please be an ever-present comfort in their lives as they serve You. Amen.*

**...being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now. 1 Corinthians 4:13**

In the previous verse, Paul began a list of things which demonstrated the lowly and unappreciated state of the apostles. He continues that list in this verse to show the difficult circumstances they faced and yet how they handled them. He begins with "being defamed, we entreat."

In essence, they are cursed or held in great contempt by those they encounter. However, they turn the proverbial cheek and "entreat." Rather than biting back, they plead for grace between themselves and the offending party. Instead of cursing them and wishing their destruction, they look to reconciliation and hope of their salvation.

Paul then notes how they are actually considered in the eyes of their persecutors by saying, "We have been made as the filth of the world." The word translated as "filth" carries a technical sense to it. In essence, it concerns men who are set apart for death in order to provide expiation. A comparable concept, although death is not mandated in this instance, is found in the Old Testament book of Leviticus which reads -

*"Now the leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp." Leviticus 13:45, 46*

The unclean person is cast outside the camp in order to carry away the infection from it. This is the kind of thing that Paul is intimating in how he is treated. In addition to this he says he and the other apostles are considered "the offscouring of all things until now." The word here finds its roots in a verb which indicates rubbing, scraping, or shaving and so carries a similar idea to what he said about being filth. In order to be cleansed, they look at Paul and the others as something which needs to be first removed. If one were to think of cutting away hair which was full of chewing gum, the picture would be appropriate.

Life application: The apostles were willing to endure great verbal and even physical abuse for the sake of the gospel. A time is probably coming, and it may be prior to the rapture, where all who call on Christ will be faced with similar persecution. Be ready to follow Paul's example when the time comes.

*Lord God, the world is quickly degrading into perversion, wretchedness, and immense ungodliness. It's hard, very hard, to stand against these things without losing composure. Help me Lord to be strong in my moral convictions while still being graceful towards those who revile me. It's a tough stand to take, but if hearts can be changed by this, then it will be worth it. Be with me and guide me each step of the road. Amen.*

**I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.**

1 Corinthians 4:14

Now, in contrast to his words which he has thus far spoken - words of irony followed by words which included examples of personal hardship and trial, Paul removes the irony and explains why he gave those striking examples by saying, "I do not write these things to shame you..." His words were not intended to degrade them, but to effect a positive change in thinking (and thus in life) in them.

His words of irony weren't intended as a means of embarrassment, and his words about his sufferings weren't meant to exalt him above them as if they hadn't somehow earned a right through personal trial which he had. Instead, and even if it had this effect, they weren't intended to shame or taunt them. Rather, he had more lofty and righteous intents in mind. In contrast to this perception, he explains, "but as my beloved children I warn you."

He has been acting and speaking as a father would to his own children - for good, for edification, for building up and exhortation. Just as a father will use examples from his own life in an attempt to show the right path, so Paul was doing thus far. When a parent

tells of their past hardships, it is in anticipation that the child will listen and think, "Oh, I can avoid that by not doing what he did."

Whether it concerns financial mistakes, blunders during times of schooling, faults that came up in relationships, or whatever else, the parent uses personal experience, mixed with irony, to impart wisdom to his children. This is Paul's method here and it is with a noble and heartfelt intent for his children in Christ there at Corinth.

Life application: The Bible has many notes of instruction which include examples of failure as well as success. There is also irony directed to its audience. None of these are intended to shame us in the sense that we can never measure up. Rather, they are intended as a means of getting us to think on *how* we can measure up. And then God gives the answer - by putting our faith and trust in Jesus Christ and living according to His instruction. That instruction is found in the Bible; read your Bible.

*When I read Your word, O God, I see my own failings in the people I read about. Individuals and people groups alike all fail You again and again as I read its pages, and yet, you tenderly care for them and work to bring about a positive change in them. And then You sent Jesus who never failed. He is what all of those other trials, troubles, and shortcomings are intended to show me... even though I am like that, I can trust in the One who never fails. I can be found within Him! And then I can live for You through Him. What a marvelous God You are, to send us Jesus! Thank You and Amen.*

**For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.**

1 Corinthians 4:15

"For" is given based on the warning of the previous verse - "I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you." The reason for the warning then was that "though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, you do not have many fathers." A father will look after his children in ways that an instructor won't. A good example to understand this is to see the only other times that the term for "instructors" which is paidagōgous (a pedagogue) is used. In Galatians 3:24, 25, Paul uses the term twice when referring to the law -

"Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."

A pedagogue was a slave who conducted children to school and looked over the care of their schooling. In a broader sense, it is used of teachers or instructors of any general kind. This is what the law was intended to be. It was meant to lead us to the knowledge that we need more than just formal schooling, but a relationship and personal care. This is what Jesus provides us.

Paul is using this same idea in a metaphorical way about himself. Many teachers and instructors had come to Corinth, but only Paul could claim "for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." He had been the one to originally bring them the message of Christ and to plant the church at Corinth. As a father begets children, he had begotten them in Christ through his preaching ministry. And so, between them in this there was a bond similar to a father for a son. He felt the same way about Onesimus when writing to his friend Philemon -

"I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten *while* in my chains..." Philemon 1:10

Life application: Are you still familiar with the person who led you to Christ? If so, take time to write them a note or give them a call and tell them how your walk is going. There is a special bond in this that deserves an extra moment of your time. If you have lost contact with that person, lift them up in prayer today to your heavenly Father who knows exactly who they are and how to reward them.

*Lord Jesus, I thank You for the person who took the time to tell me about You. The greatest moment of my life took place because of a caring heart and a few simple words. Please look after that precious soul and bless them for their efforts. And Lord, help me to step forward and to share my faith with others as well. To Your glory I pray this. Amen.*

**Therefore I urge you, imitate me.** 1 Corinthians 4:16

Paul has been speaking of divisions within the church for four chapters. Such divisions can only lead to a breakdown in harmony, infighting, and other trials. Eventually, they can ruin or completely divide a church. So, one might think that Paul is actually causing a new division by his words in the previous verse (that he is a father to them) and in this verse by asking them to imitate him. Is he trying to greedily have the church follow him and not Apollos?

The answer is no. His statement that he is a father to them implies that they are children to him. A father will look out for good, not evil, when guiding his children. And a father

will have his own example to follow. In the case of Paul, he states his example explicitly in 1 Corinthians 11:1 by again instructing them to imitate him, while explaining why -

"Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ."

Paul's example is Christ. If this is so, then asking them to imitate him is, in effect, simply learning the greater example of Christ. This is a common theme of Paul, often implied, often explicit. In Philippians 3:17, he makes it explicit again -

"Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern."

As another example, found in Ephesians 5:1 & 2, he will actually go around himself and ask them to directly imitate God -

"Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma."

The reason for speaking this way to the Ephesians as opposed to how he speaks to the Corinthians ("imitate God" rather than "imitate me") is that the Corinthians were carnal and not yet grounded in how to imitate God. If he were to have told them to "imitate God" as he did to those at Ephesus, they would have had nothing substantial on which to accomplish this admonition. One must first learn what God expects before imitating Him. As Paul knew what God expected, they could follow him and thus learn how to imitate God.

Paul's words are logical, clear, and demonstrate the wisdom which God granted him in order to handle every situation in the most effective way.

Life application: How important it is for instructors, teachers, and pastors to understand what God expects *before* teaching others. Without being God-like in their behavior, those who are instructed by them will most likely never truly learn how to imitate God.

*Lord God, give me the wise sense to act in accord with Your will and the instruction You have given us in the Bible so that I can turn around and be a proper example to those around me. If their impression of You is faulty because of me, then I have failed You. May it not be so! But rather, keep me on that straight path of Christ, never deviating from what You would desire for me in the sight of others. Amen.*

**For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.**  
1 Corinthians 4:17

"For this reason" here will explain Paul's previous statement which said, "Therefore I urge you, imitate me." As it was noted, Paul wasn't trying to cause a greater division by having those at Corinth imitate him over some other apostle. Rather, he was asking them to imitate him because he was an imitator of Christ, something they lacked and wouldn't get right unless they had a proper example.

In support of that reason, he told them he has "sent Timothy to you." Timothy was Paul's protégé and would fill the need of the Corinthians on Paul's behalf. This Timothy, Paul states, "is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord." Like those in Corinth whom Paul called his "beloved children" in verse 14, Timothy was also. Because Paul looked at all of them as sons, he felt that Timothy would be a great help in understanding what he was conveying. However, later in this letter, it still seems unsure if Timothy would actually make it to Corinth or not because he uses the word "if" concerning his travels –

"And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also *do*. Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren." 1 Corinthians 16:10, 11

Should he make it as planned, Paul says that he "will remind you of my ways in Christ." In other words, we can look at his petition to "imitate me" from verse 16 as a sound request because of his "ways in Christ." Paul wasn't trying to misdirect the Corinthians, he was trying to properly direct them. With Timothy confirming this, they could be certain that they were imitating that which was proper and their faith wouldn't be misdirected.

In fact, their doctrine and practice would be in a manner harmonious with all of the churches which had been established because Paul claimed that his teaching was the same "as I teach everywhere in every church." He was consistent in his proclamation of Christ, consistent in his doctrine, and determined to follow up to ensure that these things continued properly.

How nice it would be today if all seminaries taught a proper message of Christ and then occasionally stopped by to check up on the doctrine of their graduates! What we fail to do, Paul carefully and meticulously accomplished.

Life application: Discipleship is an immensely important aspect of the faith. Leading people to Christ is only the beginning of a life-long journey of discovery. If you have the necessary training to teach others what is right and sound about Christ, make an effort to impart that to those who are less informed. Paul deemed this immensely important and so should we.

*My Precious Lord, You have led me all the days of my life, even when I didn't know You were there. You've tended to my needs, cared for my heart, and directed my every step toward a good end. Those times I've erred have been used to mold me. They were times I can learn from and teach to others so they can avoid the same pitfalls. Help me to use my time wisely, assisting in this manner, correcting those who need support, and continuing to grow in You as I go. Thank You for hearing my prayer. Amen.*

**Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you.** 1 Corinthians 4:18

In the previous verse, Paul noted that he was sending Timothy to those in Corinth for a reminder of his consistent message which he teaches everywhere he goes. Having said this, he already knows that "some are puffed up." The idea, as noted previously, is that of pride. When yeast is put into dough, it causes the bread to rise, thus picturing being prideful, full of boasting, or arrogant. And some translations do use the term "arrogant," but by doing this, the imagery is lost. It will be more especially the case as Paul will use the example of dough puffing up in chapter 5.

He then notes the reason for some being puffed up by saying it is "as though I were not coming to you." Those who were involved in these divisions and who took the side of Apollos would certainly say, "See, he's afraid to come himself and so he's sending Timothy instead of coming personally." It would then be a poke in the eye to those who claimed Paul was their man. And thus, the divisions would continue. This is why he has preempted them in his letter with this statement. He in fact has plans already to come to Corinth, but there were also other things on his plate before he could. This will be explained to them at the end of the letter in chapter 16 -

"Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia). And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits. But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries." 1 Corinthians 16:5-9

Life application: An effective way of dispelling problems is to think in advance what other issues may arise and then preempt them with words of surety about the resolution to those issues. In doing this, it may completely alleviate the necessity to fix a problem that otherwise could have been avoided.

*Wonderful Creator - my Lord and my God. Thank You for the unimaginable beauty You've given to us in this world - from sandy beaches and high mountain peaks, to trees of immense wonder and animals with such splendid diversity. There are a thousand shades of color when I look in any direction and there are tastes which delight my tongue. The smells of nature often overwhelm me with joy. Sometimes, it's more than I can contemplate. Thank You for every wonderful blessing of life. Amen.*

**But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. 1 Corinthians 4:19**

"But" is used to contrast his previous words saying "as though I were not coming to you." He had no fear of discharging his duties as an apostle and he had no timidity in facing those who looked down on him. He intended to come and he eventually did make it back to Corinth. This occurred shortly after writing his second letter to them. However, at the time of writing, the future was unknown to him and so he uses a common term of the apostles, "If the Lord wills."

Outside of the promises of the Lord, there can be no certainty in the future, not even the near future. James explains our utter dependence on God and His hand of providence quite well -

"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you *ought* to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.' But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil." James 4:13-16

This same attitude of looking to God's will, even for the immediate future, is used elsewhere by the apostles and it shows that they were willing to allow the Spirit to lead them and they had resigned their ultimate end to the capable hands of the Lord. And so, "if the Lord wills" that Paul return to Corinth then at that time he indicates, "I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power."

This final portion of the verse tells us that Paul would be willing to listen to the words of the various factions in Corinth, particularly the leaders of the divisions, and he would be able to tell which were merely puffed up orators without a firm grounding in the word as was given, and those who had considered the power of the gospel, the truth of Scripture, and the work of Jesus Christ and had presented it carefully. Those who did so were those filled with the power of the word, the power of the Spirit, and the power of proper influence over the flock.

Life application: Running ahead, without properly handling God's word, has led to a breakdown in correct theology throughout the Christian world. Unfortunately, it is the flock who suffers the most. People have jobs, families, and responsibilities which consume their time. Therefore, their instruction comes not from self-studies, but from those who are supposed to be trained already. Extreme care and tender love and respect for the word of God is of paramount importance for the one who would be a teacher of it.

*Heavenly Father, I look to the cross and see love. How can such love exist that You would send Your Son to die in my stead? Of what value is man that You look upon him in this way? Though I don't understand it, I receive it in all its glory. My Substitute in punishment, my Hope in the resurrection, and my Desire for all eternity - my Lord and Savior; my Jesus! Thank You for my Jesus. Amen.*

**For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. 1 Corinthians 4:20**

"For" refers directly back to what was just stated about Paul's coming to Corinth and his discernment of the power rather than in puffed up words. Those who were puffed up were divisive and they were filled with words without substance. On the contrary, Paul was filled with the power of the Spirit and the ability to affect real change in the lives around him.

Of course, he did this with the miraculous - healings and the like, but more than that, he did it by the power of the words he spoke. The words of the gospel, both then and now, effect real change in those who hear them. Drunkards turn into solid citizens, prostitutes become princesses, and the proud turn and humble themselves before God. There is great power in the words of the gospel, words to which the puffed up boastings of the world can never attain because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.

This then is "the kingdom of God." It is not an earthly kingdom, but a spiritual one. It is a group of called-out believers who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. Someday, this kingdom will be physical as Christ sits on His throne and rules among His people, but at this time, it is a kingdom of faith in Him and in the surety of God's word.

Life application: There is power in the gospel message, but the power is of no use if it isn't shared. The world is quickly getting darker as the church age comes to its close. Before that terrible Day which will fall upon all the unrepentant, isn't it right that we open our mouths and share? Go forth in the power of the gospel!

*Heavenly Father, there is no power like that of the gospel. Even the most debased sinner can have a change of heart and direction through the saving message of Christ. What is perceived of by the world as bondage is actually the greatest freedom of all. To be found in Him, pardoned from a life of sin and covered by the blood of Christ is to be heaven bound and eternally secure. Thank You for allowing me to share such awesome and glorious power! Amen.*

**What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness? 1 Corinthians 4:21**

After his many comments of chapter 4, which are tied in completely with the preceding chapters concerning "divisions" within the church, Paul asks in a forthright manner, "What do you want?" In essence, "The choice is up to you when I come and the results will be realized upon my arrival." And the choices are given:

"Shall I come to you with a rod?" Is discipline necessary when I arrive? The idea of a using rod is for one who needs correction and redirection. If it needs to be used in a harsh way, so be it. A rod can be employed for something as simple as redirecting the head of a lamb to move where the shepherd desires all the way to smashing one's enemies with brutal force. "Is the rod what you wish?"

Or,

"Shall I come to you in love and a spirit of gentleness?" Paul writes about love later in 1 Corinthians 13 in a way that shows what he means. The demonstration of love is one which "does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:5, 6). Along with this would naturally come "a spirit of gentleness." There would be no rod of correction,

but gentle words of direction, guidance, and a harmonious spirit. "Would you prefer love and gentleness?"

Paul will continue to write in this manner in his second letter to them. In 2 Corinthians 10:2, he will tell them, "But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh."

And again in 2 Corinthians 13:10 he will be direct in his words to show that he is serious about what he has said -

"Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction."

Paul's direction was always for edification, not destruction. But he also knew that a strong rod of correction may be needed. It must have broken his heart to have to speak in the manner he did, but in the end, strong words are occasionally needed for keeping the body united and working toward the common goal of spreading the good news in truth and in accord with the word.

Life application: Why should we butt our heads against the word of God? If Paul was set to correct those who were disobedient with a rod, how much more do we deserve correction - we who have the whole counsel of God in written format? Let us spend our time wisely, learning, loving, cherishing, and adhering to God's precious word.

*How precious is Your word to me O God!  
More precious than oil upon my head  
It is a light to my feet and a lamp for where I trod  
Rather to have Your word, than all the world's gold instead*

*Your word I have hidden in my heart  
That I might not sin against You  
Help me from this day forward to start  
Pursuing Your word, even till my days are through*

*Heavenly Father, the minute care You have shown in the giving of Your word demonstrates how absolutely important it is to You. How can I spend my days playing, fiddling, and knitting when Your word sits unattended? Give me the wisdom to heed! To*

*read! To learn! and To share! Give me this and in using it, I know with me You will be pleased. Thank You for Your word! Amen.*

## CHAPTER 5

**It is actually reported *that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife!* 1 Corinthians 5:1**

At the end of the previous chapter, Paul noted those who were "puffed up" in their conduct. To close out the chapter he said, "What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" This sets the tone for chapter 5 which begins with words that are hard to imagine in any society at any time.

"It is actually reported..." indicates that Paul received word about the matter. But it also indicates that it is a known matter; something not hidden from the outside world. It was probably Chloe who reported this as she was the source of Paul's writing in the first place as was previously seen in chapter 1 -

"For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's *household*, that there are contentions among you." 1 Corinthians 1:11

"That there is sexual immorality among you..." This is the reason for Paul's mentioning of "a rod" as noted above. This is something which is intolerable within the body and which needs to be addressed. Bringing this up here in his epistle, which is recorded in the Bible, indicates that it is an offense for all ages, not something merely cultural within the area of Corinth. The implication then at this point, and throughout the rest of the New Testament, is that sexual immorality is not to be practiced or excused.

But there is more. This wasn't just a case of sexual immorality which occurred through momentary passions. Instead, it was a deliberate act and one which was considered deplorable in the society at that or any time. This can be discerned from the words "and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles..." What was being practiced was reprehensible even among the Gentiles. This wasn't a matter of merely reinserting the law of Moses (see Leviticus 18:8). Rather, it was a matter which is written on the conscience of all people (see Romans 1:28-32).

Because of the offending nature of the act, and because even the Gentiles knew the utter impropriety of the matter, how shameful it was for someone in the church to conduct his affairs in such a way. And more - how shameful it was that the church knew about it and had done nothing to correct it (as will be seen in the verses ahead).

And the offence was "that a man has his father's wife!" This was forbidden by the Law of Moses, which arguably is set aside in Christ, but it was an act which was known to be wrong by all people instinctively. Further, it violated the edict issued by the council in Jerusalem which is recorded in Acts 15 and which stated -

"We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well." Acts 15:27-29

Life application: Doctrine for the Church Age has been given by Paul for our learning, guidance, adherence, and for our good. What is written there has been given for the sake of the church as well as individuals within the church. To flagrantly ignore mandates and exhortations which are prescriptive in nature can only cause harm to both. When one acts in such a manner, they are bringing disgrace upon the name of Jesus Christ. Be firm in your convictions that you will neither act in such a manner, nor allow it to be tolerated in your church.

*Lord God, surely Your word has been given to us for our good and for the health of the entire body of saints. Help me to be firm in my convictions that I will never act in a manner contrary to what the Spirit has revealed in the pages of the Bible. And Lord, help me to also be firm in handling such matters which may arise in the church I attend as well. Timidity can only lead to tolerance; tolerance to disobedience; and disobedience to shame. Give me the strength to stand firm on Your precious word. Amen.*

**And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. 1 Corinthians 5:2**

Paul in this verse is referring to the sexual immorality which exists within the church from the previous verse. He now begins with "and" which is used to demonstrate the absurdity of the state of things within their ranks. In essence he says, "You act in this manner, but shouldn't it rather be the opposite!"

And the words are, "And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned." Instead of their "puffed up" attitude which was mentioned in 4:19, they should be in a state of mourning and anguish over what is occurring right there among them. To be fair, they could be "puffed up" in one of two ways.

They were puffed up and filled with conceit and pride *despite* the wickedness which was among them, or

They were puffed up and filled with conceit *because* of the wickedness which was among them.

The first is probably the true case. They were acting arrogantly and dividing over petty allegiances even though there were greater issues which needed to be considered. However, the wickedness of the heart (Jeremiah 17:9) is never to be dismissed, even among a group, and so it could be that despite being divided over which leader was best, they were united in an antinomian attitude towards sin; accepting that which was forbidden.

Which is the case cannot be determined, but both show a negligence towards proper conduct within the church. Instead of accepting how things were with this person, Paul notes "that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you." Instead of fellowshiping with such a person, they should have already excommunicated him. But rather than facing the problem from this perspective, they have either avoided it or openly condoned it. Paul shows them that this is the wrong attitude; mourning, not acceptance, was needed.

Life application: It sure is easy to overlook things which might otherwise cause us to have to act in a manner which seems "judgmental" or "intolerant." However, in such cases, it is not we who actually decide the course of action to take, it is God who has given His word for our Christian walk. If we can remember this, then we will remember that we are honoring Him by adhering to His word.

*Lord God, Your word mandates certain actions are to be taken to keep the church pure. Too often we overlook faults which are to be censured, but we do this in disobedience to what You have instructed, thus two wrongs exist. Help us to think clearly on the sanctity of Your word, to adhere to its admonitions, and to be resolute in standing on its principles. In this, I know You will be glorified. Amen.*

**For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. 1 Corinthians 5:3**

In this verse, Paul writes in broken thoughts as if he were mourning over his words and contemplating each one carefully, even through tears of sadness. Each is a separate heartfelt consideration of what must occur in order for the situation to be resolved.

Beginning with "For I indeed..." He is stressing the importance of the issue which is being considered in connection with the previous words "that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you."

"As absent in body but present in spirit" is a way of saying that his physical absence from the congregation doesn't negate his spiritual tie to them. He is, in his heart and affections, right there worshipping with them. He is attuned to their situation, feeling their emotions, and sharing in their highs and lows. In this case, it is as a father with his beloved children discussing a matter which will ultimately adversely affect them unless they get it resolved.

In this he shares that [I] "have already judged (as though I were present) ..." In his deliberations over the matter, which began the moment that they were relayed to him, and probably through much prayer and reflection, he came to a judgment as to what needed to be done. However, he isn't present and so he can only relay his judgment from afar. The broken sentences then are explained in this. He is conveying emotion and a profound determination through them. We do this with exclamation points and other punctuation which was lacking in the Greek. Therefore, sentence structure was important in this manner.

And Paul's judgment is against, "him who has so done this deed." The matter of sexual immorality needed to be handled and it didn't matter who it was. He has been singled out in Paul's letter indirectly and it is now incumbent on those around that person to take the necessary action that Paul will recommend in the coming verses.

Life application: The reason why so many churches have no moral base is because of compromise over moral issues. Friendships arise that may preclude harsh judgment. Wealthy donors may have their transgressions overlooked because of the supposed need for their money. The same may be true with the politically connected. Eventually, such examples will become the standard. When this occurs, the church is doomed. Jesus has been left outside the door for the sake of tolerance and compromise. The lampstand will be removed and Judgment Day will be a day of regret, not rejoicing.

*Lord God, Your word presents standards which are expected to be maintained, but too often it's easier to ignore those things than to confront the difficult issues which arise in a church. Help each of us to think clearly on this and to realize that Your word is more important than our sense of tolerance or moral compromise. Grant us willing hearts to be obedient, even when it is so difficult to take such steps. Amen.*

**In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... 1 Corinthians 5:4**

This verse introduces the sentence which Paul recommends to be executed on the offender he has been speaking about since verse 1. The next verse will be the pronouncement of the sentence. His words give us insights into the apostolic authority and also its limitations. Although there are no true apostles today, we can discern proper church discipline from his words.

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" indicates the ultimate authority of church matters. It is the Lord's church and He is the head of it. When actions of this nature are taken, they are done so in His name. No other authority would make sense. Stating that a judgment is made in the name of the pope would be to supplant the authority of Christ Himself. That, or any other such title of power, would be less than the ultimate authority and thus no true authority at all.

"When you are gathered together" indicates that the church is to be kept informed of such decisions and actions and, although not necessarily involved directly in the decision, they are to be witnesses of it. Elsewhere, the authority of elders is noted and explained. They have a proper position within the church and they have been selected to make the final judgments.

This goes all the way back to the first such established church recording which is the Council in Jerusalem in Acts 15. There at that meeting, the apostles were gathered and they spoke. However, the final decision was rendered not by them, but by James, the Lord's brother, who wasn't even a named apostle. As its leader, it was his judgment which was accepted and acted upon.

Paul then notes, "along with my spirit." This is like saying, "This is my decision on the matter. Act on it as if I were there speaking at this council." Those in the church had the right to reject his words, but they would be rejecting God's appointed counselor if they did. Now his words, and those of the other apostles chosen to write portions of the Bible, are recorded for us. We should always go to the Bible for our instruction and then render our decisions based on it.

To reject it would be comparable to those in Corinth rejecting Paul's words here. It would be a decision not rendered according to the will of Jesus Christ and thus it would be devoid of "the power of our Lord Jesus Christ." This final section of the verse shows that this "power" was in fact granted to Paul for such matters. Rejecting his

determination (which they could do) would be to reject the determination of Christ Himself. We stand in the same position now because God's word is complete and ready for our use in such matters.

Today, rather than the apostles, we have the Bible which was given under divine inspiration for our guidance in all matters. From this source, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are to allow our elders to render their decisions concerning such related church matters.

Life application: What authority is your church relying upon for their doctrine, practice, and judgments? If it is claimed to be "Holy Ghost power," then it had better line up with what the Bible states (because the Bible was given under inspiration of the Holy Ghost) or it isn't "Holy Ghost Power." If it is claimed to be formal Council decisions of the past or some type of catechisms, then they need to line up with the Bible as well. If they don't, then there is no true power from the Lord in them. No matter what authority is claimed, it must be in accord with the words of Scripture or it is false authority for such matters.

*Thank You Lord for the words of Scripture. They have been given under divine inspiration and so I know that I can go to them for all matters of life, faith, and practice. You have spoken, and although the Bible is large, I know that it is the best place for me to go to know Your heart, intent, and plan for me. Thank You for the Bible, Your superior word. Amen.*

**...deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 1 Corinthians 5:5**

In Christianity, doctrine is often thought of as an obstacle to a right relationship with the Lord. Instead, emotions rule theology and it rules the hearts of worshippers to the exclusion of doctrine. This only leads to ineffective Christianity, unsteadiness in a right walk with the Lord, and eventually churches becoming merely social gatherings with no true grounding in what it means to be "Christian."

However, doctrine is actually of paramount importance as we can learn from the verse under consideration. Paul has established doctrine on several levels here. First, he has shown what is right and proper to do in the case of such a heinous sin as was being committed within the church. The reasons for taking this action are long and detailed, but above all, it was to keep purity within the faith, a right perception of Jesus Christ to those within and without the faith, and to keep the church from devolving into a pattern

of abuse which would eventually mean its right to even be called a "church" would be removed by the Lord (see Revelation 2:5).

Besides these and other considerations, there is another point of doctrine which can be discerned from this verse, especially when taken in context with other such verses within Paul's writings. It is the doctrine of "eternal salvation." Christians debate whether one can "lose" their salvation or not. The debate is unnecessary if one understands the nature of God and properly handles the word of God. The answer is "no."

If one believes in Christ, they are sealed with the Holy Spirit at that moment. This is a deposit (also called a guarantee) of their new state. Ephesians 1:13, 14 (among other verses) shows this is so. As God cannot err, and as God has placed His seal upon the believer, then the sealing (and thus the salvation) must be eternal in nature.

This is confirmed by verses such as 1 Corinthians 5:5. In this verse, Paul is speaking to the body of believers about a believer. In his direct way of handling the case before him, he makes his judgment which he anticipates they will obediently follow by stating for them to "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh."

Satan is the ruler of this world, but he is defeated before Christ. He has no power over a believer, but can only afflict them as they continue in their earthly walk. The choice is each believer's as to whether they will follow the flesh or follow the leading of the Spirit and it is a constant battle (see Romans 7:13-25). This believer had decided to follow the flesh. Paul instructs them to deliver him over completely to the flesh then by delivering him to Satan.

If one is an alcoholic and comes to Christ, they are saved. The deal is done and they have moved from Adam to Christ. However, if they fall back on their old ways, they will eventually have their flesh destroyed through alcohol. The same is true with drugs, sexual immorality, or any other such carnal sin which affects the flesh of the believer. Whatever perversion lays hold of a believer, the result will be exactly the same as a non-believer; they will eventually have their flesh destroyed by that sin.

However, there is a difference between the two. In the case of the non-believer, they were never united to God spiritually by calling on Christ and their spirit will be lost for all eternity. On the other hand, a believer remains saved regardless of whether they return to earthly lusts or not. The spiritual connection has been guaranteed by God (again, see Ephesians 1:13, 14) and it remains for eternity. For such a person, his flesh will be destroyed. He will suffer all the hardships of any other person following that path.

But Paul says there is a difference in his final end when he completes his thought. Instead, he is handed over to Satan so that "his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Though his rewards will be lost (see 1 Corinthians 3:12-15), though his body may be tormented and afflicted (1 Corinthians 5:5), and though he will suffer much in this life (see 1 Timothy 1:18-20), he still retains the promise of God; the surety of the sealing of the Spirit unto eternal life.

In this, and for a jillion other reasons, doctrine does matter. To believe otherwise concerning this issue is to believe that God will not keep His promises. Instead, our salvation would be up to us, not Him. Further, the one to decide such "eternal" matters would then be the pastor or preacher who teaches this aberrant doctrine in the first place. Talk about bondage! If your position is based on your faults and those faults are decided by another human, then these two things have happened -

The human teacher has elevated himself to an untouchable level and has obtained complete control over the actions (which are still earthly and failing) of those under him. He becomes the ruler of the prize and the one to decide any and every facet of the spiritual life of those under him.

The person who so believes this concept has subordinated themselves not to Christ, but to the decisions of another fallen soul. They now place their trust in the decisions of a lesser, not the Greater. And this is exactly what Paul has been speaking about for four full chapters - unhealthy divisions!

It is the word of God which establishes our doctrine, nothing more, nothing less. Be approved, stand approved, and hold fast to the truth of the message God has given.

Life application: Once saved means always saved. Jesus Christ doesn't make mistakes.

*Well Lord, despite what any other person says, I will trust Your word in all matters of life, faith, and practice. Teachers can be as wrong as they desire and for whatever personal reason they choose, but I will hold to Your word alone. When a dispute arises, I will check the context; when a disagreement comes up, I will pray to You for clarity; and when I have finished my evaluation, I will place myself and my doctrine in Your capable hands. Guide me, be my Teacher through Your word, and keep me from unsound theology. This is my prayer. I desire to be pleasing to You above all else. Amen.*

**Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 1 Corinthians 5:6**

The words "your glorying" indicates boasting. It refers back to the words he used in 1 Corinthians 4:19 -

"But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power."

As noted then, this was a metaphor of bread being puffed up from the use of yeast. Throughout the Bible this is seen as a picture of sin, and specifically in this case, pride. The symbolism permeates the pages of Scripture and it all points to sin in our lives. In contrast is Jesus who knew no sin and thus He is pictured by unleavened bread, such as that used at the Passover. The boasting of the Corinthians was, in picture and in reality, un-Christlike. Paul says that it "is not good."

In order for them to understand, he reverts back to that Old Testament symbolism and shows them exactly what he means by saying, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" That is all it takes, just a little pinch of yeast will permeate the entire lump of dough. It, like sin in a person, will affect everything around it. In other words, the sin in the man whom Paul recommended to be expelled, if not expelled, will affect the whole congregation.

Jesus explained this to His own apostles during His ministry, trying to get them to realize that adding to the word of God with man-instituted traditions could only infect the purity of the word of God in our lives. In Matthew 16:6, He said this to them -

"Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees."

And in his consistent way of writing, Paul will use the same terminology when speaking to the Galatians about their attempts to reintroduce the law into their church-age theology (such as the rite of circumcision). Such actions merely set aside the grace of Christ that they had received and made them debtors to the whole law. Here are his words from Galatians 5:9 –

"A little leaven leavens the whole lump."

To see how potent the true effects of yeast are, we can look at the process of making San Francisco sourdough bread. It is the most famous sourdough bread made in the U.S.

today; probably in the whole world. Unlike sourdough which is made in other areas of the country, what San Francisco produces has remained in continuous production for nearly 150 years. Some bakeries, for example the Boudin Bakery, are able to trace their starters back to California's territorial period.

A starter is a piece of the bread dough which is cut off and left out of the baking process. The next day, when they make the new batch of dough, they throw in the piece from the previous day – the starter. This piece of dough contains the yeast for the entire batch of new dough. In the case of Boudin Bakery, they have used the same initial yeast, without any addition, for over 150 years, day by day. Cut off a piece, save it for tomorrow. Cut off a piece, save it for tomorrow. Cut off a piece... this one's for tomorrow.

One pinch of yeast, from over 150 years ago, still affects dough in the exact same way. Now think of this in the context of the church. Bad doctrine, introduced by the heretic Joseph Smith (Mormonism) has affected the entire group known as the Mormons to such an extent that they cannot be called "Christians" in any true sense. Likewise, the yeast of "tradition" has crept into almost every major denomination in Christianity. The very thing that Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for permeates almost the entire spectrum of the faith in varying degrees. Such is the nature of just a little bit of yeast.

Life application: Our doctrine is to be based on the word of God. Anything which is practiced in a church which doesn't adhere to the word of God is to be rejected. Paul's warning to the Corinthians is a principle which must be held onto even now.

*Lord, You are so good to me. I praise You for Your faithfulness, even when I fail. Thank You for Your kind hand of mercy upon me. I love You, I praise You, I cherish Your presence in my life. Amen.*

**Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. 1 Corinthians 5:7**

Contained within the New Testament are extraordinary hints of the fulfillment of Old Testament shadows and pictures of Christ. This verse contains two of them which could be overlooked so easily and yet they are immensely deep in their theological significance. In chapter 23 of Leviticus, there is a list of the Feasts of the Lord. In order, they are:

– Sabbath

- Passover
- Unleavened Bread
- Firstfruits (Bikkurim)
- Weeks (Shavuot/Pentecost)
- Trumpets (Yom Teruah)
- Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)
- Tabernacles (Sukkoth)

Paul notes in Colossians 2:16, 17 that these find their fulfillment in Christ -

"So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ."

As a validation of this, each and every one of them is found to be fulfilled in His work during His first advent. This verse from 1 Corinthians gives us verification that two of them are fulfilled - Passover and Unleavened Bread. A detailed study of the other six feasts will demonstrate their fulfillment as well. Christ is the focus of all of Scripture. And all of Scripture testifies to His work.

Understanding this, we can now look at Paul's words in how they pertain to the context of his surrounding thoughts. He begins by saying "therefore." It is a term which asks us to contemplate what has thus far been said. In the previous verse, he said "a little leaven leavens the whole lump." In order to ensure that the church isn't tainted with bad doctrine or sinful practice, he now builds on that by saying "purge out the old leaven." This is exactly what the Israelites were told to do at the Passover each year -

"For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread." Exodus 12:19, 20

The Old Testament body was given as physical examples which present spiritual truths. Leaven, picturing sin, is to be removed. This was to be practiced for the entire week of Unleavened Bread. The picture is thus fulfilled in Christ who was sinless and now we, who are in Him, are to purge out the leaven of sin in our lives so, as Paul says, "that you may be a new lump." And he then explains why by saying, "since you truly are unleavened."

In Christ, we are deemed as "sinless." We are declared "not guilty" despite the reality of our fallen state. Paul explains this in 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19 -

"Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

Though we are still fallen and we still sin, those sins are not imputed because of Christ. But Paul would go further and ask us to live in the manner which is reflected by our status. We are to purge out the old leaven and to be a new lump. Along with Unleavened Bread, the symbolism from the Passover also finds its true fulfillment in Jesus Christ. This is noted as Paul continues by saying, "For indeed Christ our Passover, was sacrificed for us."

The celebration of these two feasts, Passover and Unleavened Bread were mere shadows of the greater work of Christ. In Him we find the fulfillment of all types and pictures from the Old Testament, including the fulfillment of all of the Feasts of the Lord.

Life application: Jesus claimed that all Scripture testifies to Him. By studying our Bible, we find this is true. He is the entire focus of the word of God. Be sure to read the Bible through the lens of Christ. When you do, it all makes sense.

*Lord God, it is so wonderful to see that every story in the Bible points to the work of Jesus Christ. Every feast, every miracle, every noted person is used to show us pictures of Him. If You have used real people and real events to show us His work, then I know it is our duty and honor to search Him out in them. Open my eyes to see the wondrous beauty of Christ hidden as apples of gold in settings of silver. Thank You for the precious word which shows Jesus to me. Amen.*

**Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.** 1 Corinthians 5:8

As was noted in the previous verse, the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread of the Old Testament pictured, or foreshadowed, the work of Christ. Paul claims their fulfillment is found in Him. As these were "Feasts of the Lord" (meaning Jehovah), the connection is obvious - Jesus Christ is Jehovah Incarnate. How people miss this is rather remarkable!

Because their fulfillment is found in Him and because we are "in Christ," Paul says, "Therefore..." The coming words explain our duties based on our position in Him. And what does he detail for us then? He says, "Let us keep the feast." In other words, we could say "because Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us, let us keep the rest of the Feast of Unleavened Bread." It is a metaphor asking us to consider our position in Him, the sinless Lamb of God.

Christ is the fulfillment of the Passover. Because of His shed blood, God has "passed over" us and we are now found in Him. Because we are in Him, we should "keep the feast, not with old leaven." What we once were and the way we once acted are no longer appropriate ways of conducting ourselves. If Christ had to die to redeem us, then there must have been a need for Him to die to redeem us! Why would we continue in a life that necessitated such an action. That old life consisted of "the leaven of malice and wickedness."

This is certainly a reference to what necessitated his words in the first place - the man caught up in sexual immorality who is noted in verses 1-5 is being used as an example of such a debased life and it is a lifestyle which is contradictory to holy living in Christ. Instead of following such a path, Paul implores those in Corinth (and thus the church which remains to this day) that we should instead keep the feast "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Jesus Christ is sinless;

We are in Christ;

Therefore, our conduct should be reflective of the sinless position we hold.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread, a Feast mandated by God for Israel 3500 years ago, pictured those in the church age who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. We are living in the Feast and thus we should follow the example - holy living for those who have been declared sinless. Anything else would be contradictory to the honorable position to which we have been elevated.

Life application: The Old Testament isn't a compilation of outdated and useless books. Instead, it is the very tool we need to fully understand the marvelous work of God in Christ - why we need Him, what His work entails, and how His work applies to us. Let us not forsake reading, studying, and sharing the whole counsel of God found in both testaments of the Bible.

*Lord, help my heart not to be restless for anything but You. Help me to be satisfied with all that You have given me and not to lust after or covet things which I have no right to. I know that with food, clothing, and my Bible I have more than enough to be content. Along with these, You have given me so very much. I thank You for every blessing that has come my way. Let those things be sufficient to keep me from wanting more. Thank You for Your provision. Amen.*

**I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.**

1 Corinthians 5:9

This verse is not a stand-alone verse. If one were to cite it as a stand-alone, a false impression of what Paul intends will inevitably be the result. Unfortunately, it is often used in this way and thus it becomes a verse which is used as a tool to disgrace believers who have done nothing wrong. Context is always of paramount consideration when citing Scripture.

The words, "I wrote to you in my epistle" indicate that either he had written another letter to those in Corinth which is not included in the Bible, or that he is referring to what he just said in his previous thought in 5:4 and 5:5. Either way, in this he admonished them to send the sexually immoral offender out of the congregation.

What is important here concerning this not being a "stand alone" verse, is that Paul is reckoning the person who is to be expelled as a believer. Because he is a believer, keeping company with him would leave the perception that his actions were acceptable. These perceptions would be held by the offender and by those who saw the offender and who were unschooled in the Lord's commands concerning sexual immorality.

As we will see, Paul will go on to make a distinction between socializing with believers and unbelievers and keeping "company with sexually immoral people."

Life application: Context is king in interpreting the Bible. Anyone can form any doctrine by tearing verses out of their intended context. However, it takes study, care, and continued diligence to properly interpret and rightly divide the word of God based on context. Be approved! Consider context at all times.

*Lord, Your word is a treasure and a most precious gem, but it takes care and study or it can be easily twisted to say anything anyone wishes. I would pray for wise discernment in order to ensure I am properly handling it, making certain that context is maintained, and for boldness to stand up for what is right and in accord with Your intent. Your Spirit*

*has given it and so I know that I am accountable to it. Be with me as I read, study, teach, and preach this most precious gift. Amen.*

**Yet I certainly *did not mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 1 Corinthians 5:10**

In the previous verse, it was noted that it wasn't a stand-alone verse. Paul had said, " I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people." If that were all he had said, one might be under the misguided impression that they had to hide themselves in a cave or go to a remote island with no people on it or some other place like that. Where else could one go to keep away from such people? And this is the false impression that is obtained when only that verse is cited.

However, Paul continues with his thoughts here and he will further refine them in the coming verses. His intent was not for believers to refrain from being around sexually immoral people, or people with any other such vile habits. How could the gospel spread if such were the case? Even Jesus ate with "tax collectors and sinners." Christianity isn't supposed to be conducted in walled fortresses. Instead, it is to be proclaimed to those in the fallen world, such as -

- To the sexually immoral - people who practice sexual acts outside of the bonds of marriage. This includes any of a host of perverse acts as well. It includes the vast majority of people in any given society. It is true that there are people who are faithful as spouses in any given culture, but if there are no limits imposed by God on how to conduct one's affairs, sexual immorality quickly becomes a predominate trait in most societies.
- To the covetous - Coveting is desiring something that someone else possesses. It is the greed of the heart which is not content with what one rightfully owns. It also doesn't consider taking the time to earn what is desired. Instead, it is a lust of the eyes for that which one has not been worked for or which has been rightly received, such as a gift or inheritance. It is an avaricious attitude which will eventually be realized in hatred, theft, murder, etc. if not reigned in.
- To extortioners - Such are those who take advantage of others for illicit gain. They may charge high rates of repayment on loans, forced payment for "protection" which if not paid will end in any sort of punishment, etc. In this type, there is little

consideration for others, but rather a rapacious desire to profit off anyone for any reason.

- To idolaters - An idolater is one who puts anything or anyone before a right relationship with God. It can be a mere devotion or service to idols, such as is authorized even by some "Christian" denominations. It can be realized in prayers to or through any other person - such as praying to Mary or the saints. People can make almost anything into an idol - sex, money, gems, artwork, cars, sport teams or sports figures, etc. Idolatry includes the unhealthy devotion to anything or anyone which causes our hearts and affections to be directed away from God.

Paul tells those at Corinth that although they are not to keep company with such people, he didn't mean that it included the people of the world. This is because if so, it would mean that they "would need to go out of the world." This is obviously impossible. And so, he will continue to explain what he meant in the verses ahead.

Life application: How is the gospel going to be shared by you if you isolate yourself in a room away from the wicked world? Someone took the time to share it with you. Now it's your turn. God has you exactly where He desires you. So, step out and share what you know. It could change eternity for someone else.

*O God, I know that the world is a wicked place  
And that I would be so safe behind a locked door  
But how will the lost ever come to see Your face  
In You I am so rich, but others are so poor*

*Give me the heart to step out and share this word  
To talk to those who are bound by the devil's hand  
Give me boldness to tell about Jesus my Lord  
So that they too can be saved to an eternity so grand*

*Yes Lord God, if Jesus' words are true that He is the only way to be reconciled to the Father, then I know that what I share about Him is of eternal significance to them. Give me boldness of speech, right thinking in how I convey the message, and a heartfelt attitude to follow up as You direct. Let me not be slack in my sharing of this wonderful message of salvation. Amen.*

**But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. 1 Corinthians 5:11**

This verse explicitly lays out what we need to know concerning our relationships with immoral people within the church. Though Paul had no problem with believers being with people who are morally deficient who are *not* believers, he explicitly states here what our relationship towards immoral believers should be. He says, "But now I have written to you..." This is his doctrine and this is his direction. What is leaving the tip of his pen is to be considered as from the Lord because he is the apostle to the Gentiles and is speaking on the Lord's behalf.

And his words are that we are "not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who..." In other words, a person who claims to be a saved believer in Jesus Christ. If they are named among the roles of believers, we are to consider them in a separate category than non-believers. They are being held to a specific standard which he will now continue with as he notes "who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner."

From his list in the previous verse, he adds in two new categories which should be defined -

- Reviler - This is a person who is vulgar in his words. His speech is coarse, angry, defiant, and abusive. Such a person has no problem vilifying others in their character, hurting people's feelings through speech, and demeaning those around them. Such an attitude is opposite to Christ who "when He was reviled, did not revile in return" (1 Peter 2:23).
- Drunkard - A drunkard is a person addicted to alcohol; not specifically any person who drinks alcohol. A drunkard has no restraint over his drinking; it has conquered him and his allegiance is to it and not to Christ. Concerning the moderate drinking of alcohol, there is nothing wrong with doing so. The entire body of Scripture bears this out. However, like any other thing there are limits which must be exercised. These will be discussed in detail in the coming chapters of 1 Corinthians.

Paul says that of such a person as is named in his list, they are not to keep company with them, nor "even to eat with such a person." By fellowshiping with someone in this category who claims to be a brother, you then implicitly condone their behavior. They

will feel justified, and those around them who witness the fellowship will be left with the impression that what they are doing is acceptable to you and within the body of believers.

It should be noted though that Paul terms them "believers." He never questions their salvation, but assumes that they are saved. Never in his writings does he say a person can "lose" their salvation. Instead, they may suffer great harms in this life and great loss at the judgment. But their status as believers is left between them and the Lord Jesus.

The purpose of Paul's words is not condemnation, but purity and holiness within the body and an attempt to bring about remorse and a change in the offenders. This is what is expected and this is what we should always strive for.

Life application: Who are we exalting? At what cost are we willing to bring discredit upon the name of the Lord? We must always consider what our words, actions, and associations will do and how they will appear in the eyes of others. Above all, we should strive to bring glory and honor to the name of Jesus Christ.

*Lord God, how very far short of "holiness" I feel from day to day. Without thinking, I say things or do things which I am sure are displeasing to You and which diminish You in the eyes of others. Help me to think, in advance, of how my actions will be perceived and judged. Give me wisdom to stay away from corrupt actions and to fix my heart and attitude on purity and that which is honorable. This I pray for Your glory, O God. Amen.*

**For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? 1 Corinthians 5:12**

Pay close heed to Paul's words in this verse and remember them as you conduct your daily affairs. In all analyses of the Bible, context is of paramount importance and it is the one aspect which is most disregarded by those who are either not Christians or who are biblically uninformed Christians who use the Bible as a tool to set their own personal agenda concerning any given issue. This verse is an exemplary response to the misuse of Matthew 7:1,2 which says –

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

What is the context of Jesus' words? Who was He speaking to? Under what dispensation was He speaking? And just as notable, what does He then ask His audience to do just four verses later? He asks them to make right moral judgments. Here are His words -

"Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces." Matthew 7:6

Almost every time Matthew 7:1, 2 is cited, it is ripped out of its context in an attempt to silence vocal Christians who make moral judgments against perversion within society, government, or even in the church. None of these apply to what Jesus intended and understanding this will allow the Christian to feel secure in their proper, healthy, and God-honoring moral judgments.

In confirmation of this approach, we have Paul's words which begin with, "For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside?" His words are showing that he is not the arbiter of the conduct of those outside the church, nor does he sit in judgment of them. This does not mean that what he says about their conduct is not valid, but that he is not the one who will decide their fate *for* their conduct. If Paul speaks of a non-believer as a licentious or perverted person, he is within his rights as a Christian. But he will not be the one to either forgive them or to cast them into hell. That right belongs to the Lord.

On the other hand, there are these types of people within the church. They act out perversion, they are divisive, vulgar, contentious, slanderous, etc. (such as he has already mentioned). In those cases, he not only has a right to make a moral judgment about them (as Jesus indicated in Matthew 7:6), but he also has a right to make a punitive judgment as well. And this right extends to the church as a whole. This is made clear by the words, "Do you not judge those who are inside?"

It is a rhetorical question which demands a positive answer. If not they, then who? Unfortunately, in our society, Christians are trapped into believing that they are somehow to be silent over the ever-increasing moral wickedness displayed by those in society - from school teachers and college professors, to actors and musicians, and all the way up to congressmen, senators, and even as becomes ever more prevalent, the President of the United States.

To be a supporter of moral perversion has reached the height of fashion for the liberal left in our nation and it has grown to epidemic proportions. But Christians are continuously told to be silent based on Jesus' words which have been torn out of

context and held up as a banner for the need for "tolerance" against things that are wholly intolerable.

Life application: Right moral judgments do not stop as one exits the doors of the church. Instead, they are to be upheld at all times and against all forms of perversion. However, the punitive judgment for those perversions is not at the discretion of the church. God will judge the immoral and he will condemn them for their wickedness. He is not slack in this either, but is patient, allowing many to humble themselves and turn from their wickedness. Someday though, He will turn and fight against it when the sins have reached their fullness.

*Heavenly Father, You have instilled in man a moral compass to know what is right and what is wrong. However, we suppress the truth in our unrighteousness and act out our will against You. Help Christians to realize that we are not to condone this, but to speak out against it, stand up for righteousness, and make right moral judgments which are in line with Your will and Your intent for the people You have created. Help us to act with intestinal fortitude against immorality and perversion as You have laid out in Your word. Amen.*

**But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person." 1 Corinthians 5:13**

There is a difference between "judgments" and "judging." We as Christians are to continuously make right "judgments." We are to abstain from evil, recognize evil, identify that which is evil, and work against evil. However, as a body we are not given authority over those outside the church. Though we may make judgments on their conduct, we are not the judges over their conduct. Societies come and go and moral perversion is an inevitable part of them, usually increasing as the society ages.

Because the church is not the judge of societal wickedness, Paul begins with the word "But." This is given in contrast to what he just said in 1 Corinthians 5:12 -

"For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?"

Those outside are excluded from church judgment, but they are not free from judgment! Instead, "those who are outside God judges." There is no pass for wickedness and perversion. Instead, it will be handled in a separate manner by the ultimate Judge of all men. On the other hand, we are given authority over matters of disobedience within

the church. It is the responsibility of the church to make judgments and then to pass judgment on those who violate the precepts laid out in Scripture.

To confirm this, Paul says "therefore." Because the church is given this authority, it must use it properly and exercise it without fail. For those in Corinth, the decision is rendered by Paul - "put away from yourselves the evil person."

The most severe judgment of the church is directed. The offender is to be put out of the fellowship and regarded as a pagan to those in the church. He has no rights within the body at all. He has been delivered over "to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" as Paul noted in verse 5.

Unfortunately, a consequence of living in a society where there are many churches and denominations in any given town is that the offender in the world today can simply cross the street and sit in a different church. However, the sentence if properly imposed on him should hopefully be of such weight that he would repent and turn from his wickedness.

Life application: The church has a moral responsibility to uphold God's word, to keep the body pure, and to expel those who flagrantly disobey what God expects. Let us endeavor to stand boldly on the principles of Scripture and be strong in our moral convictions lest we be found wanting in our adherence to what the Lord expects.

*Lord God, chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians instructs the church to stand firm on the moral principles laid out in Scripture. Those who flagrantly abuse Your guidance are to be removed from the fellowship. In today's world, this is becoming increasingly difficult due to the immense amount of moral perversion within society and even within the church. This is especially true when our national leaders have grown so corrupt. Help us to look not to their example, but to Yours. Help us to stand fast on what is morally right and to act in accordance with Your will. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 6

**Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? 1 Corinthians 6:1**

In Chapter 5, Paul detailed "judging" for both those inside the church and noting that the church isn't the arbiter of matters outside the church. Now he is turning the same thought around. The reason for this isn't explicitly stated, but it is alluded to in verse 6:6 which is just ahead.

Just as the church is to judge matters which occur within the church, the church is not to have such matters judged by those outside the church. It is a point of obvious grief to him and he will detail why as he proceeds. To stress the magnitude of the issue, he asks "Dare any of you...?" It is a note of rebuke or a note of extreme warning. In essence, as Bengel notes, it "implies treason against Christian brotherhood." What he will continue with is something bordering on sacred.

And so, he continues, "Dare any of you, having a matter against another..." There will always arise disputes between people. This has occurred since the beginning and it will continue throughout the age. People perceive things differently and feel they have a right to a legal remedy for injustices committed against them. But within the body of believers, Paul demonstrates that when such a thing arises, they should not even dare to "go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints."

The absurdity of following such a course will be explained, but even before reaching those verses, it is possible to think through many reasons why this shouldn't occur. If the saints are declared righteous, then how could a fair legal decision be rendered in a court ruled by the unrighteous? Suppose a believer has wronged another believer and is unwilling to own up to his wrong. What would preclude him from bribing an unrighteous judge to maintain his supremacy in the matter?

Additionally, what kind of example would a church or church member be setting if he were to take such matters before a non-believing body? What will be the perception of those non-believers concerning the power of Jesus, the charitableness between believers, or the ability for a church to handle matters of even greater weight (meaning spiritual matters)? If they can't handle earthly problems, why should they be trusted with the eternal issues that religion is supposed to handle.

For these and other reasons, it is entirely inappropriate for believers within a church to not attempt to arbitrate their differences within the church setting.

Life application: How important is a matter that you would be willing to bring discredit upon the name of Jesus? At what point does an offense justify degrading Him in the presence of the unrighteous. Paul's words ask us to consider this and to act accordingly.

*Heavenly Father, You have forgiven me for so much and You have done so without holding it over my head. In Your great grace and mercy, You have forgotten my misdeeds because of what Jesus did for me. Now Lord, help me to act in the same way towards those who come to me asking for forgiveness and reconciliation. Help me not to turn my heart away from such an act, but to accept terms of peace and harmony. How can I withhold forgiveness over such little offenses when You have granted it for a life of disobedience against You. Help me in this Lord. Amen.*

**Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 1 Corinthians 6:2**

Paul is showing the utterly absurd nature of the saints going before the ungodly for their judgments. His words confirm that their counsels are merely earthly and bear little weight. In contrast to them are the judgments of the saints. "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" The very people to whom the Corinthians were going to resolve petty matters between the believers are the same people who will be judged by the saints someday!

Paul is showing that the religious matters bear immensely higher weight than the earthly issues we find so important. It is to the "saints" that the religious decisions will be rendered. This verse, along with so many others in the New Testament, shows us that those termed "saints" are not decided upon by a council or a pope, but rather it is a term for "believers." All who are saved by Christ are, by default, saints. And these saints will "judge the world."

And so, to continue to help these saints think clearly, Paul continues with, "And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?" The folly of those in Corinth is made clear! How can we hold to the promises of the future with all of its honor and power, and not reasonably consider it in our deliberations now? These niggling little matters (which seem so important at this time, but which actually have no true importance when considered against the backdrop of eternity) that arise between believers are minute compared to what we will someday decide.

So how can it be that we can't even decide them now? Paul asks them to think! And it is all the more relevant to believers today. Those in Corinth didn't have the New Testament epistles to rely on. All they had was whatever instructions they received and their faulty memories. Now, we have the whole counsel of God given to us and ready for reference, decision, and action. What an immensely valuable tool for guidance - and yet we still neglect it and we still fall into the same error today that those in Corinth fell into prior to the publication of the Bible.

Life application: What priority is Scripture in your life? Just how willing to rely on God's instruction are you? Do you know more than He? Are your judgments more valuable than His? We know the answers, and so let us continue to learn and apply this precious gift to our every step.

*Lord, what seems so important in this life actually has very little importance compared to what is coming. So how can we fight over the miniscule things that arise and pester us each day when the true life ahead promises us eternal rest and contentment? Help us to focus on the sure promises that You have given and in this we will be able to keep the little things of this life in proper perspective. You have it all taken care of, and because of Jesus our end is assured. In this, let us remain content! Amen.*

**Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? 1 Corinthians 6:3**

There is much debate and an almost perceived fear among commentators as to what Paul is referring to here. Some say that because there is no qualifier before "angels" it must be referring to the "good" angels. In other words, he doesn't say the "fallen" angels or the "bad" angels. Others disagree and say he must be speaking about the leaders of churches - pastors, priests, etc. The term can be used this way, but it would make no sense at all because he is writing to a body with elders already in place and he himself is an apostle.

The plain sense of the verse demands that we look at it in no other way than that he is speaking of heavenly messengers, good or bad, that will be judged by the saints. If a sentence is to be pronounced on a fallen angel, believers will be the ones qualified to make that judgment. The good angels will be excluded from such judgments because there was no fault in them. Thus, in actuality, judgment is rendered on both. One judgment is "no" judgment necessary. The other judgment will be according to their fallen nature and evil deeds.

But for *what* could believers judge fallen angels? The answer is that they are the afflicters of believers now. They are the ones who wreak havoc among the weak, making miserable those believers who are susceptible. They are also those who completely possess non-believers and torment them as demons. Because of the angels' interactions with man, redeemed man will be allowed judicial authority over them.

Likewise, the "good" angels have been "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14). Because of this, their ministrations will be noted by those who finally see what good they wrought among men before their glorification.

Understanding this verse from this perspective then makes all the sense in the world. What we don't even perceive now will become clear to our eyes in the future. God has given those who believe an opportunity to actively participate in a realm that we now only passively participate in. And if this is so, then "how much more, things that pertain to this life?"

In other words, if we will someday judge angels who are in a completely different order of being than we are, then shouldn't we be able to handle the judgments of this life in the order we now perceive and understand! The answer begs for a positive response. Yes, we should be in control of our judgments now, not handing them over to non-believers when they fall entirely within the parameters of those who will inherit eternal life and the right to judge eternal beings.

Life application: Imagine the great honor of being one of the redeemed of the Lord. And likewise, imagine the great responsibility that accompanies that honor. Let us never take lightly our duty to govern our own affairs in the church and among believers.

*Lord God, it's not to angels that you have put in subjection the world to come, but to man, and more especially one Man. All of the authority of heaven and earth is granted to Your Son, my Lord Jesus. As this is so, then why should I worry about a single thing that happens in this life, from stubbing my toe to losing my most beloved, surely all things are within the control of Your capable hands. If the future is already granted to Jesus, then all of this life is being prepared for that day. Thank You for this sure hope. Amen.*

**If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? 1 Corinthians 6:4**

Paul is continuing on with his same train of thought concerning judgments - who should judge matters in what context? The believers in Corinth had taken civil matters, such as lawsuits, (things pertaining to this life) to the pagan courts to be settled. He has shown them the utter folly of this and now goes on with that line of thought.

He says "If then you have judgments..." In this, he is saying that these things have arisen and will from time to time arise. It is natural for there to be disputes. At the time of Moses, while in the wilderness, there was a constant stream of such matters which were brought to him. This is recorded in Exodus 18. It was at a time when people were living in tents and not even settled into a home with land and a large number of possessions. How much more is it expected that such things would arise among those living a regular life in a community.

And so, when such judgments "concerning things pertaining to this life" would arise, there would need to be a judge. It is inevitable and natural. But who would be the judge? Who would be chosen to preside over such petty matters of "this life?" Paul wants them to think the issue through based on what he said in the previous verse, that as believers "we shall judge angels."

And so, he says the following words, which need a careful evaluation - "...do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?" The verb for "appoint" is the Greek word *kathizete*. It is actually unclear whether Paul wrote it in the imperative mood (meaning a command) or in the indicative mood (meaning interrogatively). And so, a couple possibilities arise -

- If a command, he is telling them: You are to appoint those who are the least esteemed by the church to judge (meaning the least knowledgeable in the church would still be preferable to appointing unbelievers over them for such judgments).
- If interrogatively, he is asking them if they would actually dare to "appoint those who are least esteemed by the church" (meaning unbelievers).

The debate over which is his intent has continued on since the letter was written and scholars disagree, but in the end the thought is clear either way. It is a rebuke to them for their unsound practices. It could be that Paul was intentionally ambiguous in his wording so that we would look at this from different angles and still come to the same conclusion. The practice of going outside the church for judgments was wrong and even

the least informed in the church would be preferable to the most knowledgeable outside of it.

Life application: Disputes within the church and among fellowshiping believers should be mediated by those within the church. It is a concept which seems all but forgotten today, but when thought of from the eternal perspective, it is the one that certainly makes the most sense.

*Lord, as I sit here, tired from the load of work and the pressures of life, I still have a wonderful sense of joy about my situation. It's a feeling which transcends the pains and difficulties that come my way. When times aren't right, I keep remembering that You have promised an end to the trials and have given us a much better hope of things to come. Yes, the world wears me down, but the thought of being with You some wondrous day fills me with joy. I just can't wait for it to come. Yes, come Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? 1 Corinthians 6:5**

The irony abounds. Paul has been speaking to those in Corinth who would allow believers within the congregation to carry out lawsuits against one another in pagan tribunals. His words have shown that it is not only inappropriate, but it makes no sense based on their positions in Christ. He now says, "I say this to your shame." They have disgraced themselves over this matter and his words anticipated them feeling the disgrace because of it.

And then comes the ironic question - "Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?" It is to this same group that he has now written 5 full chapters of doctrine based on their "divisions" of allegiance. In chapter 4, he said this to them -

*"We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored!" 1 Corinthians 4:10*

How can it be that they are "wise in Christ" and yet they cannot make simple decisions concerning matters of dispute between believers? It is a scathing rebuke on the wisdom they feel they possess when in fact they are demonstrating none at all! His letter is intended for them to think these things through. Line after line is one which asks them (and thus us) to consider rationally our position in Christ and then to act in a manner according to that high status.

But, it is so much easier to watch a movie or sit in the lawn and gaze at the birds as they flit about. This book is our guide, it is our "constitution" for living, and it is that which reveals our Lord. We should pick it up, read it, and cherish its words each day.

Life application: When someone says, "There are many ways to interpret the Bible" they are indicating that man holds sway over what God intends. In fact, there is one proper way to evaluate the Bible, but every one of us fails to do so to some degree or another. Our failure in no way negates what God determines. It shows that we need to study more.

*Heavenly Father, the most common expression about Your word today is that "there are many ways to interpret the Bible." But this is from our perspective, not Yours. You have one truth and one presentation of that truth. Our failure to correctly understand what You intend simply means that we need to study more. And so Lord, give me the aching desire to properly handle Your word; to rightly divide it; to hold fast to its truths; and to never, never compromise its moral judgments. I desire to please You, not have harmony with those who would diminish the power of Your superior word. Amen.*

**But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!** 1 Corinthians 6:6

In the previous verse, Paul asked this question: "I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?"

Verse 6:6 is not a continuation of the question, but rather a reply to it. It is a rebuke that there "is not a wise man among you, not even one..." Instead of displaying wisdom (which will someday be used even to judge the angels), he notes that "brother goes to law against brother." Instead of this, they should be willing to sit down and responsibly work out their differences among each other, not even involving the church for mediation.

Rather than this though, they not only fail to settle their differences, they were skipping right over the church for mediation and going directly to civil trial where judgment was rendered "before unbelievers." It was an utter failing of their position in Christ and the knowledge, fraternity, and faith that they should have exhibited.

Albert Barnes notes that according to Flavius Josephus, "the Romans (who were now masters of Corinth) permitted the Jews in foreign countries to decide private affairs, where nothing capital was in question, among themselves." How could it be that if they

had this right, that they wouldn't exercise it? They were considered a sect of Judaism at this time (see the dispute which arises in Acts 18 and the judgment rendered by the proconsul in Acts 18:14 concerning this) and so they had the legal right to mediate many such private affairs.

Remembering that 1 Corinthians is included in the Bible, it is a prescriptive letter from Paul explaining our responsibilities within the church during the church age. We should consider how to act in similar matters based on his words here and abide by them.

Life application: Of what true value is it to gain the upper hand in petty matters which arise between believers that we would violate the words of Scripture in order to bring suit against our brethren in the church? Looking at these things from the eternal perspective, it is better to let go of such offenses than it is to bring discredit upon ourselves as believers and, more importantly, the name of Jesus.

*Lord Jesus, I would pray for wisdom in how to handle offenses which come between me and other believers in You. I know for certain that in comparison to the things I have been forgiven by You, the petty differences which arise are utterly insignificant. And so, Lord, help me to view our disagreements from an eternal perspective and not from the displeasure of the moment. Grant me a heart of wisdom in such things so that You will be glorified in my actions. Amen.*

**Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather *let yourselves be cheated*? 1 Corinthians 6:7**

"Utter failure" is well translated here. Paul is telling those in Corinth that their lawsuits against one another demonstrate that they have missed the mark in Christian fellowship and in maintaining a sense of fraternity within the faith. It is true that when one sues another, it is generally because a wrong has been committed. Suppose someone lends \$5000 to another believer. When it isn't paid back, the normal and expected course of action would be to go to them and attempt to get the money back. When that fails, a suit might be the next logical step to follow.

However, Paul is saying that doing this is contrary to what should be expected of a Christian, especially if the suit is conducted in non-Christian mediation. Paul says that instead, "Why do you not rather accept wrong?" And then to further that word, he repeats the thought to confirm what he meant - "Why do you not rather *let yourselves be cheated*?" It seems contrary to the normal order of business because it *is* contrary to

the normal order of business. Something more noble is expected of those within the faith.

We may suffer from being cheated, but God is not unaware of it. Our faithfulness to His precept will be rewarded in due time. He will handle all wrongs and correct all offenses, either in this life or in the true life which is to come, but He is asking us to stand on the principles He has laid down.

Having noted this, the passage makes no commentary on interactions with non-believers, governmental agencies, corporations, or the like. When harm is suffered at the hands of a non-believer, there are venues for handling such things.

Life application: How difficult it can be to set aside grievances that have been levied against us by other believers. But how much more satisfying should it be to know that we are following the wishes of the Lord by doing so! Let us stand firmly on God's word and not be weakened in our determination to be obedient to the knowledge we possess; mixing in practice to what we have learned.

*Lord, my brother has offended me  
But You have said that I should let it go  
Is it not better that I be wronged  
Than to take him to court for all the world to know?*

*Surely the offense has me upset as You can see  
But in the end Your word is my rule and guide  
Should I consider my offence more important?  
Should I so lift myself up and be filled with pride?*

*Rather, I will stand upon my guide, Your written word  
And thus, be obedient to You, my precious Lord*

*Lord God, You know those who are counted as brothers in the faith who have offended me in one way or another, but Your word has asked me to consider my position in You as more important than the loss I have suffered. Help me to put Your word into practice and to allow You to handle the matter in Your wise way. I know that what You will decide will be perfectly just and so why should I worry? I place such things in Your capable hands.  
Amen.*

**No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and *you do these things to your brethren!***

1 Corinthians 6:8

This verse should be looked at in connection with the previous verse for a full understanding of what Paul is relaying -

"Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather *let yourselves* be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and *you do these things to your brethren!*"

He had just asked them why wouldn't they accept wrong and even be cheated instead of going to law against one another. In his written words, it is as if he were speaking without giving them time to even explain themselves because their actions were inexcusable. And so he continues with the same thought, stating a fact that they cannot ignore - "No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat."

They are in essence caught with their hands in the cookie jar. He has identified openly that their actions are harmful and wrong towards one another. There is a root of bitterness between the believers which has been allowed to enter into the congregation. It is something that is warned against in Hebrews 12 -

"Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled..."

-Hebrews 12:14, 15

This "root of bitterness" is explicitly stated by Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians as something which should not be allowed. Here are his words to them -

"...no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified." 1 Thessalonians 4:6

The fact that they were cheating and doing wrong is bad enough, but what was more vile to him is that "*you do these things to your brethren!*" If this is how they were treating one another, then how much more disgraceful must be their actions to those who weren't considered as brothers! It is the Lord Jesus they represent. And yet

because of the things they were doing, those outside the church would certainly be inclined to say, "I want no part of that religion."

Life application: Would you apply for a job in a company that was known for employees cheating one another and suing one another? Would you willingly join such a company, knowing in advance that there was nothing but infighting and division? Of course not! If this is the case with work, how much more do you think people will reject coming to Christ if they go into a church and see nothing but the same between believers. Our actions in church have real significance to the eyes of those who come in seeking answers to their questions about the Lord.

*Lord, help me to remember that people are watching my actions and evaluating You based on what I say and do. It is so easy to forget this as distractions arise, deadlines need to be met, and as my thoughts wander to things that come to mind. Fill me with Your Spirit and keep me attuned to who I am in You so that others will see and want to know You because of how I act. This I pray to bring glory to You. Amen.*

**Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ....** 1 Corinthians 6:9

Paul is going to make a sobering list of those who "will not inherit the kingdom of God." He makes his statement in the form of a rhetorical question, and it has the full force of a positive declaration - these people will in fact "not inherit the kingdom of God."

This is a most unpopular view in the world in which we live and it is one of the reasons why Paul is rejected by many aberrant pastors, priests, and preachers today as they utter sermons which do not consider the whole counsel of God. But his words are true and whether we want to believe them or not is irrelevant. The only thing that matters is what God has determined.

And so, he begins his list in this verse and it will continue through verse 10. All of the following categories are termed "unrighteous." That word is used for the whole list which is then presented. It is these unrighteous who will not inherit God's kingdom. And to make sure we are clear on the subject, he interjects words of warning, "Do not be deceived." It is his way of saying that others may attempt to diminish, twist, or reject this truth concerning these people, but that doesn't change the truth of the matter.

The term here for "unrighteous" was just used in verse 6:1 when speaking of those in the pagan world to whom the Corinthians were going to for their judgments. Paul is showing the illogical nature of this. Why would someone go to "the unrighteous" when they are not in that category? He is attempting to have them think this issue through. And so, he presents his list -

- Fornicators - This includes all sexual impurity. There is a place for sex and it is within the confines of marriage. But there are those who reject this and exercise their sexual desires outside of those confines. Marriage from a biblical standpoint is between a male and a female. Within the confines of those two precepts - marriage, and the union of a man and woman - sex is acceptable.
- Idolaters - As noted in 1 Corinthians 5:10, an idolater is one who puts anything or anyone before a right relationship with God. It can be a mere devotion or service to idols, such as is authorized by some wayward Christian denominations. It can be realized in prayers to or through any other person - such as praying to Mary or the saints. People can make almost anything into an idol - sex, money, gems, artwork, cars, sport teams or sports figures, etc. Idolatry includes the unhealthy devotion to anything or anyone which causes our hearts and affections to be directed away from God.
- Adulterers - This concerns those who break their covenant of marriage and engage in sexual relations outside of those bonds. An adulterer can be a married person having sex with someone not their spouse, or it can be an unmarried person who is having sex with a married person. From a biblical perspective, both are adulterers.
- Homosexuals - The Greek word here is *malakoi* which indicates "softness" or being effeminate. This is the trademark of many homosexuals and so it is translated that way here. But many scholars indicate that it includes a broader and darker range of sin. It is a person who is weak in their moral convictions to the point where any perversion is tolerated and accepted.
- Sodomites - The Greek word is *arsenokoites*. It denotes a male engaging in same-gender sexual activity; specifically, a man in bed with another man and thus homosexuality.

Paul's list will continue in the following verse. It is to these categories of unrepentant sinners that there is no hope of entering the kingdom of God. The modern argument

that a person "is born" this way is irrelevant. A person may be born with a predilection towards drinking, but this does not mean they need to be a drunk. And whether a person is born with a bent towards some type of sexual perversion, like homosexuality, or not is irrelevant. They have been instructed that this is wickedness. They alone will bear the consequences of their actions.

Life application: Whether we like what the Bible teaches on difficult moral issues or not is beside the point. The only thing that matters is that we accept God's sovereignty and act in accord with His directives.

*Glorious God, when I read lists of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God, such as that presented in 1 Corinthians 6, I have to think that I was once in such a category. But through the precious blood of Christ, I have been washed and forgiven. Help me now to stand firm on my moral convictions and to lead others to the truth of those sobering words of condemnation or life. Help us to think clearly on these things while there is still time. Amen.*

**...nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 1 Corinthians 6:10**

Continuing with his sobering list of the unrighteous, Paul next names -

- Thieves - The meaning is clear in any society. It refers to anyone who lays hold of something which belongs to another and takes it for themselves. Robbery, stealing, pick pocketing, etc. are simply different ways of describing the overall concept of thievery. And this can be on a personal, an institutional, or a governmental level. Companies can steal from their employees as much as employees can steal from their companies. And governments can, and do, steal from their citizens through unjust taxation. Those behind these schemes are not guiltless.
- Covetous - Coveting, as described in the analysis of 1 Corinthians 5:10, is desiring something that someone else possesses. It is the greed of the heart which is not content with what one rightfully owns. It also doesn't consider taking the time to earn what is desired. Instead, it is a lust of the eyes for that which one has not been worked for or which has been rightly received, such as a gift or inheritance. It is an avaricious attitude which will eventually be realized in hatred, theft, murder, etc. if not reigned in.

- Drunkards - These were described in 1 Corinthians 5:11. A drunkard is a person addicted to, and consumed by, alcohol; not specifically any person who drinks alcohol. A drunkard has no restraint over his drinking; it has conquered him and his allegiance is to it and not to Christ. Concerning the moderate drinking of alcohol, there is nothing wrong with doing so despite the stigma many unbiblically attach to it. The entire body of Scripture bears this out. However, like any other thing, there are limits which must be exercised.
- Revilers - Again, as noted in 1 Corinthians 5:11, this is a person who is vulgar in his words. His speech is coarse, angry, defiant, and abusive. Such a person has no problem vilifying others in their character, hurting people's feelings through speech, and demeaning those around them. Such an attitude is opposite to Christ who "when He was reviled, did not revile in return" (1 Peter 2:23).
- Extortioners - This final category was described in 1 Corinthians 5:10. Such are those who take advantage of others for illicit gain. They may charge high rates of repayment on loans, forced payment for "protection" which if not paid will end in any sort of punishment, etc. In this type, there is little consideration for others, but rather a rapacious desire to profit off anyone for any reason.

The Bible now states, in completely clear terms that all of the categories listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 will not inherit the kingdom of God. It is easy to look at the list and say, "I haven't done that one or that one," but in the end, all have committed at least one and certainly more than one of each offense listed. In other words, we are all guilty and stand condemned before God. As Paul says in Romans 3:10, "There is none righteous, no, not one."

No person is justified in and of themselves before God and all people are "condemned already" according to Jesus' words in John 3:18. What we need to be right before God cannot be found within ourselves. Paul will keep on showing this as he continues with his epistle. We disregard his words at our own peril.

Life application: Who can point a finger at one of the people on this sobering list without condemning themselves. There is nothing wrong with making right moral judgments, but there is a problem with doing so before first getting right with God through Jesus Christ. Once that occurs, we stand in a position where we can identify evil in others and lead them to the Fountain of cleansing, which is Christ.

*Heavenly Father, I once was guilty before You, having transgressed Your laws and violated Your holy nature. But in Your great grace and mercy, You sent Jesus to take my place, to bear my sins, and to remove my stains. Now, because of Him, I stand justified before You, pure and undefiled. Help me to live out that state which I truly possess in a manner worthy of it. Help me to reflect Your goodness in all its splendor. Amen.*

**And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.**

1 Corinthians 6:11

Referring to his list of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God, Paul now shows the immensity of the work of Christ, even for people who have committed such acts against Him as were mentioned in the previous two verses. He begins with, "And such were some of you." Pick from the wicked things on this list and it may have indeed applied to any of those in Corinth. And thus, the same thought gives hope to such offenders today.

But without understanding the nature of sin, it's hard to contemplate exactly what this means for each and every person in Christ. James says that "...whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Paul is taking the most notorious offenses and highlighting them, but James shows that any infraction of God's law breaks the entire law, and thus we are all condemned before God. Because of this, looking down on another for whatever their sin was must be excluded.

Next Paul says, "But you were washed." Jamieson-Fausset-Brown states, "The Greek middle voice expresses, 'Ye have had yourselves washed.'" The tense here varies from the next two points that Paul will make, and this is not by accident. It is showing that receiving the Holy Spirit is something that must be accomplished by us through an act of faith.

We are not "regenerated in order to believe" as reformed theologians claim. The Bible, time and again, shows that we must receive Christ voluntarily; this verse shows that to be true. The Pulpit Commentary notes that, "The very object of Christ's death had been that he might cleanse his Church "by the washing of water by the Word." Therefore, receiving Jesus is not "a work" that merits something, but rather it is the necessary action that we must take in order to receive the gift.

In the receiving of His work, we wash ourselves by the Spirit. This then leads to Paul's next two points which say, "but you were sanctified, but you were justified." The normal

order of these two points is reversed. According to Paul in Romans we are "justified" and then we go through the process of "sanctification." However, this is not speaking about the progressive sanctification that occurs in a believer's life. Instead, it is the "setting apart" or "consecrating" of the individual to God. It is a done deal.

Despite the state of maturity (all new believers are immature) and despite the lack of knowledge about Godly things (in which most new believers are deficient), they have been set apart by God as sanctified. This is a clear indication of the doctrine of eternal salvation. What God has sanctified is forever so.

A point of note in Paul's words is that the word "*alla*" or "but" is repeated for each of these points. In this, it indicates a special emphasis on each part of the process; the words can be taken as emphatic. You "have washed yourselves;" you "are sanctified;" and you "are justified." And, it was done "in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

Salvation is accomplished "in the name of the Lord Jesus" and by no other. Only He came in the flesh to redeem us from our sins and to purify us with His shed blood. Nobody, outside of His bestowed grace, can be saved. And the action is accomplished "by the Spirit of our God." The Holy Spirit is the one who performs the actions when a believer calls out to the Lord. The moment they do, they are sealed with the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 14), and are given the guarantee of eternal life. They are sanctified in Christ, and they are justified in Christ.

Albert Barnes notes that, "This verse brings in the whole subject of redemption, and states in a most emphatic manner the various stages by which a sinner is saved, and by this single passage, a man may obtain all the essential knowledge of the plan of salvation." When one bears the weight of sin committed after coming to Christ and feels that they may have lost what they once received, all they need to do is return to this verse and contemplate it. It contains that wonderful assurance that we are saved despite ourselves.

Life application: This verse asks us to look back on who we once were and to conduct our futures with humility, gratitude, and to carry in our hearts deep thankfulness for the grace and mercy of God who took what was ignoble and purified it for Himself.

*Lord Jesus, You took the clay jar that was broken and dirty and set it apart for Yourself. You made it right and cleaned it up so that it could be used for something noble and good. And even today, the jar is changing as You bring it to an appearance never even*

*imagined. You have done the marvelous! Thank You, O God for repairing me and placing me in Your heavenly home. Amen.*

**All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.** 1 Corinthians 6:12

In what seems a dramatic shift to another subject, Paul begins today with, "All things are lawful for me..." He will go on to speak about foods in another verse, and so it seems that he is referring to something newly introduced. But then he will return to the subject of sexual immorality, demonstrating that he hasn't really changed course at all. He has been speaking about this issue already and is merely taking another approach to help the issue sink in.

Therefore, when he says, "All things are lawful for me ...," it is speaking in a general sense, not literally that "all" things are lawful. In other words, "sex" is lawful, but "sexual immorality" is not. He will introduce "foods" in order to get us to think on a different level concerning this. From his previous comments in this epistle, it is completely inescapable that committing acts of a perverse sexual nature are forbidden. He has already shown that to be true. And so, he continues. Yes, "all things are lawful, but all things are not helpful."

In this, Paul is speaking of "license." What are we free to do in Christ, and how can we misuse that freedom which actually turns into bondage? And so again, he states, "All things are lawful..." He is emphasizing the matter to capture our full attention and to ensure that we understand what he is desperately trying to tell the Corinthians (and thus us as well who are reading his words).

Yes, "all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." God created sex (which we are using as an example of a general principle) and therefore it must be "good." But we can abuse what God has given to the point where it is no longer "good." This takes us down several paths. Sex is normally lawful, but inappropriate sex is not helpful. If it is not helpful, then it is harmful. There is a self-destructive nature to inappropriate sex.

Likewise, sex is normally lawful, but we can be brought under the power of inappropriate sex and become enslaved by it. If we are enslaved by it, we are no longer serving the Master who bought us and "sanctified" and "justified" us as was noted in the previous verse. We are working contrary to what God has intended. The penalty for this has already been noted - to be expelled from the fellowship. This concept will be built

on by Paul in the verses ahead. To understand what he is saying in this verse, the words of C.J. Ellicott will provide clarity -

"There is a verbal contrast in the Greek here which can scarcely be rendered fully in English. The Greek words for "unlawful" and "be brought under the power of" are cognate words. What the Apostle says is, 'All things are lawful for me, but I am not the one to allow them therefore to become a law over me.' There is such a thing as becoming the very slave of liberty itself. If we sacrifice the power of choice which is implied in the thought of liberty, we cease to be free; we are brought under the power of that which should be in our power."

Understanding this, we see that being brought under the power of something other than Christ is a return to bondage and therefore teaching, practicing, or allowing sinful license is contrary to the gospel. If it is contrary to the gospel, then it is not "of" the gospel and must be condemned. This is why Paul was so strict in his judgment against the sexually immoral sinner in the previous chapter and it is why the church must continue to be strict in such judgments. There is but one gospel and it must not be polluted or corrupted.

Life application: Paul wrote his letters under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. What he says are, therefore, God's words, not just his. To reject what he has written is to reject what God expects. Stand fast on the truth of the gospel and the need for purity and holiness within the church.

*Lord, help me to honor You with every breath I take. I tend to get distracted by the momentary things which pop up and suddenly I find myself walking once again in the flesh. Remind me to be filled with Your Spirit, walking in obedience to You, and ever mindful of the great and honorable title of "Christian" which I bear. This I pray to and for Your glory. Amen.*

**Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 1 Corinthians 6:13**

In his usual way of making exceptionally complex matters easier to understand, Paul now introduces "food" as a way of grasping the immensely more important issue of sexual immorality. However, in what is always the case, Paul's words are often twisted (see 2 Peter 3:14-16) to mean something entirely different than what he intends.

By introducing foods, as an understandable baseline, he is showing that they are an indifferent matter which we participate in, even the eating of food sacrificed to idols. This is a matter he will speak about in detail in 1 Corinthians 8 and elsewhere. Foods affect the physical man and have no lasting value other than to sustain a person until the next meal. The eating of foods is a morally neutral matter.

God made foods and foods are "for the stomach." Likewise, God created man, including his stomach and the stomach is intended "for foods." In the end, both are material, non-moral, and perishing. And so, "God will destroy both it and them" meaning "the stomach and the foods." On the other hand, there is sexual immorality. It is an entirely different category and one which cannot, despite our greatest desires and our greatest efforts to twist what He intends, be treated as we treat foods.

Sexual immorality is a moral issue. It cannot be separated from this state. We cannot rationalize it away, we cannot make excuses, we cannot compare it to any other issues of a non-moral or wrongly imposed moral issue. It is wrong in and of itself. Further, though different types of sexual immorality are mentioned by Paul and others, they all fall into one over-arching category and must be considered in that way.

Engaging in sexual immorality affects not a merely perishing organ, but it affects the man as a whole - body and soul. Man is not granted the authority to engage in this type of act because the moral nature and effect of sexual immorality doesn't cease to affect the man at his death like eating various foods does. Instead, it is carried with him to his judgment, be it before Christ at the Bema Seat, or before the Lord at the Great White Throne. It is an offense against God, eating foods is not.

Further, eating foods will not lead others to commit sin, sexual immorality will. Eating foods will not turn a church from the Lord, sexual immorality will. Foods are neutral, sexual immorality is morally wrong.

Life application: Concerning sexual immorality, what we treat in a flippant manner, or what we try to hide through twisting of a precept or in the diminishing of the highly moral nature of such an act, doesn't change the force of the offense in God's sight. Just because we attempt to rationalize away our moral offenses by comparing them with other non-moral or inappropriately-mandated moral offenses, it in no way changes the severity of our actions. God is, in fact, God. We are His and we will stand judged by Him, not excused by our attempts to undermine what He has ordained.

*Heavenly Father, there are times when I attempt to "justify" the wrong things I do by comparing them with the "bigger" sins of others or reading "just one more commentary" to find someone I agree with, whether I know he is wrong or not. How wicked is the heart within me that I would try to validate my own wrong actions when You have spoken that they are, in fact, wrong. Grant me a clean and pure heart to be obedient to You and to turn from the evil that so easily ensnares me. Strengthen me through Your word and by Your Spirit. Amen.*

**And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.**

1 Corinthians 6:14

In complete and absolute support that sexual immorality is not to be condoned, Paul now ties his discussion in with the resurrection of Christ. It is Paul's way of saying, "Think!" In the last verse, he said, "Now the body *is* not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." To make this so obvious that anyone should see the importance of the matter, he next says, "And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power."

He has tied our lives in with the perfect, sinless, Son of God. Because He was found without sin, He was raised to life; death has no power over Him. It was "not possible that He should be held by it" (Acts 2:24). This is the basis on which He was raised. If sin were found in Him, He would not have been qualified for the resurrection. And it too is the only basis for our resurrection. It is not because we are sinless in and of ourselves, but because we are sinless "in" Christ. That means "right now." That means we are "right now" connected to Him.

As this is true, then engaging in sexual immorality among believers is to abuse our granted position and to hold in contempt that which is sacred - the only tie that we have for our granting of eternal life. Paul will continue with this thought in the coming verses, but 1 Corinthians 6:14 should be enough to wake up any sleeper and open their eyes to the truth that sexual immorality is not to be engaged in or tolerated.

Life application: We are "in" Christ. We are united to Him and sealed with the Holy Spirit. Is it a light thing that we would so misuse our position in Him that we would excuse voluntary sin? Let it never be so!

*Heavenly Father, when I received Christ, I received a new position and a new standing with You. And yet, at times I fall and act as if I'm in my old self. What a tarnishing of the honor I have been bestowed and that I bear! Forgive me for returning to my old self and*

*help me to continue to live in and for Christ in a manner worthy of that high and exalted state. This I pray... help me in my weakness. Amen.*

**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 harlot? Certainly not!**

1 Corinthians 6:15

"Do you not know" is Paul's rhetorical way of saying, "You should certainly know..." It is an obvious truth that anyone who has called on Christ should know what he will now state. It shouldn't take any additional reflection or consideration. He is relaying now a thought based on his previous statement of verse 14 which said, "And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power."

If God will raise us up by His power because of the work of Christ, then we must be "members of Christ." It should be a self-evident fact to the believer. And because it is, he asks another rhetorical question, "Shall I then take the members of Christ (meaning "my" members because I am united to Christ) and make *them* members of a harlot?" The question begs a negative response!

Harlotry has no place within Christianity and is used by Paul as an all-encompassing term for any sexual immorality. The Bible allows one type of sex and that is between a man and a woman within the bonds of marriage. Anything else is a perversion of this. A harlot not only engages in sex with many partners, but she does so for pay. And this was commonly connected to religious rites. Because of this, Paul uses harlotry as the premier example of sexual immorality.

By engaging in sex with a harlot, we are uniting that which is sacred and set apart to God with that which is profane and opposed to God! As Ellicott notes, "The double act of taking them away from their glorious union with Christ, and joining them to a base body, is implied in the Greek." It is a double-slap in the face of that which is upright and acceptable for the Christian.

Life application: Although Paul is speaking of sexual immorality, we should consider every action we take in life in conjunction with our spiritual connection to Christ. David, in the Psalms says, "I will set nothing wicked before my eyes..." Isn't this the right, noble, and honorable path to follow in all things. Let us "fix our eyes on Jesus" and not on that which is base and inglorious.

*Heavenly Father, I know that where my eyes rest my thoughts will follow. Be they my physical or my spiritual eyes, when I look at something profane, my thoughts will turn to the profane. When I fix my eyes on Jesus, my thoughts will be directed to Him. Help me to follow the advice of the psalms and "set nothing wicked before my eyes." Give me the hunger and desire to know You, to seek You, and to focus my eyes upon You. With this, I will be an acceptable jar, ready for Your filling. Amen.*

**Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body *with her*? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh." 1 Corinthians 6:16**

So far, Paul has argued against sexual immorality from several different perspectives. Now in verse 6:16, he reaches back to the very first account of man on earth from Genesis 2. God intended for man to have a partner and he intended for them to be united in a way which was unique to humanity. As it said in Genesis 2 after naming all the animals God created, "But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him."

And so, God created a woman for the man. In their union, the two "shall become one flesh." Paul has just said to those in Corinth (and thus to us) "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 harlot? Certainly not!" His words are built upon the thought that we are "in" Christ. Therefore, when we unite in an immoral way, we are defiling the very bond in which we exist by bringing into it an act which is wholly ungodly and immoral.

Such is the case when a man unites with a harlot. Considering this, how reprehensible are such acts in any other form - homosexuality, bestiality, etc.? God has ordained the parameters of sex and he has written it on our hearts. To attempt to justify sexual sin in any way is to "suppress" the knowledge that God has given us. Paul lays this out in Romans 1:1. There can be no excuse for such acts, and yet they are often what seem to define us as humans. Our fallen, corrupt nature makes us yearn for the profane and the perverse. The remedy is Jesus. We are to fix our eyes and our thoughts on Him and we are to be obedient to the word He has given.

Life application: Sexual sins are no less consuming of our minds and thoughts than drug or alcohol addictions. They can fill us with great anguish and turmoil. This leaves us with real choices, just as the other addictions. We can hold on to Christ, being obedient to His word, or we can allow ourselves to let the flesh take over. Hold firm to the Lord. If you are "in" Him, then He will strengthen you for the battle you face.

*Lord God, it seems as though every day my thoughts come against me, tempting me to fall into some pit that I desire to stay out of. They attempt to direct my feet down dark paths and across difficult and painful terrain. Help me to fix my eyes on Jesus in these times. Raise the valleys and level the mountains, Lord, so that I can see Him as I avoid the pits, walk the straight highway, and tread on a smooth surface right into His loving arms. Thank You for hearing me. Amen.*

**But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. 1 Corinthians 6:17**

We are shown that the bond between a man and a woman who are united in marriage is likened to our union with Christ. Paul said in the previous verse that the two "become one flesh." In a similar manner, but on a spiritual level, "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him." The words "with Him" are inserted for clarity, but the Greek actually says, "one spirit is." There is a spiritual connection to each believer that is realized when they receive Jesus Christ as Lord.

In this verse then is not only the establishment of the concept of oneness in spirit, but the truth that because we are one in spirit, our actions now truly affect that bond. This is why Paul is so adamant about our rejection of sexual immorality. To engage in perverse acts after being saved is to do so when united to Christ. Paul is asking them to seriously think this through from the eternal perspective.

But there is also one other point of doctrine which is implicitly upheld by this very verse; the doctrine of eternal salvation. If we are joined to the Lord in this way, then it becomes apparent that our salvation must be eternal. If we engage in a perverse act, such as adultery, and it is something that affects our union with Christ, then it must be that the union with Christ is maintained despite the fault. Otherwise, Paul would have noted it as a warning that the bond would be severed. However, nowhere is that concept even hinted at. Thank God for what Jesus has done. We continue to be saved, despite ourselves.

In his ever-consistent way of describing our union with Christ, we see that Paul speaks of it elsewhere. Here are two examples from the book of Galatians -

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Galatians 2:20

"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

-Galatians 3:17

Life application: We are one with the Lord in spirit. He lives in us and we have put Him on as our garment of righteousness. Let us attempt to always live up to that glorious position. He is holy and so let us act in holiness as well.

*With Christ I too have been crucified  
It is no longer I who live but He  
When I called on Him, at that moment I died  
And the life I now live is one in Him, eternally*

*I now live by faith in the Son of God  
Who loved me and gave Himself for me  
Help me Lord, in Your steps always to tread  
And to reflect in You a life which is pure and holy*

*For surely into Christ, I was baptized  
And in Him is eternal life realized*

*Father of glory, I know that through Christ my Lord I am again united to You. And yet at times I find myself falling very short of this high and exalted position. My thoughts and actions belie the Name which I now bear and it grieves me when they do. So, Lord, keep reminding me, nudging me, and guiding me. Help me to walk in paths of righteousness and to bring honor to You. Amen.*

**Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. 1 Corinthians 6:18**

Paul's words concerning sexual immorality now result in a direct command – "Flee it!" No stronger words could be uttered. They are direct and specific. Based on what he has already said, and what he will say in the coming verses, this is something of the highest significance and importance. And he gives the reason why when he says that "every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body."

This is a tie directly back to what he said in the previous verse. We are united to Christ and are one with Him in spirit. Therefore, by sinning against our own body, we are sinning against Him directly. The concept of "body" here is inclusive of the entire man,

not merely the flesh (as he pointed out in his note about “foods” earlier). Sexual sin is a direct sin against Jesus Christ because believers are “in” Jesus Christ. Let us consider this carefully as we conduct our lives.

It has been said that there is safety in numbers, but in the case of sexual immorality, there is greater safety in running away. This is what Joseph did when he was confronted by Potiphar’s wife. He knew that involvement with her was wrong. And that was at a time before the giving of the law. We have the lessons of the time of the law and we have the New Testament to guide us since the passing of the law. How can we believe we will escape judgment if we are caught up in sexual immorality?

Fleeing from such sin in this manner is imperative and it calls to mind James’ words in his epistle. In James 4:7 it says, “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” We are to resist the devil, flee from sin, and submit to God. If we do these things, we will be sound in our faith and practice and we will stand approved in our conduct.

Life application: Thoughts lead to action and therefore we should always endeavor to control our thoughts concerning sinful practices. The Bible asks us to rather “fix our thoughts on Jesus” (Hebrews 3:1). By doing so, we will keep from getting side-swiped by the devil and finding ourselves in an unhappy position.

Heavenly Father, You direct us to flee from sin such as sexual immorality and idolatry. But even our thoughts are captured by these things at times. Help us to fix our thoughts on Jesus, direct our eyes to Him, and to be obedient to Your word. This is a tough world to walk in and it is getting more so each day. Give us wisdom to control our eyes and our desires and to live lives which are holy and honoring to You. Amen.

**Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 1 Corinthians 6:19**

“Or do you not know” is intended to be taken as a positive affirmation – “Certainly you must know!” It is a rhetorical question designed to get the letter’s recipients (and thus us) to think this issue through clearly. And the issue he is speaking of is that “your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you.” This then is another case raised by Paul why we should not be engaged in sin and impurity.

There are three general uses for the term “temple” in the Bible which we need to understand. The first is the temple (earlier before the temple was built it was the

moveable tabernacle) in Jerusalem. This was the place of worship for the covenant people and it showed that God was among them. The second is found in the gospels and it is speaking of the Lord's physical body. Now in the epistles, it refers to the believer in Christ who is sanctified by the sealing (and thus the indwelling) of the Holy Spirit.

As a substantiation of this, we can refer to verses such as 2 Corinthians 6:16. There is says the following –

“And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:  
‘I will dwell in them  
And walk among them.  
I will be their God,  
And they shall be My people.’”

The Holy Spirit “whom you have from God” is He who seals us (Ephesians 1:13, 14) and thus He is our guarantee. He indwells us from the moment we believe. And as much as He is a guarantee, the Spirit also is a sign of ownership. We have been purchased and are owned by God. This is why Paul now declares “and you are not your own.” We belong to that which we are a slave to.

We were once owned by the devil because we were slaves to sin (see John 8:34 and Romans 6). However, through the blood of Christ, we were redeemed and now are slaves of God. If we are slaves of God, then we belong to Him. If we belong to Him, then we are bound under Him to be obedient to Him. We cannot and we dare not assume that we have license to sin. Such a thought is corrupt and wicked. It defies the very authority of our Master over us.

In a human master-to-slave relationship, disobedience would be considered intolerable. Why should we think it is different with God? But this is the constant theme of those who want to have their foot in both worlds. On one hand they claim *freedom from sin* in Christ and on the other they claim *freedom to sin* because of Christ. It is both illogical and perverse.

Life application: Go to work today and tell your boss that you will no longer adhere to his rules, guidelines, and authority. See how far that gets you and then consider how much less God appreciates such defiance. (Note: Don't actually go to work today and do those things.)

*Lord, You are ever so gracious and merciful. I'm sure that I fail You far more than I could ever please You. But there is a Seal upon me which keeps me in Your hand through it all. I cannot understand the depth of love that You possess to allow that Seal to be a fixed "guarantee" of my promised redemption. Forgive my disobedient heart and help me always to strive to be worthy of what I already possess. Thank You Lord, Amen.*

**For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. 1 Corinthians 6:20**

This is the last verse of chapter 6 and it is an exacting follow-up to Paul's previous words that said "you are not your own." We are not the possessors of our lives, nor are we to be the deciders of our conduct. These now belong to the Lord. He has purchased us and is our Master and His word is our instruction manual for conduct. We are entirely under His authority because we "were bought at a price."

But what was the price? What value was set on redeeming us from the power of the devil? The answer is found in Jesus' final words upon the cross. In John 19:30 we read this –

"So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit."

The word from which "It is finished" is translated is the word *tetelestai*. It indicates the completion of something; the rendering of a payment and the final act of purchase. In his first epistle, Peter confirms that it was the cross of Christ which made this possible –

"...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

-1 Peter 1:19, 20

"The precious blood of Christ" implies the death of the Lord. The death of the Lord occurred on Calvary's cross. Therefore, we were purchased through His horrifying death. Because such an enormous price was paid, how can we consider it acceptable to live in sin? Our Master has given us His directions and those directions never condone our right to sin. It is unthinkable to even consider! And so, Paul says, "therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

As we are "in" Christ, and because He is sinless and also our Lord, how can we justify sinful actions? We belong to God and are bound to His word as our rule and guide. Understanding this shows us the immensity of the importance of knowing and adhering to His word. If we are His, what would make us think that we should follow extra-biblical church rules which conflict with Scripture, a pastor's unbiblical teachings, or any other set of directions besides those given by God?

It is a simple issue to think through. If we work for a company, Dwyer Industries for example. Would it make any sense to ignore the directions and policies of the company? Would we bring in the directives of another company or listen to a mid-level manager who was making up his own policies which conflicted with the company's instruction manuals? No!

If this is the case with a work environment, how much more should we who are in a bondservant position under God be willing to submit to His guidance and instruction! And yet, how flagrantly we treat the Bible, dismissing those things which we find unsuitable to our tastes? Let us remember our state and stand fast on the counsel given in the Holy Bible. As Bengel's Gnomon states, "They are in error, who think that God should be only internally, or only externally worshipped." Our state is one which is wholly subservient to the Lord - body and spirit. We are to worship Him with our minds, bodies, deeds, and actions.

Life application: What is the value of the death of Jesus Christ to you? In what esteem do you hold His cross? Is it simply a ticket to heaven but a chance for free-living until then? Or do you cherish it right here and right now as a mournful necessity occasioned by our sin? Look to the cross; cling to the cross; and boast in the cross. In doing so, you will conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the cross.

*Lord God, there is no greater desire in my heart than to glorify You. I was purchased from the world of sin and death through the blood of Jesus Christ and therefore I am Yours. I know that You wish me to conduct my life and actions in accord with this position and I know that the way to do this is through applying Your word to my life. Therefore, give me sound instruction and right-thinking on Your word. Then I will be able to be obedient to its precepts. Thank You for hearing my prayer. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 7

**Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me:**

***It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*** 1 Corinthians 7:1

In these words, Paul is referring here directly to a question which had been asked of him - "Now of the things of which you wrote to me..." The first of the issues is concerning marriage and his words are probably a direct response to the question. For whatever reason, the issue of celibacy as opposed to marriage had been addressed. The term "to touch a woman" is a way of indicating marriage.

Paul is saying that there is nothing wrong with celibacy. In this, he uses the term *kalon*, "an excellent thing" instead of a word of lesser impact *agathon* which means merely "good." It is this terminology which was probably borrowed word for word from the letter he received. They asked his opinion and he in turn has provided it in confirmation. It would be like someone asking, "Isn't the sky really blue today?" The answer might be, "Yes, it is really blue." The words "*It is good for a man not to touch a woman*" then are his response.

Q: "Is it good for a man not to touch a woman?"

R: "Yes, it is so."

In other words, what Paul is saying is not intended to mean that it is *better* to remain celibate than to be married, but not being married is an excellent thing. He will explain his reasons why as he goes on, justifying the soundness of living a celibate life. From this beginning point, he will give quite a few details concerning marriage as well. Some will reflect the Lord's own words concerning the issue and others will be his interpretation of the state of things.

However, he will speak of the appropriateness of marriage throughout his thoughts. Thus, it confirms that he is not using this verse as a greater or lesser comparison, but rather as a confirmatory response to a question.

Life application: Context is always a necessary aspect of our Bible interpretation. If we fail to consider context, we will inevitably come to faulty conclusions concerning matters which will affect our walk with the Lord and our understanding of what is sound or unacceptable for our lives.

*How wonderfully marvelous it is to know You more each day Lord! Rising early and reading Your word sets my feet on the right path for what lies ahead. Pondering Your word as I walk along the path keeps me safe from the fiery darts which fly towards me; I am fully protected as I consider Your testimonies. And before I retire to my cherished reward at the end of the day where I can get a bit of rest, I once again open Your word and let it fill me up. And thus, my sleep is sound and filled with thoughts of You. How wonderfully marvelous it is to know You more each day Lord! Amen.*

**Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. 1 Corinthians 7:2**

Our second verse of chapter 7 shows us that Paul was certainly responding to a direct question in the previous verse. There he said, "*It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*" The concept of "marriage" is connected to "touch a woman." In other words, to remain celibate is a good thing and he had no problem with such a lifestyle. He himself remained unmarried.

However, there is also a reason for marriage instead of celibacy which he now explains by beginning with "nevertheless." His words now are set in contrast to what he just said. The idea is, "Remaining celibate is fine, but on the other hand..." And the reason is immediately given which is "because of sexual immorality."

Someone who decides to remain celibate is just as likely to be tempted as he is able to refrain. If he is tempted and fails, he will then be engaged in "sexual immorality" because sex is confined to the bonds of marriage. Therefore, being celibate is a noble goal, but it is not the norm and it is bound, in many cases, to result in sin rather than devotion to the principle for which it was intended.

And so, because of the propensity for falling into sexual immorality, "let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." Paul is indicating that being married is preferable to falling into sexual immorality. Although marriage increases problems and trials in many ways, it is a better option than engaging in illicit behavior which thus defiles the body of Christ (as he spoke about in detail in chapter 6).

It is rather unfortunate that some denominations within the church failed to heed these words of Paul and instead mandated that their clergy remain unmarried. This is for several important reasons -

It binds those who are in such positions to something which is contrary to nature.

It leads to exactly what Paul notes today, sexual immorality.

Christianity is disgraced by the actions of those who have so conducted themselves in these vile practices.

It is unbiblical.

Once sexual immorality sets into such an environment, it leads to greater perversion as sexual misconduct becomes entrenched in the clergy. And sadly, the greater sexual perversion is directed to those who are easily controlled and manipulated. It has become a horrifying result of the misuse of what God intended for His people and it has so tarnished some denominations that those outside of the church view Christianity with eyes of contempt.

Life application: God created woman for man and it is normal and healthy for them to be married. No other sexual relations are authorized by the Bible except those of a man and a woman who are married to each other.

*Heavenly Father, there are things which You have mandated in Your word which are held in contempt today. Among the most prevalent is that sex is to be limited to a man and a woman who are united to one another in marriage. This precept is looked down on, shunned, and belittled by the world, but Your word asks us to be in the world but not of the world. Help us to be obedient to You above all else and never to act in a manner contrary to Your word. Amen.*

**Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.** 1 Corinthians 7:3

Paul is using delicate terms to speak of the marriage bed. He began to allude to this in the previous verse and he will expand on it in the verses to come. After having discussed celibacy and that it was a fine and acceptable action to take, his words to those who decide rather to be married are that they should act in a manner which demonstrates that state.

There is an affection that is due between a man and a woman who are united in marriage and it goes in both directions. If one has decided against celibacy and for marriage, then that which belongs to marriage should not be denied by either spouse. His words are subdued to avoid any hint of perversity or indecency. Instead, the marriage bed remains undefiled and he is using terms which express this.

Life application: When one is married, there are expectations from the spouse which are not to be denied by the other spouse. If they are, then why would they have agreed to the marriage? But they did and they therefore have obligations to provide the affection due to the other.

*Lord God, how wonderful it is to have a wife by my side. We can walk the highway of life and experience things together which would never be as enjoyable alone. In seeing this, I see even more why You have called a Bride to Yourself. What a pleasure it is to know that together we will forever enjoy the streams of goodness which flow from Your throne of grace. Until then, thank You for that little slice of heaven that I have now with my own wife, anticipating that great Day ahead. Amen.*

**The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.**

1 Corinthians 7:4

This verse is a truth which goes back to the very creation of man. In Genesis 2:24 it says-

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

Because they are now "one flesh," there is an authorized control over one another that cannot be dismissed. This verse is not to be separated from the previous verses. Paul noted the appropriateness of marriage because of what would otherwise devolve into "sexual immorality." After that, he showed that a man is to give his wife due affection and the wife is to offer the same to her husband. In other words, they are not to deny the rights of the bed in marriage.

To further strengthen this concept, he provides this verse of clarity. "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*." The wife cannot force the husband to live as a celibate. Nor should the wife force him into even temporary celibacy. Instead, she is to offer herself to him because he possesses authority over her.

"And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*." In the same manner, the husband is not to deny the wife what she desires in the marriage bed too. She has like-authority over the body of her husband. Neither has a higher standing in this relationship; both are to be granted the fulfillment of their needs and desires. And the reason, based on his previous words, is obvious.

If either denies the other their rightful due, it will more than likely end in frustration leading to divorce or adultery. If to divorce, it may still be considered adultery (as will be seen in the coming verses). Whichever is the case though, sexual immorality (and thus sin) is the expected result. And this sin came about from denying what is otherwise a God-granted right because of the marriage vows which were taken.

Life application: Marriage and the marriage bed are not to be used as weapons between spouses. They are to be used to build a harmonious relationship which meets the needs and desires of one another.

*Glorious God! Thank You for the wondrous creation You have given us. There are a seemingly infinite number of smells, tastes, and sensations to delight our minds and souls with wonder. Even those things which are offensive actually serve a purpose, because we can then have something to use as a contrast. Adam and Eve didn't know how good they had it until they lost Eden. We have that knowledge and even more... because we have the surety of being in Your presence, surrounded by delight, forever. And it's all because of the shed blood of Christ. Thank You for the Lord Jesus! Amen.*

**Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 1 Corinthians 7:5**

Based on his words of the previous verse, Paul now introduces a word of instruction to avoid problems which may arise between the married. Beginning with "Do not deprive one another" his intent is to show that it is not right for a man to deprive a wife, nor a woman to deprive a husband of their rightful due within the marriage. As one another's body belongs to the other, there is no "right" to deny what actually has mutual ownership.

However, there may be times where there may be a mutual agreement to remain temporarily celibate. It should not occur "except with consent for a time." The only reason for one to deny the other is when it was mutually agreed and then only for a short time. The verb used here is in the aorist tense showing that it is intended for brief periods at best, not for continuous years or some lengthy period. A span may be desired, for example, for mourning the loss of a loved one or possibly for seeking God's face for some reason. This is not without prior precedent. When the people were to see God's presence on Mount Sinai, they were given this instruction -

"So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes. <sup>15</sup> And he said to the people, 'Be ready for the third day; do not come near *your* wives.'" Exodus 19:14, 15

In a like manner, Paul says that by mutual consent, a couple could abstain "that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer." For a higher purpose of a spiritual nature, temporary celibacy is acceptable. However, Paul understood that we are still in our frail human bodies and it is not the norm for married couples to live in such a manner. Instead, he instructs that they are to "come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

Should a prolonged time of such celibacy occur in a marriage, thoughts will begin to wander, temptations will begin to arise, and the flesh will make itself known once again. In such a weakened state, Satan will come to tempt even the strongest person. Many pastors and other followers of Christ have fallen because of such enticement. And this comes from a "lack of self-control." This is the natural thing which occurs when someone is weakened through temptation.

King David found this out personally as have so many others. There was probably no initial thought in his mind that he would disobey the Lord's command. But in his weak state he succumbed to adultery and then murder to cover it up. If this can happen to Israel's sweet psalmist who penned words of beauty to the Lord even in the most trying circumstances, how certain is it that we too can fall in this manner!

Life application: God, through Paul's hand, has given us these instructions for intimate conduct between a man and a woman who are married. If they are not adhered to, or if the man or the woman intentionally violates what He has instructed, it is sin. Be ready to perform the duties which you promised when you made the original vow of marriage to your spouse.

*Heavenly Father, I want to thank You today for those You have placed in my life and who have such a positive effect on me. You have blessed me with a wife beyond compare, children who have blessed me in ways they cannot imagine, people who help me with words of comfort, actions of support, and times of happiness and fellowship. I'm blessed with a great group with whom I worship and wonderful people that I work with. Lord, just thinking on all the people who are in my life - close by or as distant friends who I only hear from occasionally, I feel so blessed - even to overflowing. Thank You for the intimacy of such people. Amen.*

**But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. 1 Corinthians 7:6**

This verse has caused great conflict between scholars as to exactly what Paul is speaking of. First, some translations say, "But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment" (KJV). The intent of what Paul says then becomes unclear. Some have taken it that the "permission" is something that was granted him to say, but not as a commandment. This is not the intent at all.

Rather, the word "concession" shows what he means much better. He is leaving the details of the lives of believers, whether they decide to remain celibate or get married, up to the individuals. However, as we will see, he is doing it with his own personal advice on the matter (this will be seen in the coming verses).

The second area of conflict is exactly what Paul says is a concession. Is it from 7:1? Is it from the preceding verse? What is it that he is not commanding, but rather is giving as sound instruction? The answer is clear from the text itself. Verse 7:1 said, "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me:" In response to the first question, he began with his instruction on celibacy versus marriage. During this entire set of verses, and for the next two to come, he is giving personal advice on the matter. He has not issued any command, but is merely responding as he believes is appropriate.

When we come to verse 7:10, he will issue a "command." At this point, the words of concession end and direct obedience to the words issued is expected. Until that time, his words are intended for a sound contemplation of the issues of celibacy and marriage. Both are authorized by God and so it is obvious that there are no commands concerning the issues, but rather words of wisdom which will keep the individual or married couple free from unhappiness in their chosen state.

Understanding this brings us to the third difficulty. Are the words of Paul inspired or not during these first 9 verses? He is claiming that his words are a concession or an "allowance" for believers to follow. If they are his words, and he is not claiming inspiration in the matter, are the words truly to be considered a portion of the word of God and thus inspired?

The answer is "yes." They are written by Paul as he was carried along by the Holy Spirit. Regardless as to whether his words are merely descriptive, prescriptive, for exhortation, for advice, or for instruction, they are the words God intended for the particular subject in question.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16:5, "Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia)." This is merely a descriptive thought. Paul is describing what will happen. Nothing is required for us, and yet it is inspired because God intended for this thought to be in the Bible.

In 1 Corinthians 5:11 he says, "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person." This is a prescriptive verse, a command, that is to be followed in Corinth and in all churches at all times. Obedience is expected and something is required for us, and it is inspired because God intends for us to be obedient to His directive, given through Paul.

The same is true with all other forms of writing used in Scripture - wisdom, poetry, history, advice and counsel, instruction, etc. Each has a place and all are inspired. They are exactly what God wants for us to be built up and edified with.

Life application: Understanding context and also style of biblical writing is extremely important to grasp what is being said, to whom, and for what purpose. Arching over all of this though is the expectation that we believe that the Bible is truly God's word. If we accept this premise, then we will properly apply the context and style to our walk with the Lord. Dismissing even one verse of Scripture because we disagree with it will unravel the entire tapestry of the word and it also demonstrates that we believe that what God says is less important than what we desire; it is idolatry. Let us carefully and tenderly handle God's precious word.

*Oh God, how amazing it is to read Your word and to ponder the beauty which is contained in it. Despite thousands of years of analysis and study, new revelations, patterns, pictures, and secrets are gleaned from it day by day. It is a timeless and precious wonder which is beyond compare. Forgive us for the dust which settles upon it as we neglect it. Forgive us for shunning it, deriding it, and ignoring it. Help us, O God, Your people, to accept it, cherish it, and study it all our days. Thank You for Your superior word. Amen.*

**For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. 1 Corinthians 7:7**

Paul's words here are debated, not because they are difficult to understand, but because of presuppositions in those who read what he has penned. This is true with much of the Bible. What we already believe will affect what we read and assimilate. It is

difficult, but not impossible, to set our presuppositions aside, but it is always the right course to take.

He begins with, "For I wish that all men were even as I myself." This is the disputed portion of the verse. Paul was unmarried as we can glean from 1 Corinthians 7:8. Because of this, those who prefer the single, celibate life will naturally tend to infer that he means that he "wished all were unmarried as he was." This however is not what Paul means. He is speaking of his ability to control his sexual desires, even in his unmarried state. He wished that all had the same control as he did.

This is obviously the correct rendering for several reasons. First, marriage is a God-instituted rite and was given to man for the very reason of having a partner that man could join with. Secondly, if all were celibate as he was, there would have been one generation of Christians and then the faith would have ended. And thirdly, he has already given instructions to both the married and the unmarried and they deal with proper handling of sex, not just abstinence, as the main issue.

Instead of improperly engaging in sexual activity, he finishes this thought with, "But each has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that." In other words, some have the gift of remaining unmarried and not being tempted in their celibacy. Others have the desire and urge to engage in a relationship and so God has given them the right to such a relationship in marriage. Thus, even these words, "one in this manner and one in that," demonstrate that he is not saying that he wished all remained unmarried, "but that every one had the same grace of continence which he himself was endowed with." (CJ Ellicott).

Life application: Whether we decide to remain unmarried or to marry, we are to abstain from sexual immorality in the state we are in. God has ordained that sex be confined to a man and a woman who are married to one another.

*Though many trials and temptations may come my way  
I pray for strength to remain faithful to You, O God  
Grant me the ability to turn and walk away  
From any form of sin which lies ahead on the path I trod*

*Oh, that I would be faithful to Your word!  
And that I would never displease You with the life I live  
Help me to bring honor and glory to You my Lord  
In this one life which to me You did give*

*Thank You for Your kind hand of grace upon me  
And thank You for looking after Your other children, all of us  
I know that it is a gift which is granted for all eternity  
And it came through the precious shed blood of Jesus*

*Lord, You have given each of us gifts, abilities, and strengths. But we also have failings and weaknesses. Help us to use the positives to overcome the weaknesses so that we can be pleasing to You with each moment that we breathe and each step that we take. When we fall short, help us to get up, shake off the dust, and continue down the right path which leads to pleasing You. Amen.*

**But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; ... 1 Corinthians 7:8**

This is a follow up to the question levied to Paul about being celibate as opposed to getting married. He answered the question about celibacy, spoke of marriage, and has returned to both those who are unmarried, and those who were married but who are now widows. He is doing this because eventually the question would have been made, "Does his advice on celibacy and marriage pertain in these circumstances too?"

He is presenting a logical, orderly, and complete response to their question. And so, "to the unmarried and to the widows" he gives guidance - "It is good for them if they remain even as I am." In other words, there is nothing wrong with never getting married, nor is there anything wrong with a widow remaining a widow. Having said that, he is neither mandating this, nor is he saying that there is something wrong with getting married or getting remarried. In fact, in 1 Timothy, he will give this advice concerning younger widows -

*"But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully."*

-1 Timothy 5:12-14

Everything must be taken in context and the reason behind each statement must be considered. To take any of these individual verses from Paul and use them as a stand-alone text, will inevitably result in bad doctrine. Eventually, things like Catholic doctrine

where priests are to remain unmarried will result from a misinterpretation of Scripture and then other, much greater, problems will inevitably arise within the church.

Life application: The Bible covers the main issues that we need for the conduct of our lives. If we properly apply it, we will be in good shape as we live lives of holiness and purity in the presence of the Lord.

*How wonderful it is to have Your word to rely on, Lord. When troubles and questions arise which are difficult for me to resolve, I can go there and find out what You would have for me to do. And as You are the Creator of man and the Author of the manual for man, I know that I will always find the right and proper resolution to my needs. Thank You for such attentive care for us, the work of Your hands. Amen.*

**...but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*.** 1 Corinthians 7:9

This is the second half of the previous thought to the unmarried. Paul said that it was good if they remained even as he was (meaning unmarried), "but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry." This is obvious. If someone who is unmarried is filled with the desires that come about in such a state, they should then get married.

The surety is that desire leads to action and action in this case is sin because sex is to be between a man and a woman in the bonds of marriage. Referring back to Paul's statements in chapter 6, a Christian is "in" Christ and therefore to engage in illicit sex is to sin against Christ directly.

And so, Paul goes on by saying, "For it is better to marry than to burn with passion." To understand this in a way not evident in the English, the Pulpit Commentary provides an analysis of the Greek tense of the verbs -

"The 'marry' is in the aorist - 'to marry once for all,' and live in holy married union; the 'burn' is in the present - 'to be on fire with concupiscence.' Marriage once for all is better than continuous lust; the former is permitted, the latter sinful."

Paul's words here follow on the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:27, 28 -

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.'  
But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

The Bible teaches that intent to sin is sin. We are given a remedy for the sins we face concerning sexual desire in this verse. However, there are instances where the physical needs cannot be met for whatever reason. In those cases, additional prayer and communion with the Lord is needed. This is no different than an alcoholic or drug addict who must learn to focus on Christ and to rely on Him. We are given our instructions and we need to strive to conduct our lives in holiness and in a manner which is honoring to the Lord.

Life application: The Bible shows us that we need to make decisions that may be difficult, but they are never unattainable. By staying in the word, walking closely with the Lord, and fellowshiping with other believers, we can be victorious over our sinful actions and desires.

*Heavenly Father, how often I fail You! Were it not for the cross of Jesus, that eternal void between You and me would be a horrifying thought to contemplate. But because of what He did there at Calvary, there is hope, there is forgiveness, and there is the wondrous surety that I am forgiven and free. What kind of love is this! You are beyond glorious in how You have dealt with Your wayward child. Thank You, O God. Amen.*

**Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband.** 1 Corinthians 7:10

So far, Paul has been addressing the unmarried and those considering marriage. He now turns to those who are married and begins with, "Now to the married I command..." This is something that is expected to be adhered to at all costs and is not up to the audience's wishes or desires. It is a set, fixed, and firm rule. And to further bolster this, he adds, "yet not I but the Lord." In other words, this is a command based on the words of Christ Jesus. Paul is taking extreme care to show that his words *are* the Lord's words. They are fixed and inviolable.

And the command from the Lord which is re-transmitted by Paul is that, "A wife is not to depart from her husband." If a person is married, they are to remain married. It is a solemn agreement to one another that was conducted in the presence of God, regardless as to whether they were believers at the time. It is also regardless of whether one or both have since called on Christ.

The reason for this instruction probably came about because of a question from Christian spouses who may have been concerned as to whether it was unlawful for them to be married to one who is a pagan. It is also possible that Paul's earlier words about it

being good for individuals to remain unmarried may be misconstrued to mean that separating is acceptable and even the favorable position. But the Lord's words on this issue must stand and they are those spoken by Him in the gospels, including Mark 10:11, 12 -

"So He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'"

The issue of divorce wasn't merely a dispensational issue (meaning under the time of the law or during the church age, etc.). Instead it is an issue which transcends dispensations and is an eternal decree. Marriages are not to be treated carelessly and married people are to remain married until death. Paul will explain why as he continues and he will also provide other pertinent information concerning marriage and divorce.

In the end, there is only one exception to the rule on divorce which is if a spouse commits adultery. In our society, we will look for any and every excuse to be disobedient to this command, but there is none other than adultery. Let us pay heed to these words and consider them carefully. The Lord has spoken and our obedience is expected.

Life application: Is it a light thing to ignore Jesus' words concerning marriage? If we are willing to violate His command on this issue, then what type of follower does that show us to be? Let us remain united to the one we chose as our spouse and never dare to ignore the commands of Christ.

*Heavenly Father, there are things recorded in Your word which are difficult for me to obey, but who am I to be disobedient to what You have commanded? Grant me the resolute and determined state of mind that I will be obedient to You no matter what. I know that I am forgiven already because of Christ, but that cannot be an excuse to be disobedient to Your word. Instead, it should be the impetus for gratitude and an even closer adherence to it. Help me to remember this and to stand fast in my faith and practice. Amen.*

**But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce *his* wife. 1 Corinthians 7:11**

This verse follows on from the instruction in verse 10. It is another regularly neglected and abused tenet from Scripture, and yet it is clear and concise. If a woman has

departed from her husband, she needs to "remain unmarried." Excuses as to "why" a woman left her husband (with the noted exception of adultery) are irrelevant. No other words are given which negate this precept and Paul's words here are not merely cultural or passing away. They are doctrine for the church. To disobey them is to disobey the Lord who inspired the words.

And so in this case, the woman is to "remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband." This brings up an obvious problem though. What if the husband has gone and remarried? In this case, it would imply that the marriage bond is irretrievably broken and therefore she would be free from this constraint. However, it is not explicitly, but only implicitly to be inferred. No matter what, the stricter judgment on this matter is preferred. It is not acceptable for a woman to leave her husband and go to marry another.

But there is more. Paul then explains that "a husband is not to divorce his wife." This follows on from Jesus' words in Matthew 5:32 -

"But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery."

These words from the Lord, and also from Paul, show us that the marriage bond within the Christian context is to be held in the highest regard and is to be considered sacred. It is a violation of the will of the Lord for couples to divorce for any reason except adultery.

Life application: When you said, "I do" you were confining yourself before God to the bonds of a marriage that are not to be dissolved except through death. Divorce is not an acceptable alternative to unhappiness. Having said "I do" you should always be content with the thought that "I still do."

*Lord, it is beyond imagination to me how we can call on You to be saved and then not want to know You intimately through the study of Your word. The Bible is the most wonderful gift, the greatest treasure, and the most uplifting joy that I can imagine. And yet we go to church and hear sermons that rarely if ever show us the beauty and marvel of what is contained in its pages. Help us to get our thoughts and hearts directed toward You and give us a desire to know Your word more each day. Amen.*

**But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. 1 Corinthians 7:12**

Paul has addressed those who wish to remain celibate, those who are widowed, and those who are married. However, he will now discuss a new group and his words are immensely important. The reason why will be given, but it actually deals with those who are affected by the marriage as much as those who are married. The issue he will now address is that of mixed marriages, where one is a believer and one is not.

To begin, he says, "But to the rest I, not the Lord, say..." He is very careful to mark a distinction between the directives personally given by the Lord and those that are given by him. His words, however, have no less import than those of the Lord. This is because they are a part of the Bible which is God's word. They are given under the inspiration of the Spirit and must be considered authoritative. And so, he begins with, "If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her."

A believing man with a non-believing spouse may not divorce her because she is an unbeliever. He got himself into the marriage and he has no right (with the previously noted exception of adultery) to terminate the marriage. The fact that he is (or became) a believer and she is a non-believer is irrelevant. He is obligated to his vows and he must stay with his wife no matter what. Again, reasons will be given for this, and they will not only affect the husband and the wife, but others as well. And it includes a reason that addresses a theological issue which goes all the way back to the fall of man.

Life application: As with the previous verses, we can clearly see that there is no reason, apart from adultery, to terminate a marriage. We cannot "excuse" our actions in divorce. And yet divorce has become as common as going to the store for groceries. The Lord cannot be pleased with the flagrant disregard of this by His people.

*Lord, how often I error in my thoughts and actions and then try to make excuses for the wrong I have committed. Forgive me for trying to justify the unjustifiable and grant me the wisdom to accept my faults, confess them as faults, and determine to not make them in the future. And keep me filled with Your word so that I can recognize what is wrong before it comes my way and to stay on the correct and noble path. Thank You Lord. Amen.*

**And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. 1 Corinthians 7:13**

This verse is the flip side of what Paul said in verse 12 - "If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her." By saying this, he is confirming that there is no excuse by either spouse, if a believer, for leaving the marriage relationship. They are bound to their oath regardless if it was made before conversion or not, and even if the other spouse fails to call on Christ.

The reasons for his words are coming in the next verse and they show us the immense importance of remaining married, even to an unbeliever.

Life application: We are expected to remain committed to our spouse. We are not granted "wiggle room" in this.

*Lord God, help each of us to be obedient to Your word and to cling to what is right, even if it means our unhappiness for a while. In the end, obedience to You in a state of difficulty or sadness is surely preferable to disobedience accompanied by temporary happiness. Help us to think this through O God. Surely Your word is always given for our ultimate good and for a closer walk with You. Amen.*

**For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. 1 Corinthians 7:14**

Paul now states a truth about marriage that affects the children of the marriage. It is a tenet which is so remarkable that this verse should be remembered by every believer. There is a premise in the Bible which is inescapable and which goes all the way back to the fall of man. God created our first father, Adam. At this time, there was a spiritual connection between the man and his God.

However, Adam was given a warning –

"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" Genesis 2:16, 17

The narrative goes on to show that Adam disobeyed God. However, he continued to live until the age of 930 years. This shows us one of two possibilities:

- 1) Either what God said wasn't true, or
- 2) The man did die, spiritually.

The second is correct and it is the premise of the Bible from that point on. Adam became a physical being with a soul, but no "spiritual" connection to God; he died spiritually. What is implied throughout the rest of Scripture is that all men are born into Adam. We are physical beings, with a soul, but no "spiritual" connection to God. We are conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5) and are spiritually dead and thus all are "condemned already" (John 3:18 & Ephesians 2:1, etc.).

This is actually confirmed implicitly in the account of Cain and Abel. They brought an offering to the Lord without the Bible noting any offense committed by them before the offering was made. In essence, the implication is that they understood this spiritual disconnect existed in them. And the fact that sin reigned is evident by the actions of Cain who killed his brother. Thus, Paul's words, "all have sinned" confirms that we are born in sin; it is inherited and we are born separate from God; spiritually dead.

Time and again, the Bible uses this concept of being "in" someone to remind us that we are all descendants of Adam by blood and thus we are "in" Adam. This is why there are such meticulous genealogies recorded in both Testaments of the Bible. It is to show that connection all the way back to Adam who was created by God. When Adam sinned, we therefore sinned "in" Adam. Paul explains this in Romans 5:12 -

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." Romans 5:12

Jesus came to repair this spiritual disconnect. Without Him, there is no hope for restoration to God. Only through Him can the breach be repaired. Understanding the rite of circumcision will help us comprehend this. Circumcision was given as a sign to the covenant people. It pictures "cutting away" the inherited sin, because that sin transfers through the father. Thus, by cutting the male organ, the sin is pictured to be "cut away." As it was only a picture, the covenant people waited for the Messiah who would actually fulfill that picture.

When Jesus came, He was born of a woman (thus He is fully human), but without a human father. He inherited no sin from Adam. His Father being God (thus He is fully God) meant that He was born without sin. Therefore, He was qualified to replace Adam. The four gospels are then given to provide a record of His life. He was born without sin, just as Adam was created without sin. But He still needed to live without sin. The

gospels show this to be the case. He lived without sin, prevailed over the law, and He died under the law without sin. Therefore, He prevailed over sin. In Him, sin (and thus spiritual death) is defeated. The Lamb had overcome.

So, what does this have to do with 1 Corinthians 7:14? Paul says, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband." This does not mean that they are "saved" through the unbelieving spouse. But it sanctifies them for a very important reason. And this reason is that, "otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy."

The inherited sin of Adam exists in all people from the moment of conception. We are conceived, born, and live separate from God until the time we call on Christ and are spiritually regenerated (John 3:16, Romans 8, etc.). If we never call on Christ, we will die "in Adam" and thus separate from God. But in His great mercy, God has allowed these children of a believer to be regarded as "holy" until the time that they are old enough to choose or reject Christ. Nothing "unclean" can ever enter into God's presence and, therefore, no child is saved - at any age - without Christ's covering.

In the case of a Christian family though, these children are set apart. However, if the marriage is dissolved by the believer, this is lost. Therefore, the sanctification of the parents is necessary to provide this set-apart state for the children. Without it, they are no longer set-apart. This may sound like a cruel and uncaring God, but it is exactly the opposite. He allows us free-will. From Adam to us we have made our choices and we must live by them. But He has also offered us His Son and the protections which come through Him. Therefore, what we perceive as uncaring is actually a demonstration of the greatest grace and mercy imaginable!

Life application: Our earthly choices can have spiritual consequences that we don't even realize unless we study and then adhere to the Bible's precepts. Let us also never impute "wrongdoing" or a state of "uncaring" to God. Rather, let us exalt Him for His unmerited grace and mercy.

*Lord God, Your word shows the most wonderful, caring, and glorious love for Your people. Despite our choices which have separated us from You, You have come and intervened in the affairs of man to make all things right once again. You have sent Jesus to quicken our spirits and to restore us to fellowship with You. Thank You for this great and marvelous Gift of life! Thank You for our Lord Jesus! Amen.*

**But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. 1 Corinthians 7:15**

Jesus had said that the only reason for divorce is adultery. When saying this, He was speaking to the covenant people, Israel, and at a time which was under the law. Paul, now writing to the church for church-age doctrine, has been careful to repeat Jesus' words and note that they are, in fact, His words. After citing that, he said in verse 12, "But to the rest I, not the Lord, say..."

He then went on to say that a believer cannot leave a non-believing spouse and he gave a very important reason for it. Verse 15 is still a part of Paul's personal directions and it may seem, at first, contrary to Jesus' words, but it is not. He is being carried by the Spirit and his words have become a part of God's word.

"But" begins this verse and it is in contrast to the two previous verses. "If the unbeliever departs, let him depart." This goes in either direction, whether the unbeliever is a man or a woman, but he uses the masculine for both as will be seen in a moment. Either way, if an unbeliever wants to be out of the marriage, then the believer may let them go. In fact, they probably don't have any choice in the matter in most countries and cultures anyway. If they want to go and can go, then there is nothing which mandates that they must stay.

Paul then explains this position by saying that "a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases." We, as believers, have been brought out from the bondage of sin to a new master. To be in a different form of bondage wouldn't suit our new position and calling, and it could only be detrimental to our walk with the Lord. Therefore, to release the unbeliever is acceptable when they wish to go. And the reason is that "God has called us to peace."

We are His and we are to live in peace under His authority. If our allegiances are skewed because of a marriage fraught with conflict and trial, then we are not living in the peace which He intends for us. And so, in this verse we have the only other reason which is biblically acceptable for dissolving a marriage. Understanding this then, we need to think rationally and carefully about our marriage choices and do our utmost to adhere to the commands of the Bible.

Life application: Let us stand firm on the Bible, even concerning those issues which may be difficult or displeasing. We have been called to obey the prescriptive statements

made there and it is unwise and inappropriate to pick and choose which ones we will adhere to.

*Heavenly Father, again I look at Your word and I see commands which are hard for me to accept at given times of my life. But if I am honestly concerned about pleasing You, I will accept them as written and in the context in which they are given. Those which apply to me directly will be those things which I will determine to do, even if they are hard to meet or unpleasant to me. Your will O God, not mine! Amen.*

**For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save *your* husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save *your* wife? 1 Corinthians 7:16**

In this verse, Paul certainly returns to the thoughts given in verses 12 and 13 which read-

"But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him."

The reason for a believer not being allowed to depart from a non-believer has especially been given in verse 14 when considering the state of the children. Paul was very careful to note that the children are considered "holy" because of the marriage bond which exists, even if one is an unbeliever. Along with that most important of reasons, Paul gives another reason for the believer to remain with the non-believer, and he does it in the form of two questions:

"For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save *your* husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save *your* wife?"

It very well may be that the non-believing husband or wife may come to salvation through the marriage by observing the conduct and witness of the believer. Our happiness or unhappiness in a marriage is of far less value than the salvation of even one person that we may no longer be in love with. Our lives are called to be witnesses to Christ, even in a marriage which is unsatisfactory.

The verse also confirms that the "sanctified" status of the non-believer which Paul spoke of in verse 14 had nothing to do with salvation, but was rather directed solely to the setting apart of the children as "holy." Also, Paul is not saying that the husband or wife

could actually "save" the non-believer. Only Jesus can do this. He is implying that their actions would lead to Jesus saving them. This should be obvious, but still is worth stating.

Having noted this about the connection to verses 12 and 13, it is also likely that the thought of verse 15 is considered in this verse as well. That verse said -

"But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace."

Taking that verse and tying it to verse 16 (our verse being analyzed now), Paul may also be saying that allowing the non-believing spouse to depart is acceptable because there is no way that they could know the outcome of the marriage. If they refused to allow the non-believer to depart as they wished because they were thinking they could "save" the non-believer, it could inevitably lead to strife which is in opposition to the statement that "God has called us to peace."

So, in all situations, the onus is on the believer to never voluntarily depart from the marriage; to allow the non-believer to stay if they wish; and to allow the non-believer to go if they wish. The free-will choice of the non-believer takes precedence, just as the free-will choice of an individual to accept or reject Jesus as Savior takes precedence. This free-will choice of the non-believer pictures the freedom God has given us in our marriage relationship to Him and shows implicitly that the doctrine of being "regenerated in order to believe" is false. Free-will is granted to humans concerning our relationship with Christ and free-will is granted to the non-believer to stay in the marriage or to depart from it.

Life application: God, through His word, asks us to be willing to sacrifice our own happiness for the sake of our marriage. Our choices, when self-centered, will inevitably turn out bad. But when we are obedient to God's word, there is a chance that things will turn out for both our happiness and an increase in the kingdom through the conversion of others. Let us adhere to God's word even if it is contrary to our happiness.

*Glorious and wonderful God! How good it is to rise early and hear the light breeze on the leaves. It is marvelous to hear the birds coming to their morning activity, flitting about and singing the songs You have taught them. And the smells of the dawning day are vibrant and alive - flowers opening, coffee brewing, the dew on the grass. The morning is a special time where I can sit back and enjoy being in Your presence in a special way. Thank You for the morning time, O God. Amen.*

**But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. 1 Corinthians 7:17**

The words now issued by Paul reach back to cover the preceding 6 verses (10-16) and at the same time they are an introduction to other concepts which Paul will comment on. In verses 10 and 11 came the Lord's command concerning marriage; that it should not be terminated through divorce. Then in 12 and 13, he noted that the believing spouse was not to depart from an unbelieving spouse and he gave the reason for it in verse 14. After this, he qualified the marriage arrangement by saying that the unbeliever, if he or she wishes to depart from the marriage, should be allowed to depart.

These are the thoughts which are included in the all-encompassing "But God has distributed to each one..." In other words, the position that one is found in when they became a believer was so chosen by God for that time in their lives; it was not unknown to Him and He understands the details and complexities of the situation. Because of this, what He has allowed should remain. Thus, "as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk."

This phrase means that we are to remain in whatever state we were in when we were "called." We cannot say, "Because I am now a Christian, God would want me to leave my unbelieving spouse." Nor can we find any other excuse to be disobedient to His word because we are now "in Christ." Rather, He selected the path we are on and we are to walk it, regardless of the weight of the load upon our shoulders, because it really is no true weight which we bear alone. Instead, it is one which Christ shares with us. From this stepping stone, Paul will continue with this line of reasoning in the verses ahead.

For now though, he shows that what he is telling the Corinthians is not arbitrary or suddenly enacted by him. Rather, the instructions he is giving are consistently applied elsewhere as well. As he says, "And so, I ordain in all the churches." Since the writing of the epistle, and because it is included in the canon of Scripture, it is set and fixed. It is a part of God's word and thus we are to be obedient to it, just as obedience was expected on these matters from those in Corinth.

Life application: As believers, we can't use the past as an excuse to get out of our present situation. God has directed our steps which lead to the moment we called on Christ and He did so knowing the baggage that we brought along with us. In His wisdom, He has placed us where we are for His reasons. Let us accept our state with gratitude and work within it as faithful servants of Christ.

*I will love You, O Lord, my might  
The Lord is my rock and my fortress too  
He is my deliverer, through day and night  
My God, my strength, Him I will trust all my days through*

*My shield and the horn of my salvation  
My stronghold, it is He  
I will call upon the Lord with elation  
He is worthy to be praised now and for all eternity*

*Lord God, I remember the day that my heartstrings were pulled and I met Your Son. It was a moment that I will never forget and it was a time of immense joy and yet sadness. The feelings of sorrow for having walked apart from Him for so long, and in a way which was contrary to You. But the joy was, and still is, exceedingly far greater. All the past was forgiven and the future became certain and clear. Thank You for the day I met my Lord. Amen.*

**Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. 1 Corinthians 7:18**

In the previous verse, this was noted: "But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk." In addition to the verses which preceded this thought and which pertained to marriage, Paul now gives other real-life examples of what he means, beginning with circumcision.

To the Jews, circumcision was the sign of the covenant and a sign of being the covenant people. It was first given to Abraham and it was noted at that time that "...the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant." Genesis 17:14

Throughout the history of Israel, circumcision continued to be used as a standard by which the faithful were measured. To those Jews or proselytes to Judaism who came to Christ and who were already circumcised, Paul directs, "Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised."

It might be that some converts to Christ may have been anxious to do away with the badge of their previous life in Judaism and go to a surgeon in an attempt to change what had previously been marked upon them in this way. Paul says that this shouldn't be

considered. Rather, he is asked to remember that as the Lord called him while circumcised, so let him walk in that circumcision.

And the reciprocal is true as well. He next states, "Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised." For those gentiles who were coming into the faith, Paul now gives the amazing words of release from this ancient rite by stating that their condition, at the time of their calling, was of higher importance than that of the rite of circumcision.

To understand this, it needs to be remembered that we are saved by grace through faith. To attempt to earn God's favor through circumcision would be to set aside the grace of God in an attempt to be justified by the works of human hands. Paul spends much of the book of Galatians explaining this and calls such attempts out as heresy. And to those who require such things, he notes them as heretics who proclaim "a different gospel, which is not another" (Galatians 1:6, 7). Rather it is something which is accursed.

Life application: Let us again consider Paul's words "as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk." Did you have a tattoo when you came to Christ? If so, don't let someone bully you into thinking that you must have it removed. Did you eat pork before you came to Christ? Don't let anyone tell you that you must now stop. There are things which should be changed, but they are explained in Scripture. Those things which are not mandated to be changed are things which we are at liberty to keep just as they are.

*Heavenly Father, I love the freedom I have in Christ. I was accepted by You by mere faith in His work and His ability to save. I will cling fast to that freedom and always remember that I was saved by grace through faith, and that it was all from You. Help me to continuously remember that I cannot "earn" Your favor through any works, nor can I add to it in any way. Instead, I am saved, remain saved, and will never lose that precious salvation - all because of the work of Another, my Lord Jesus! Hallelujah and Amen.*

**Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.** 1 Corinthians 7:19

The confusion that reigns over this verse in the minds of some is immense. Paul could not be clearer in the first half of the thought - "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing." For the believer in Christ, it makes absolutely no difference whether one is circumcised or not. As seen in a previous verse, almost the entire book of Galatians deals with this one subject which is used as the premier example of the Law of Moses, circumcision. It was given by God to Abraham as a sign to the covenant

people and the mandate is repeated in Exodus and Leviticus. However, it served its purpose and was fulfilled in Christ.

Now whether one is a Jew who is circumcised, or a Gentile who is not, there is no difference between the two. The circumcision has no bearing at all on their status before God because a believer in Christ is circumcised in the heart (Romans 2:29). The external rite is fulfilled and thus set aside in Christ. However, cults, aberrant teachers, and those who run ahead without knowledge still mandate this rite and thus promote a false gospel. As noted, it could not be clearer, and yet the waters get muddied.

And this leads to the second half of the verse which can likewise become muddied, both by those who mandate circumcision, or even by those who understand circumcision is no longer required. Paul says that "keeping the commandments of God *is what matters*." The obvious connection of "the commandments of God" to "circumcision" should be made. When was circumcision mandated? Under the Law of Moses! Is circumcision still required? No! Therefore, "keeping the commandments of God" cannot be speaking of the Law of Moses or any part of it!

This is the force and intent of Paul's words now and is (as noted above) the meaning and purpose behind his words in Galatians. If circumcision is used as a benchmark of the law, and circumcision is set aside in Christ, then all of the precepts of the Law of Moses are set aside in Christ. This is stated explicitly in Hebrews 7, 8, and 10, and both explicitly and implicitly elsewhere. It is:

- Annulled (Hebrews 7:18)
- Obsolete (Hebrews 8:13)
- Taken away (Hebrews 10:9)
- Wiped out, taken out of the way, and nailed to the cross (Colossian 2:14)
- Etc. elsewhere in multiple statements, explicitly and implicitly

So, what are "the commandments of God" which Paul is speaking of? They are found in Jesus' words which are directed to believers after the cross, not those directed to Israel under the law. They are also found in the prescriptive verses of the book of Acts which make up a very small portion of the book, possibly no more than five percent of it. And finally, they are found in the New Testament epistles. These, in particular, are doctrine for the church based on the fulfillment of the Law of Moses by Christ.

To reinsert the law, or to pick and choose portions of the law - such as mandating circumcision, not eating pork, or observing a Sabbath, etc., is to set aside the grace of

Christ and is "another gospel" and thus heresy. We must trust that Christ is the fulfillment of the law and that His work is sufficient to save us, wholly and entirely. And yet, we must also understand that His work in salvation does not give us license to sin by ignoring prescriptive elements of the New Testament. For example, women who preach violate New Testament law based on Paul's words to those in Corinth and also his words to Timothy. This is an example of what Paul is referring to here. It is a willful disobedience of what God has shown He expects of New Testament believers.

Life application: If you allow yourself to be circumcised in an attempt to meet the standards of the law, the Bible says that you have "set aside" the grace of Christ and have become a debtor to the whole law. As no one can fulfill the law, it is a self-condemning act. This is true with any precept of the law fulfilled by Christ. Don't be led astray by a false teacher who boasts in works of the flesh and negates the glorious work of Jesus Christ!

*Glorious God Almighty! The power and the marvel that You display in the heavens is beyond imagination. Pulsars and quasars put out more energy in a moment than we could mentally comprehend in a lifetime. The forces of gravity are consistent and they hold the universe together in a way which allows all things to continue as they should. And yet, despite the unimaginable power of these things, You tend to our hearts and needs as if we were the sole apple of Your eye. How great is Your love and how wondrous is Your glory! Amen.*

**Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.** 1 Corinthians 7:20

This verse is a repeat of the thought given in the second half of verse 17, which said, "as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk." He has been speaking about circumcision and has said that "circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing." And this came after his words that those who were circumcised when they were called should stay that way and those who were uncircumcised when they were called should likewise stay that way.

His thought now in verse 20, is given as a confirmation of this. Whatever was our calling when we were called is where we are expected to remain. In order to show that this is not limited to circumcision, but that it is an overall precept to show that we are acceptable to Christ in the station in which we were called, he will give a new example in the coming verses, that of slavery.

Shouldn't it be obvious that if Jesus accepted us in a certain condition, that we thus must be acceptable to Him? And yet, many then spend the rest of their walk with Christ trying to please the One who already found them acceptable. In this, they forget that grace is grace and so they attempt to find justification in their own personal works and not in the work of Christ. It is a sad cycle which can lead to neurotic believers who waffle in their convictions and are always worried about "losing" the eternal salvation they have been granted.

It should again be noted that remaining in the calling in which one is called does not refer to the abusive and forbidden lifestyles referred to in Scripture. One cannot say, "I was called as a homosexual and therefore I can remain a practicing homosexual." This is what we are called *from*, not *to*. A person is not called *from* circumcision. This is a thing that they already possessed which is not contrary to New Testament doctrine. Freedom in Christ never means freedom to sin.

Life application: If Christ is the end of the law, then let the law be ended! Don't reinsert precepts which will only bring you into bondage and mental confusion.

*Oh God, some days I arise and I am as tired as when I went to bed. The day ahead of me seems long and filled with toil. Often I have stress between myself and someone else. These things can seem so hard to overcome. But at such times, I would ask that You would grant me sufficient peace in my mind to be able to go to Your word and read enough to settle my soul. I know that if I have this, the rest of the day will fall into place. You have all things under control and Your precious word is there to remind me of this. Thank You for being with me each step of the way. Amen.*

**Were you called *while* a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use *it*.** 1 Corinthians 7:21

Paul now refers to the second major issue tied to what he said in verse 17 – " But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk." This second issue is slavery. He asks a question of those who are bound in slavery, "Were you called *while* a slave?"

Slavery is something that has occurred throughout human history and has come in different forms, from complete bondage and absolute rule, to simply being owned by another yet with varying amounts of freedom, but without pay for the work which is performed. The Old Testament details provisions for slavery, how certain slaves are to be treated, and the rights which slaves bore within the context of Israelite society.

In the Roman Empire of Paul's time, a large portion of the population were bound under slavery and it was as common and accepted as the general paid-labor force is in the world today. The difference mostly centered on the amount of freedom offered to slaves. In coming to Christ, the individual slave may feel that his allegiances were now confused. He or she is bound to a master and yet they have committed to Christ. This might have brought about a level of concern or anxiety concerning their position.

His question as to their state when they called on Christ is to show them that there is no true complication in the matter. If they are slaves now as he writes and they were slaves when they were called, then there currently is no change in their state. Christ called them while they were in servitude and they were accepted by Him. And so, He understands the dilemma they feel which to Him is no dilemma at all. Because of this he continues with, "Do not be concerned about it..."

If Christ wasn't worried about it, then they shouldn't be either. The allegiance they have to Him is one that will not conflict with the allegiance they have with their own master. They are to remain obedient to their rightful owner and what he expects. A good example of this actually comes from the Old Testament. It is found in 2 Kings 5. A Syrian officer, Naaman, came to know and call on the God of Israel, but he also had allegiances which bound him to his master. This caused him a bit of anxiety as to what he should do when he had to accompany his master into the temple of Rimmon where his master would worship. He asked Elisha the prophet for pardon concerning this matter. The request and response are found in 2 Kings 5:18, 19 -

"Yet in this thing may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD please pardon your servant in this thing.' <sup>19</sup> Then he said to him, 'Go in peace.' So he departed from him a short distance."

Jesus is looking upon the hearts of his faithful and He understands the difficult position that they are in concerning worldly responsibilities. As He called us, so we may continue, but with a different heart and direction concerning Him. However, at the end of Paul's words today, he gives this final thought, "...but if you can be made free, rather use *it*." What he means is that if a slave can free himself, then there is nothing wrong with that.

In the Roman Empire, like in Israel, there were provisions for obtaining freedom. One could buy their freedom or earn it in various other ways. Paul told them that despite being called as a slave, nothing bound them to remain as slaves. But if they did remain

as slaves, there was nothing wrong with that either. Today, this is comparable to changing jobs. If you were a lawyer when you were called, there is nothing wrong with changing one's profession. The principle which is being laid down is one for peace and contentment in the state one is in, but not necessarily being firmly bound in that state.

Life application: There is nothing degrading in menial labor or even bondage. If the Lord calls you in such a state, then how can it be considered degrading? You have been given the highest honor in all the world. Whatever lowly position you think you're in is only in your mind, not His. To Him, you are a member of His family and in a high and exalted position!

*Oh Lord, at times I feel like the menial jobs I do are degrading and not worthy of notice, but then I remember that You called me just as I am. You weren't at all concerned about the amount of money I make, about the dirty hands and face I have at the end of the day, nor the life which lacks flash and pomp that I live. Instead, You called me and set me next to You in the heavenly places. What higher honor is there? When I remember this, the jobs I do take on a new and wondrous light. Thank You for the work of my hands which You have established. Amen.*

**For he who is called in the Lord *while* a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called *while* free is Christ's slave. 1 Corinthians 7:22**

In the previous verse, Paul said, "Were you called *while* a slave? Do not be concerned about it..." That may seem uncaring about the plight of the slave unless one understands the freedom of those in Christ, even if they are in bondage to another human. In an exchange with the Jews of His time we read these words between Jesus and them in John 8 -

"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' 33 They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, "You will be made free?"' 34 Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. 35 And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. 36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.'" John 8:31-36

The premise of the Bible is that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Because we are in our father, Adam, we inherited his sin. Further we eventually come to the age where we commit our own sin on top of the inherited sin in

our lives. Because of this, we are in bondage to the devil, and he is a cruel and harsh taskmaster. But once in Christ, we have become free of the devil's power. Thus, "he who is called in the Lord *while* a slave is the Lord's freedman."

Regardless of the burden of being bound to a human master, it is nothing in comparison to the freedom that is found in Christ. The earthly master may have temporary say over the earthly existence of the believer, but Christ has eternally set those in Him free from a much greater bondage. Building on that, Paul then says, "Likewise he who is called *while* free is Christ's slave." In other words, we are all slaves in some way. Nobody is truly free to act in complete independence.

Therefore, in Christ the slave and the one who is free are actually on the same spiritual level. We are bound to His laws and the freedom that we have in Him is equally shared regardless of our fleeting time on earth. In this then, a sense of complete contentment should be shared by all. In Christ, we have all been freed from the power of Satan and we all are slaves of the One who created us, redeemed us, and has complete and eternal control over the endless future which lies before us.

Life application: If you feel the weight of day to day trudge and toil because of your work or because of those who are appointed over you in some way or another, let that not overly displease you. Rather, if you are in Christ, you are the freest of all beings. Whatever temporary displeasures you face will be erased for all eternity when you are glorified at His return.

*Heavenly Father, I long for the day when Jesus returns for His people. The thought of no more grief, pain, toil, or sleepless nights is a wonderful hope which I can almost taste. Moment by moment I wait in antici.....pation for that wondrous sound when the trumpet blows and we are gathered to be with Him. May that fantastic moment be soon. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. 1 Corinthians 7:23**

This verse isn't saying what may initially come to mind when it is read. What it sounds like is that because we were bought at a price, meaning the finished work of Jesus which included His cross, that we are now His and so we shouldn't allow ourselves to be sold into literal slavery as bondservants of another. However, this is not what is being referred to.

Rather, the idea of being a slave that Paul is speaking of would be yielding to unnecessary rites and customs which a false teacher or non-believer might impose on them. As slaves of Christ, we are under His ultimate authority. We have been granted grace and are freed from the constraints of both the law and of the world around us. We are to live as slaves to Him. If we were to allow ourselves to fall back under the law, or to be swayed by those who reject or manipulate the gospel, we would be brought into a form of slavery from which we had been bought from.

Paul explains this in a concise statement found in Ephesians 4:14 where he says that "we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting." If we fall into their trap, we are making ourselves a slave to a far lesser authority than Christ who redeemed us. The Pulpit commentary gives an excellent explanation of this verse when they say the following:

"There is a grand play of words in the advice to them not to become slaves, at the very moment when he is advising them to continue in slavery. In that which the world called "slavery" the Christian slave might enjoy absolute liberty. The price which a master paid for them was but an unmeaning shadow; they had been bought once and eternally by an infinitely nobler price, and that purchase was the pledge of absolute emancipation."

Again, the words of Paul in Galatians 5:1 give another beautiful rendering of the thought he is making when he says, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." The "yoke of bondage" which makes us "slaves of men" is speaking on a spiritual not a physical level.

Life application: The greatest freedom we can ever possess is to be found as a slave of Christ. To enjoy the fullness of this freedom, we must read, learn, and apply the Bible to our lives. If we don't do this, but rather trust in the doctrines of men, then we are putting ourselves back into bondage, even if we think we are following a path of freedom and ease. Read your Bible, keep its precepts in context, and apply them to your life. In doing this, you will truly experience the fullness of the life that Christ desires for you during this earthly existence.

*Let us no longer be children  
Tossed to and fro and carried about  
With every wind of doctrine  
By the trickery of men who rave and shout*

*In the cunning craftiness of their deceitful plotting  
Let us their wayward tricks be a'spotting*

*And let us speak the truth in love  
That we may grow up in all things into Him  
Who is the head—Christ, our Lord above  
Let us in His doctrine immerse ourselves and swim*

*Let our walk be acceptable in His sight  
Let us always follow the noble path, the one just and right*

*Yes Lord! It is my prayer today that I would be grounded in Your word and kept from the bondage of those who would twist it in a way that would keep me from a sound and joyous walk with You. In Your word is freedom, wholeness, and the path for right living. So, fill me with proper understanding and then the desire to apply that to my every step. Amen.*

**Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.**

1 Corinthians 7:24

This verse is somewhat of a repeat from verse 17 and it covers the entire thought from verses 17-23. In essence, Paul is saying that whatever state one was called in is acceptable and that there is nothing wrong with remaining in that condition. Whether one is married or single, a slave or a master, or whether they are circumcised or uncircumcised, there is nothing in the Christian faith which they have accepted that would ask them to change that state.

In this thought though, there is nothing which condones a lifestyle which is contrary to the Christian message. In other words, if someone's lifestyle was contrary to what is expected of a Christian, that is not included in Paul's word here. Only those things which are neutral, or those things which are set aside in Christ (such as circumcision) fall within the parameters of these words. We are not granted license to continue in the life of sin which we were engaged in when we called on Jesus.

We are to conduct our walk side by side with the Lord and in harmony with His expectations, but not fearing that we must change our state now that we are in Christ.

Life application: Let us walk confidently with Christ, knowing that He has accepted us in the state in which He called us. If we are poor and drive an old car, we are just as

acceptable to Him as if we were loaded with money and had a large house and many possessions. What we possess is not what is important. Our faith in Him and our adherence to His word, however, is worth much in His sight.

*Heavenly Father, I feel so blessed just to be allowed to come into Your presence knowing that You hear my prayers. Thank You for access to Your throne of grace which I have because of the shed blood of Christ. Today, my prayer is one of thanks, gratitude, and praise. Be exalted, O God, in my life and in the lives of all Your saints. Amen.*

**Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy. 1 Corinthians 7:25**

Based on the opening words "Now concerning virgins," we can infer that this begins another section of answers to questions addressed to Paul by those in Corinth. This is based on his opening line of chapter 7, which said "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me..." The question which begins in verse 25 is about virgins. What is it that a family with young virgin daughters who are coming of age should do with them? Should they keep them in an unmarried state? Should they allow them to be married? And so forth.

His response begins with, "I have no commandment from the Lord." There is nothing that was spoken about concerning this issue by the Lord during His earthly ministry, nor did Paul receive anything specific from Him during his time of direct instruction from Him. He is careful to note this so that his words are not intended to be taken as such. Instead, he is giving his personal opinion on the matter for their consideration. Because of this he says, "yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy."

In other words, the Lord demonstrated confidence in Paul to reason out an issue and to make a right, sound judgment on it. What he writes has the full force and authority of that bestowed upon him by the Lord. Being considered "trustworthy" also implies that he will render a judgment which has no self-seeking motivations or biases, but rather will be with the intent of bringing glory to Christ and also building up those who receive his instruction.

Life application: Paul wrote his letters to the Corinthians who received them and kept them for sound counsel. Eventually, these letters became a part of the Bible. They are the inspired words of God, spoken through Paul, as doctrine for the church age. Let us

consider them with that in mind, never deviating from the precepts he has laid down under this state of inspiration.

*Lord, help me to stand fast on Your word, even when tested by those who "pick and choose" what they want to accept from it. Help my doctrine to be pure and my understanding of Your word to be kept in proper context and with the intent that You have given. Be with me in this, because so many refuse to submit to its precepts and it takes fortitude to stand up and proclaim what is correct and right. Without Your hand of help, it is a battle which seems overwhelming. So be with me in this daily fight. Amen.*

**I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that *it is good* for a man to remain as he is: 1 Corinthians 7:26**

A portion of the words in this verse are probably either a direct quote from the letter he had received (verse 7:1), or are the same basic substance of what was asked. There was obviously a "present distress" which afflicted those in Corinth. Possibly the entire population, or Christians in general, were affected by this distress which might have made getting married a difficult proposition at that time. Some believe it was a time of general famine and deprivation (see Acts 11:28). Others believe it was from the persecution of Christians by Nero which was coming around that time. Whatever is being spoken of, they had probably asked Paul, "Don't you think that it is good, because of the present distress, for a man to remain as he is?"

His response then would follow their words - "Yes, I suppose therefore..." Having said this, there is nothing to suggest that this was anything other than a temporary arrangement and not the standard for all times. In other words, Paul is not promoting monasticism. Were there a massive famine in the world today, his words would still ring true. Why would someone want to get involved in a marriage, which is a time of expected happiness and family growth, when neither of those could be expected because of the difficult circumstances? Should things get worse, only sadness and death would result. This isn't what one would expect for a marriage!

Likewise, if it were a time of war or major persecution, would it be wise to get married and spend those moments of life together fleeing, hiding, and possibly dying? No. Rather it is better to get through such a major calamity without the additional burdens and heartaches which may come from a marriage.

Having noted this, the next few verses will show that even if staying single is a wise choice during such a time of deprivation or hardship, remaining married is expected for

those who are already married. Paul is covering each contingency in order and ensuring that proper biblical and Christ-honoring standards will be upheld at all times.

Life application: The context of life around us is an important guide in making big decisions about the future. Would it be wise to invest in a construction company when the housing market has collapsed? Would it be wise to buy land for a farm during a cycle of severe famine? Likewise, is it wise to consider getting married in a time when one cannot provide for a spouse and family those things that they need to remain healthy and content? Just as ensuring proper context when reading the Bible is necessary, so is considering context when evaluating the world in which we live concerning major decisions about the future.

*Most gracious heavenly Father, I would ask that You direct my steps according to Your infinite knowledge. I cannot see the future before it unfolds, but You can. And so, should there be obstacles or hindrances to a sound walk with You and a content life for me in the time ahead, grant me the ability to make decisions now which will allow me to honor You through them. Guide me for the sake of Your glory and honor. Amen.*

**Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.** 1 Corinthians 7:27

There is no reason to suppose that Paul's words in verse 27 are a fixed and firm rule, but rather a temporary guide. This is based on the previous verse which spoke these words -

"I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that *it is* good for a man to remain as he is:"

The colon at the end of that verse, used by the translators to signify the thought being presented, shows that verse 27 is based on "the present distress." It is also evident from the coming verses. Therefore, based on this, and taking in context the other times Paul speaks of this issue, this is a temporary measure, not a fixed and prescriptive directive. In this temporary state, he asks, "Are you bound to a wife?" His answer, which is based on his previous guidelines and which is confirmed by the word of the Lord Himself is, "Do not seek to be loosed."

And his next question is, "Are you loosed from a wife?" This can mean "free" from a wife, such as in being single. Or it can mean one who is loosed in a host of other ways - death, divorce before becoming a Christian, divorced because of sexual immorality, or single because the non-believing spouse departed, etc. If in this state, and because of

the temporary trials he says, "Do not seek a wife." Again, this doesn't mean a suitable woman for a wife might not come along and that she should be shunned. Rather, he is certainly inferring that a man who is caught up in the current dilemma should focus on those circumstances and not be seeking a wife.

Who would be in battle during a war and be looking for a wife at the same time? Who, in a time of famine would say, "Gee, it sure would be nice to find a wife to starve with?" And so forth. There is a time for all things and the current distress that Paul was writing about showed the need for right thinking on the issue of marriage.

Life application: Seeking a spouse is a good thing, but doing so in a time of hardship or calamity will more than likely only increase the hardship or calamity. Therefore, take all things in a proper order and without causing increased suffering in what is already a tough world.

*O wondrous God! Thank You for the day which lies ahead. Every blessing, every trial, every bite of food, and every flower on the path has been arranged by You for us. Some things will be great, others may not be so, but they are given to us for growth, learning, and appreciating You all the more. And so, I look forward to whatever comes my way as a gift from You. I'll take the good, take the bad, and do it all with gratitude to You. How I love You, O God. Amen.*

**But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.**

1 Corinthians 7:28

In the preceding verse, it was noted that there is no reason to suppose that Paul's words in that verse were a fixed and firm rule, but rather a temporary guide. Verse 28 verifies that. He had just said "Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife." His words were spoken because of the difficult circumstances those in Corinth were facing at that time and he wanted them to not be further troubled through the added weight of marriage.

In substantiation of this, he now says, "But even if you do marry, you have not sinned." Therefore, his previous words cannot be considered prescriptive, but rather as an exhortation based on circumstance. Those who do marry are not in violation of his inspired words. Continuing on, he notes that "if a virgin marries, she has not sinned." The same is true with the virgin. No sin has been committed, but it may be that the new couple will face undue hardships because of their decision and in this, Paul says, "but I

would spare you." In other words, "I give you advice to spare you from those hardships." He is acting as if a loving father giving advice to his still naive son.

If we consider the soldier who is in battle, of course he would not be thinking about marriage. He is under fire and there is death all around him. However, if he gets a pass to an area which is not under fire, he may meet a young lady and fall in love. His desire is to marry her and never let her go. But he also has the reality of returning to the battle when the pass has expired. This then may be likened to the situation to which Paul is writing.

There was some sort of hardship at the time of his letter and it would make for a difficult path for newlyweds. In his words, he is giving them advice to alleviate that difficult situation. A commander might write to his young private and say, "You will be coming back to the lines and you could die. Or, your wife's village may come under fire and you might lose her." His words would be an attempt to help him think the issue through. However, in the end, the private will make his choice and whichever way he chooses, unless specifically ordered to the contrary, he will not be considered insubordinate. Such is the case with Paul's advice here.

Life application: The Bible gives explicit commands which require obedience. It also gives words of advice and counsel which, if acted upon, will lead to happiness. If not acted upon, the result isn't sinful, but sadness, loss, or difficulty may be the result. As God made man, and as God gave us the Bible for our instruction, the best route is to always apply it's precepts to our lives.

*O God, I read Your word and I see in it so many valuable lessons. Some things I see are points I wish I had known long ago. I would have saved myself a lot of grief and troubles. And yet, I know that by paying attention to Your word now, I will have a much firmer foundation to walk on in the days ahead. You gave us Your word not to hamper our happiness, but to make it full and also that we might be pleasing to You. Thank You for Your superior word. Amen.*

**But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, 1 Corinthians 7:29**

This verse is generally taken to mean that Paul thought of the coming of the Lord as "right around the corner" and that the expectation for a long and normal life before His coming was unlikely. Although this is possible, it is not the only explanation and it dismisses his words of verse 26 which speak "of the present distress."

Considering his words here with that in mind, a more probable view of what he is speaking of comes to light. He begins with, "But I say, brethren." He continues with the idea that his words are directed to "brethren," meaning believers. It doesn't exclude that his words could be applied to unbelievers, but his concern is to those in the fellowship. For them, they need to consider that "the time is short." The word used here is *sunestalmenos* which means "contracted" or "drawn up, as if into a narrow space." It is a word which is elsewhere used in the act of "furling" a sail. It goes from being a large, open sheet, to a condensed roll which takes up little space.

So, is Paul referring to the expected return of the Lord, or "of the present distress?" Because he has already referred to the distress of the moment, it seems unlikely that he would suddenly jump to "the return of the Lord" without specifically stating this as a reason for his coming admonition. He isn't going to refer to the coming of the Lord specifically until chapter 11, and that is in the context of taking the Lord's Supper. When he speaks in detail about His coming, it will be in chapter 15. This will be after countless admonitions for the conduct of life, even a long life ahead.

Therefore, the probability strongly suggests that Paul's words are intended for those in Corinth who were facing a high degree of uncertainty because of the conditions around them and they would therefore point to the same for anyone living in a time of exceptional turmoil. If this is the state of things in the world around the believer, he says "that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none." Without considering the words of the coming verses, what he says here could be misunderstood to mean that no regard should be given to one's wife. This is not his intent, as will be seen. Rather, he is saying that the attitude of clinging to one's wife in the hopes of a long and prosperous marriage isn't recommended. Because of the present distress, one should understand that the wife may be taken away suddenly (through whatever the distress is - plague, famine, war, persecution, etc.).

In such a difficult time, clinging to the marriage as if it were a long and permanent arrangement could certainly lead to heartache and bitterness.

Life application: The context of the times is important when understanding biblical applications. We are to enjoy the things God has blessed us with, but if we assume that the life we live today will be the same on the morrow, we may find bitterness and disappointment. It would be unwise to expect a good job, a stable family, and a garage full of nice toys during a time of economic collapse. Context is important when evaluating life, just as it is when evaluating the Bible.

*Lord, I know that the time around me is like a sail being furled in. There will be a moment when it will be gone and I certainly don't know the speed with which my sail will be fully secure. It could be a long and pleasant roll through the years, or it could end suddenly with an abrupt pull of the cord, drawing my days quickly to their termination. For this reason, I will spend my moments wisely - seeking Your face, praising Your name, and attempting (even if failingly) to glorify You in all ways. It is my heart's desire to keep my sail in the face of favorable winds until no more can be captured. Amen.*

**...those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess... 1 Corinthians 7:30**

This verse continues the same thought analyzed in the preceding one. To get clarity, we can take the first portion of that verse and apply his words to this portion. It would thus read -

"But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short, so that from now on... those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess."

What Paul meant by "the time is short" was discussed in detail in that preceding verse. And because of that reason, he admonishes "those who weep as though they did not weep." It is nearly impossible for us to drown out all emotion, but our emotions can be subdued because of the difficulties which surround us at any given time. In war, a soldier may lose his best friend and not shed a tear, knowing that there isn't time for tears when bullets are still coming his way. It may be that he doesn't mourn his dead friends until after he returns home from battle, or by then he may have completely suppressed the difficulties.

This is true to a varying degree with any emotional trauma when the surrounding circumstances are of a most difficult nature. Paul saw the circumstance of those in Corinth as necessitating the need to not weep over such temporary things. In the same manner, he admonished "those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice." Again, there may be times when giving out a joyful or triumphant shout may not be appropriate.

If a battle is won, but there was immense loss in human life on the side of the victors, is there any true reason to rejoice? Rather, it would be more appropriate to humbly and gratefully acknowledge those who had given their lives for the cause. If a football team were to win a game in which a player had died (on either team), would it be appropriate

for the winners to rejoice? No! It would be a time of acknowledgment that a tragedy had occurred.

And finally in this verse, Paul says that because of the present situation, "those who buy" should act "as though they did not possess." If one is living in a time of great upheaval where anarchy filled the streets, would it be wise to go to the store, buy a new TV, and then revel in the great new purchase? No! It would be more likely that the TV would be stolen soon, the house ransacked and even destroyed, and the owners forced to live from moment to moment in a state of terror and privation. It would make no sense to grab the TV as the rioters were banging at the door, holding fast to it as if it would be of use later.

There was some distress at the time of Paul's letter to those in Corinth and Paul wanted to save them from what he knew would be pointless emotion. He was asking them to keep calm, be level in their feelings and attitudes, and to understand that this world is temporary and passing away. And the same should be true with each of us in some measure at all times. The more we cling to this world, the less we will cling to Christ. This is a world of uncertainty, distress, and loss. To overly hold onto it can only lead to increased unhappiness at some point in the future.

Life application: If our hearts, minds, and thoughts are always directed towards Jesus, we will be more prepared for times of trials, sadness, loss, and even an appropriate response to joyful times. If He is our ultimate prize and hope, then the things of the world will necessarily be put into the proper perspective. Let us always and in all things place Him first.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the sure knowledge that You are there and that You are my ultimate Prize. The very best of this world is just a temporary, fleeting thing that I can only tenuously hold on to. And the greatest sadness I could face will be replaced by an eternity of joy when the Lord comes for me. Help me to keep this quickly-passing world in its proper perspective and to always carry with me the reality that it is not my true home. I love You and will wait patiently for You. Amen.*

**...and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away. 1 Corinthians 7:31**

This verse finishes the thought analyzed in the preceding two verses. Again, to get clarity, we can take the first portion and apply his words to this final section. It would thus read as follows -

"But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short, so that from now on... those who use this world as not misusing *it*. For the form of this world is passing away."

Today for this final portion of the thought, Paul says that "those who use this world" should use it "as not misusing *it*." This is speaking of the excess of life that can so easily ensnare us. We live in the world and must use the things of the world to continue to exist, but we are not to allow them to become our prime focus or center of hope and contentment.

Instead, we are to continually reevaluate our state and remember that those things we use and possess all came from the Creator and they are temporary, as is our very body. All these things are "passing away." But there is a greater and eternal hope for those who have called on Christ. If our lives are filled with the lust of the world, then we have shown that this world is our desire and that God is less important to us than the world. John speaks of this exact thought, along with the transitory nature of this world, in his first epistle -

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." 1 John 2:15-17

Those things around us which seem fixed and firm are not. Even the mountains erode and can be leveled through a large cataclysm. If such magnificent and seemingly permanent structures are temporary, how much more those things we possess! The terminology for that which "is passing away" calls to mind the fleeting scenes of a movie. Our eyes take in the information and our brains process it, but it is actually gone from before us as soon as the next scene comes. It is nothing but a memory. This is exactly what Solomon speaks of in the book of Ecclesiastes. In his opening words, he says this -

"'Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher;  
'Vanity of vanities, all *is* vanity.'" Ecclesiastes 1:2

The word for "vanity" in this verse is *havel*. It literally means "vapor," or "breath." Solomon warns that just as exhaled breath on a cold morning quickly disappears, so is the sudden disappearance of the world around us. Everything is fleeting except God. Because this is so, we are admonished to call on Him and then remember Him now

while we still have the chance. Someday, all things will be made new for those who have called on Christ. It will be an entirely different order and one which will endure for all eternity.

Life application: Don't get so caught up in this temporary world that you miss the greater and eternal world to come. Don't miss out on Christ!

*Heavenly Father, everything that I used to think was permanent and lasting is actually just a temporary vapor. The years have quickly gone by and I'm suddenly not a young person any more. Friends have come and gone and the fun things that I thought gave me satisfaction have disappeared, one by one. The only thing that is truly constant is You. As so my hope, my joy, and my anticipation is truly in You alone. How I long for You. My soul is thirsty just for You. Amen.*

**But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. 1 Corinthians 7:32**

In this verse, Paul reverts back to his words of verse 28 which said, "Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you." After that came the intervening verses to build upon that thought and then this verse which begins with a confirmation that he has their best in mind and his words are intended not as commands, but as heartfelt words of counsel - as if a father to his children. And so he begins with "But I want you to be without care..."

If they will follow his exhortation, they will spare themselves trials and sadness that he is sure are coming because of "the present distress" (verse 26). And so to live "without care" he tells them, as an explanation, that "he who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord - how he may please the Lord." This was his personal state and he knew it to be true. The man who is unmarried, particularly in times of distress, is not distracted by the marital issues which can complicate one's life in many ways, and which inevitably will cause minds to be distracted from a clear and unhindered relationship with the Lord.

In contrast to this will come his words in the next verse which will be looked at separately.

Life application: Life happens. The more responsibilities we have, the easier it is to get distracted from a single-minded devotion to the Lord. This is particularly true when close relationships are involved. Having a spouse, children, or other family members to care for can cause our minds to be consumed with those details, leaving less time for

pursuing Jesus. This does not mean being in such relationships is wrong, but if the world around us is in the middle of a time of distress, it would be better to consider not getting into overly burdensome relationships during such a time.

*Lord, if I am a man of the dust which has been made into a jar of clay, then I am intended to be filled. I can either be filled with precious contents, or something vile. I would choose to be a receptacle for Your goodness and Your Spirit. But also, if I am filled with You and then allow small amounts of wickedness to seep in, the contents will be tainted. And so daily, fill me anew with You and keep the world from seeping into the cracks of my life. Instead, seal me tightly with Your word and Your precious doctrine so that I may be a holy vessel, dedicated to You alone. Amen.*

**But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please *his* wife.** 1 Corinthians 7:33

This verse is set in contrast to the preceding one which read, "He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord." When one is single, and if they are directed to the things of the Lord, they will naturally care for doing those things which are pleasing to Him. However, the contrast is also usually the case. And so Paul notes it for our reflection by saying, "But he who is married cares about the things of the world." This doesn't mean such a person isn't interested in pleasing the Lord at all, but his allegiances may become skewed, especially during times of distress.

Even if such times don't currently exist, a man still needs to provide for his wife and keep her happy and content, but he can usually do it in a way in which both will be able to direct their lives toward pleasing the Lord. They can attend church together, pray over meals together, talk about the Lord's goodness on walks, etc. However, if it is a time of distress, the man may become overly consumed with "how he may please *his* wife."

If food is in shortage, the man will spend a great deal of effort in obtaining it in order to feed his beloved and any children that they have. Going to church may become a secondary matter as the time once available for this is lost in the struggle to live. And finding time to stop and praise the Lord in times of privation is naturally harder. This doesn't mean that the love for the Lord is gone, but priorities become skewed during times of upheaval. How much more difficult it is to please the Lord when there are many additional burdens upon the man's heart which he feels he must handle!

Life application: As has been noted over the previous few verses, the context of the times in which a person lives is important to consider when pondering life-changing decisions such as marriage or having children. This is why it is often good to stop and evaluate such decisions rationally and apart from the emotions which tug at our heart strings.

*Lord God, today is open before me and I don't know even a moment from now what will come about, but You do. And so, I place this day in Your capable hands asking for just a few things. Give me the opportunity to speak to someone today about my faith in Jesus. Grant me patience with others so that I don't bring discredit upon Your name. And should You call me home today, allow my last breath to be one which praises You. With these things, I will feel the day was well spent. Amen.*

**There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please *her* husband.**

1 Corinthians 7:34

In the same manner as there is a difference between the unmarried and the married man (concerning focus on the Lord and proper allegiances to Him), there is also a difference in the case of women. Paul notes that "There is a difference between a wife and a virgin" (meaning a female virgin). He is not at all speaking about the physical difference, but the same difference noted among men from the previous two verses as he next explains.

"The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord." When a believer is unmarried, they have a much better opportunity to keep their minds and thoughts on the Lord. Their actions will be directed towards Him alone, and their spiritual life will be filled with Him as well. Because of this, "she may be holy both in body and in spirit." Regardless of the surroundings, even in a time of certain distress, her actions will be directed toward Him. On the other hand, Paul notes the contrast which is found in a married woman by beginning with "but."

"But she who is married cares about the things of the world - how she may please *her* husband." When a woman marries, she is bound to her husband and will naturally set her affections on him. In a time of distress, this may be even more so. The cares of their marriage, the thought of losing him, and the separations which might arise may consume her mental and emotional strength and even debilitate her physically. When this occurs, she is no longer focusing on the Lord as much as the virgin would be.

Having said this, Paul is not in any way saying to not marry. Nor is he saying that there is anything wrong with marriage. He is speaking to those in Corinth at a time when there is a "present distress" as verse 26 noted. This distress, whatever it may have been, could only increase the troubles and trials associated with a marriage.

A good example of the divided allegiances that result in such an instance is found in the sisters Martha and Mary. One was worried about many things when Jesus was in the house. At the same time, Mary was content to sit and listen to Jesus. The account is found in Luke 10 and is a great example of what Paul is relaying concerning this issue of marriage even though it isn't specifically speaking of marriage. Martha, like the married woman, was concerned with many things and her priorities reflected that -

"Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.' And Jesus answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.'" Luke 10:38-42

Life application: What is your priority? Are you following Christ, reading His word, and listening to the prompting of the Spirit in your life? Or, are you being distracted by many things and allowing them to shut His presence out of this one life He has granted you before you stand before Him? Make sure to spend this valuable time wisely. Spend it with Christ.

*Time is fleeting Lord and the days go so fast  
And yet there is so much for me to do  
But when the sun is setting and the day is past  
I look back and see I spent too little time with You*

*And so, I commit to spending more time with You on the morrow  
Surely, I will do better when the sun rises anew  
But at the end of the next day, again I'm filled with sorrow  
I failed again, O Lord, to spent precious time with You*

*O God, give me a wise and discerning heart  
Grant me the resolve to open Your word as I should do*

*And to walk with You and talk with You, yes help me to start  
To spend my quickly fleeting life in sincere fellowship with You*

*Heavenly Father, my days are rushing forward and the time that is gone I cannot get back. And yet, so little of it has been spent in the pursuit of You. Help me to set my priorities aright and to pursue the knowledge of You now. I desire to stand before You approved and commended for the years I have lived. Help me in this Lord. I ask this that You will be glorified. Amen.*

**And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction. 1 Corinthians 7:35**

Paul's words, "And this I say" is referring to the instructions on marriage that he has given from verses 25-34. In this, his words were "for your own profit." Explained differently, what he has said is advice which is meant to help those in Corinth and to assist them in their thinking about the issue. Remember, in verse 26, he wrote of the "present distress" which they were facing. As a person who understood the complexities of the times and was able to process them in a valid Christian context, his words were intended as general guides for a sound life through that distress.

This is certain that the words are only recommendations and not directives because he next says that it was "not that I may put a leash on you." The word translated as "leash" is the Greek *brochon*. This is its only use in Scripture and it implies a noose, snare, or cord which is used to restrain something or someone. The gist of his words then is that he was not intending to bind them with a man-made rule and thus add to the gospel of freedom which is found in Christ, nor to bind them from anything lawful within the society which didn't contradict the gospel, but rather his intent was to provide sound, helpful, and fatherly advice for their welfare.

In contrast to such an over-reaching command, Paul simply wanted them to consider "what is proper" in order that "you may serve the Lord without distraction." His intent then was solely for their good during the "present distress" and his words are not to be considered directives for any time at any point of the church age. Rather, in times of upheaval and distress, believers should be able to go to Paul's words and determine a sound course of action that will keep them from trials and heartache, and yet able to serve the Lord fully and without additional burdens which could take away that full devotion.

Life application: Again, we see the importance of context. Reading a single verse and applying it without context inevitably leads to crummy doctrine. But by checking the context of what is given, we can be certain that we are on the right path in our walk and in good stead with the Lord.

*Lord God, I am so thankful to You for the guidance Your word gives. There are proverbs of wisdom which provide a general guide for our daily walk. There are words of exhortation to build me up and keep me thinking correctly. There are commands which if followed will ensure that I am right with You and in Your favor. And there are psalms of praise which show me how I too can express my own personal feelings to You in a way which is pleasing. These and so many other aspects of Your word fill me with wonder, delight, and surety that I am walking correctly in Your presence. Thank You for Your word! Amen.*

**But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry. 1 Corinthians 7:36**

It is generally agreed that this verse is speaking of a man who is responsible for a virgin daughter or who otherwise has the charge and responsibility over the young woman. There is an age where she will naturally be inclined to want the company of a man, even if there is a time of distress occurring in the world. Just because there may be, it doesn't change the natural process of her life. Eventually, she will be tempted to express those desires if she is not allowed to marry.

The one in charge of her should understand this and may eventually feel that his care of her, even if it is for her own good, may cause her to sin if he doesn't allow her to get married. And so, when she reaches or exceeds that point by becoming "past the flower of her youth," Paul says that he may "do what he wishes" by giving her away in marriage.

It is more preferable to do this than it would be to restrict her from marriage and eventually cause her to act on her natural impulses in a sinful way. Obviously, the world is different today and parents don't exercise the same control over their children that they once did. The custom of prearranged marriages is all but over and instead the decision is left up to the one marrying. Now however, even under the best of circumstances, parents may agree to the marriage, but there is little control exercised by them over the "who" and the "when" of it.

Regardless of this, whether it is the arranging of a marriage or simply the "nod of consent" to it, if the girl is of marrying age and his approval is given "he does not sin." Instead, Paul says that it is ok to "let them marry." Again, all of this is based on the "present distress" which was referred to in verse 26 and has been cited as a general guideline for such an instance. For the past 2000 years, marriages have continued as normal during the time that the church awaits the return of Christ.

Life application: Marriage has been ordained by God. Likewise the urges and desires for marriage were instilled in us by God. It is better to marry than to sin against Him by engaging in sex apart from marriage. And so, even in times of distress, the situation and circumstances of marriage must be carefully considered for the good of all involved.

*Lord Jesus, it sure is wonderful to know You. I cannot imagine being without the hope found in the eternal life promised through Your shed blood. And so today, I simply want to thank You, to praise You, and to acknowledge Your wondrous majesty. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well.** 1 Corinthians 7:37

These words are set in contrast to what was stated in verse 36. It is assumed from these verses, and known from the customs of the times, that the father had control over his daughter's marriage decisions. Unlike the world today where young people fall in love and decide who they will marry, those in the Roman empire were simply told who they would marry and when. It might be that in the afternoon a father could come home and say, "Tomorrow you will marry a man I met today." Arranged marriages were the standard, not the exception.

Paul noted previously that the father didn't sin if he allowed his virgin daughter to marry. And now he introduces the contrast by saying, "Nevertheless..." What was said is acceptable, but there is another point to consider. And all of it is based on the "present distress" already noted in verse 26. Because of this difficulty "he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well."

By withholding marriage from his virgin daughter, he is doing well because he will keep her from the great troubles which were expected at this time of distress. Someone had to tend to her, be it him or her new husband. Because she was already in the home and

because there was no external need to marry her off, they could ride this time of distress through together without causing sin. The idea here is that if keeping her from marrying would cause her to be tempted to the point of losing her virginity, then it would be sin. If this wasn't the case, then they were doing well by having her not get married.

Life application: Paul's words continuously show his regard for purity, holiness, and keeping sin at bay. If we can learn from his examples and his words of instruction, how much easier will our lives be and how much more pleasing to the Lord will we walk!

*O wondrous God, around me are the sounds of life. The crickets are chirping, the chimes are tinkling in the wind, and the house is stirred with morning routine. It is a comfort and a joy to have such things and I thank You for them. But should times of loss and disaster come my way, I will be unwavering in my thanks to You. My love and gratitude to You isn't based on the present delights, but on the surety that nothing can separate me from Your love because of Christ. Thank You for this steadfast hope. Amen.*

**So then he who gives *her* in marriage does well, but he who does not give *her* in marriage does better.** 1 Corinthians 7:38

Having stated his instructions on the giving of one's virgin in marriage, Paul sums the thought up in this verse beginning with, "So then he who gives *her* in marriage does well." He has not erred in his actions nor sinned against God by them. He has given a wife to a husband and his virgin to a man for her care and protection. Even if this were during a time of "distress," no wrongdoing has occurred.

Having said that, Paul then notes the contrast by saying, "but he who does not give *her* in marriage does better." He cannot be speaking of "better" in a moral sense because if so, then the other chosen path would have been morally deficient. The better moral path should always be chosen. Instead, "better" must refer to the issue of the distress of the times. For the sake of the virgin, by withholding marriage it would be a better expedient for the care of her heart and any possible sadness which might result from the challenges which lay ahead.

Life application: If a path can be taken which avoids the pitfalls of heartache and sadness, it is certainly the better one to choose. Getting ourselves into trials and difficulties should naturally be avoided because we are then much more likely to have freedom to praise God instead of worrying about the trials which surround us.

*Lord God, it's hard to lose friends that I am close with as they move away for work, marriage, or some other reason, but at the same time they will have new adventures, meet new people, and will hopefully be blessed in the path they take. Above all, I would pray for those who have set out on a new trail that they would remember You as they go. Help them to keep their lives in focus concerning their need to pursue You first. And then Lord, bless them beyond their wildest imagination! Yes Lord, bless Your people. Amen.*

**A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 7:39**

Paul's words now are probably a direct response to a question put forth by the Corinthians. However, even if not directly asked, they still provide a well-rounded summary of his previous thoughts on marriage. First he reiterates his earlier words by stating that "a wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives." This "law" is speaking of that of God from the beginning of creation, conscience in Christ, and New Testament theology; not the Old Testament law which has been set aside because of the work of Christ.

As long as the husband is alive, she is bound to him. However, "if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes." Again, in this verse, it is implicitly seen that the giving of a virgin in marriage was done by the one who had responsibility over her, not by her own choice. This is unlike today where that right is generally granted to those getting married and by mutual consent. Having noted that, for the widow, there were no restrictions and the choice to remarry was hers "to whom she wishes." Paul speaks of the widow's freedom from her marriage in Romans 7 -

"For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband. So then if, while *her* husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man." Romans 7:2, 3

Understanding that a woman is freed from the marriage by the death of her husband, and that she is free to marry whom she wishes, Paul adds in one caveat requiring her obedience which is that she must marry "only in the Lord." Regardless of whether her previous husband was a believer or not, if she is a believer, she is required to marry a Christian. Several reasons for this should be obvious, but above all, her consideration of Christ as her Head is the most important. How could she be honoring Christ by allowing

a non-Christian the authority over her? Paul speaks of the headship of Christ over man and the headship of the husband over the wife in 1 Corinthians 11. Her marriage to a non-believer would ultimately be dishonoring of Christ.

Paul gives this same general guideline in 2 Corinthians 6:4 when he says, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Marriage implies a yoke and to be yoked to a non-believer in marriage would certainly be an unequal yoking. Therefore, Paul's words are intended to honor Christ and ensure that He is exalted in our lives.

Life application: Heartstrings are far less important than obedience. When making decisions in life, the first and most important consideration is our allegiance to Christ. We need to make sure that our emotions don't drive our decisions lest we be led astray from a proper walk with Him.

*Lord God, there are times when I really want something which I know I shouldn't have. Sometimes taking a bite of something yummy will cause more trouble than the appeal of the bite. Sometimes, taking part in an adventure may unnecessarily risk my life and so I need to not engage in that activity. I know these things and try to live by them. And yet, do I hold obedience to Your word as just as important? Help me to live according to its precepts first and foremost and never take part in something that would hinder my walk with You. This I ask so that our fellowship will be pure and undefiled. Thank You for help in this. Amen.*

**But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment—and I think I also have the Spirit of God. 1 Corinthians 7:40**

To complete chapter 7, Paul finishes his thought on the remarrying of a widow during the "present distress" which was mentioned in verse 26. He just noted that for a widow, "if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." Having said that, he states that the present time may not be the best time to get involved once again in marriage. His thoughts are that she will be "happier if she remains as she is."

This is only to be construed as a temporary thing during the "present distress" because in 1 Timothy 5, he gives the following instruction -

"But refuse *the* younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. And besides they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house

to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. Therefore I desire that *the* younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some have already turned aside after Satan." 1 Timothy 5:11-15

Whatever distress was occurring at the time of this letter to Corinth had passed or it didn't affect those in the area to which Timothy was working as a pastor. Therefore, his advice differs from 1 Corinthians 7. Continuing on concerning his words to the Corinthians, he says that they are "according to my judgment." This refers back to verse 25 where he began this particular discourse on virgins and widows. In that verse he said, "I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy." Therefore, these are his judgments on an issue not explicitly explained by the Lord.

But this doesn't mean that his words are not authoritative. Instead, as an apostle and one who was under the influence of the Spirit, they bear the authority of the Lord, granted to him. And so, he closes the chapter with, "and I think I also have the Spirit of God." These words don't indicate that he wasn't sure. Rather, as the Pulpit Commentary notes, "it is an expression of personal conviction that he has the Spirit, not an implied doubt of the fact." He understood the authority he possessed and that the Spirit was guiding him. In a polite manner, he reminds those in Corinth of this fact.

Life application: Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7 have been given under the influence of the Spirit and for the general edification and instruction of the church. Some of his words were directed solely to a period of "distress" that surrounded the church at that time. They must therefore be taken in that light and considered when times of distress surround believers at any point during the church age. Paul's words contain wisdom and exhortation, but not necessarily prescriptive commands for such times.

*Let the elders who rule well be counted by all  
As worthy of double honor and respect  
Especially those who labor in the call  
Of the word and doctrine which is pure and correct*

*For the Scripture says in its pages  
"You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain"  
And, "The laborer is worthy of his wages  
Thus, giving us sound advice once again*

*Yes Lord, I am thankful to You for those who have labored in Your word and in sound, proper doctrine. The greatest treasure of my life is knowing You more each day and coming to understand the mysteries of Your word. For those who have spent so much time in it, rightly dividing it and then sharing their learning with me, I am forever grateful. Thank You for them and please heap an eternal blessing upon their heads for their efforts. Praise to You for those You have put in my path. Yes! Thank You Lord. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 8

**Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. 1 Corinthians 8:1**

Paul now begins a new line of question answering, specifically that of "things offered to idols." The Corinthians had written him about various subjects and Paul is addressing them based on his comment of verse 7:1 which said, "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me..." With the items of chapter 7 complete, chapter 8 takes on this subject and it will consume the entire chapter which consists of just 13 verses.

The reason for their question and Paul's response should be obvious. Under the Mosaic Law, there were special dietary restrictions which applied to the faithful. They were extremely strict and they formed an important distinction between being a Jew and being a Gentile. The issue is addressed in the book of Acts, in Galatians, and elsewhere as well. In those accounts, what is relayed shows the immense importance of the matter for those in the new faith found in Christianity.

Unfortunately, as clearly as the issue of "foods" is explained in the New Testament, many have failed to heed the words and have fallen back on the Old Testament law in varying measure instead of relying on the grace of Christ. They again impose burdens which were set aside in the work of the Lord and place themselves under unnecessary bondage. Even Peter was found to fail in this regard and Paul had to correct him on the truth of the gospel.

If certain dietary restrictions were to arise within Christianity, we would find ourselves bound under a legalistic situation similar to the Levitical laws and thus we would be found attempting to obtain God's favor through works once again. The strong view concerning foods then is that all foods are acceptable and that any process of obtaining and eating those foods is unimportant.

However, there is more to the issue than merely denying "works" in order to be justified. There is the issue of conscience and knowledge which Paul will address in a wise and clearly-stated manner. As the Pulpit Commentary notes about this verse -

"His liberality of thought shows itself in this - that he sides with those who took the strong, the broad, the common sense view, that sin is not a mechanical matter, and that sin is not committed where no sin is intended. He neither adopts the ascetic view nor does he taunt the inquirers with the fact that the whole weight of their personal desires

and interests would lead them to decide the question in their own favour. On the other hand, he has too deep a sympathy with the weak to permit their scruples to be overruled with a violence which would wound their consciences. While he accepts the right principle of Christian freedom, he carefully guards against its abuse."

And so, in order to show that there is, in fact, a contrast between conscience and knowledge and that both need to be harmoniously considered, he immediately introduces a parenthetical comment which begins with, "We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." Just because someone may have knowledge doesn't mean that their actions are appropriate. In essence, "Yes, I have knowledge that I can eat all foods, but how does that knowledge affect those around me? If it affects them in a negative manner by harming their conscience, then am I acting in love towards them?"

Additionally, Paul notes that "knowledge puffs up." In other words, having knowledge can lead me to being prideful in my knowledge which will inevitably lead to sin. He is returning to the metaphor he used in chapter 5 where "leaven" or "yeast" is used to make bread rise. The leaven is a picture of sin infecting our lives. As we sin, we become puffed up in our actions. Just because we have knowledge of a particular subject, it doesn't mean that it is right to use that knowledge if it will harm others. Instead, he states the contrasting truth that "love edifies."

He will continue his parenthetical thought in the next two verses before returning to the main line of reasoning. In this then, he is demonstrating wisdom in how he approaches this subject. He will hold the line on the truth that we are free in Christ from all such restrictions that they have asked about, but we are not free to exercise that freedom while allowing others to be harmed in the process. Where there is doubt or misunderstanding, there needs to be instruction in the word of God. Once this is accomplished, then we can exercise our freedoms with a clear conscience.

Life application: It is not true that we have to avoid anything that others find offensive. In such a case, Christians wouldn't be Christians at all because the message of the cross is an offense; the truth that hell is real is an offense; and the truth that the only way to avoid hell is to be saved through the cross of Christ is certainly offensive. However, instruction on these (and all other points of doctrine) need to be explained. It would make no sense to say "You are going to hell" to a pagan without explaining why.

Likewise, it is right to explain our freedoms in Christ to weaker Christians by opening the word and providing right instruction. After that, if they remain offended by what we eat

or where we eat, it would be unreasonable to not go eat. Their offense has been explained in love and therefore there is no longer an obligation to refrain from acting in accord with the freedoms we are granted.

*Heavenly Father, I want to thank You for the freedoms which are found in Christ. I know that the foods I eat cannot affect my walk with You. But I also know that they may affect a weaker brother who lacks proper knowledge in our freedoms. And so, Lord, give me the wisdom to lead him to the truth of Your word in love. Help me to be responsible in my actions so that You will be glorified and my brother will be edified. Amen.*

**And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. 1 Corinthians 8:2**

Paul now introduces a thought directly related to what he said in verse 1. In that verse, he said, "We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." It is true that everyone has a certain amount of knowledge, but for some having knowledge is believed to be an end in and of itself. They suppose the mere knowledge is a ticket to understanding everything that is necessary to control one's life and one's surroundings.

However, knowledge without a moral compass has led to many millions killed in war, to the falling of nations, to the subjugation of others, and to a complete lack of true goodness in the world. "If anyone thinks they know anything" then is speaking of the person who is satisfied with the head knowledge in the book, but feels there is nothing more which is needed.

In the case of the Bible, Paul would be speaking to the theologian who understood all of the mechanical aspects of the word - knowing Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek; understanding the historical background of what the writers were relaying; grasping the literary forms found within the writings; etc. Such a person may feel that he has conquered the Bible and is therefore above those around him who are less educated. However, such a person may know "nothing yet as he ought to know."

God is certainly far more pleased with the uneducated high-school dropout who finds a heartfelt relationship with Christ than that stuffy professor who has never humbled himself at the foot of the cross. All of the knowledge in the world won't get a person one inch closer to salvation without the heart accompanying that knowledge. Only when that increased knowledge is accompanied by faith does it take on its true purpose. As we grow in understanding, we should also grow in glorifying God, empathizing with

those around us, walking in love with others, and applying the Bible to our every step. This is wisdom then - the correct application of knowledge toward the things of God.

Life application: If your heart is right with Christ, you are in the sweetest spot of all. Don't feel your walk with the Lord is lacking just because your level of knowledge is minimal. You will learn as you study, but you will do it on the wise path of mixing your knowledge with your love of the Lord.

*Knowing everything about the Bible is a good thing, we know  
But without love, just what good is that knowledge to us?  
So, what if I know Hebrew and Greek and put on a linguistic show  
How much closer does that get me to Jesus?*

*I could know every detail of every story found in this book  
And when someone cited it wrong, I could make a giant fuss  
But if I never open up my heart and take a good look  
How could I expect to be pleasing to Jesus?*

*Instead, the heartfelt faith of a child is such an important thing  
Walking humbly with the Lord should be the goal of each of us  
When we speak, of the Lord our voices should ring  
I know that these will surely bring a smile to my Lord, Jesus*

*Lord, I love Your word and all that it contains. I delight in every detail and subtle nuance that can be gleaned from it. But I also know that as I learn more, I need to put my knowledge into practice and into a desire to share it with others in a way which brings You glory. If I have all the knowledge in the world, but don't back it up with love for You and others, it is ultimately wasted. So, Lord, humble my heart and help me to apply my knowledge in love. Amen.*

**But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.** 1 Corinthians 8:3

This verse completes the parenthetical phrase which began in 8:1. In this, one might expect Paul to say, "But if anyone loves God, that person knows Him." However, this would only lead to more ego within an already puffed up church. It is possible to know God in a general sense, but it is impossible for a finite man to know the infinite God in His fullness. And so, he uses the passive "is known by Him" rather than the active "knows Him." He states the same type of thought in 2 Timothy 2:19 - "The Lord knows those who are His..."

Such nuances in communication are essential to recognize. An important thought which requires understanding the nuance of what is being said is found in 1 John 4:8 –

"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

John says that "God is love" but this cannot be turned around to say "love is God." There is a definite article in front of God - "the God." God is not limited to love, but it is a definition of His character that we can understand. Again, Paul uses this same type of wording in Galatians 4:9 as when he says, "But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God..." It is true that the Galatians (and the Corinthians) "know God" but it is only in a limited way.

Understanding this then we can then apply what Paul is relaying to the context of the rest of the parenthetical statement. He is using what is known as a *metalepsis* for us to grasp his intent. A metalepsis is a figure of speech in which a word or a phrase is used in a new context. A good example of this is, "I need to go and catch a worm tomorrow." This leads to the common expression that "The early bird catches the worm." This means to get an early start on the day and thus to be successful in whatever endeavor is intended. The subject "I" in the first phrase is compared to the subject "early bird" in the next.

He is substituting "love" with "knowledge" in order to show that love is the principle thought in that which edifies. In our love of God, we are "known by Him." Such should be the case in our love of others then. The main subject of this chapter is "food sacrificed to idols" as mentioned in verse 1. We can have completely accurate knowledge about the subject and yet err in our handling of it. If we fail to act in love towards others (who have less knowledge than we do) in the use of our knowledge, then we will fall short of what God expects.

As Barnes notes on this topic, "...a man should not be guided in his contact with others by mere knowledge, however great that may be; but that a safer and better principle was 'love, charity,' ... whether exercised toward God or man. Under the guidance of this, man would be in little danger of error. Under the direction of mere knowledge he would never be sure of a safe guide."

It was important for Paul to include this parenthesis at the beginning in order to establish the truth that knowledge is no substitute for love, but love mixed with knowledge is necessary to complete the picture in the guidance he will present.

Life application: The subtle nuances of how words are used in Scripture are important to pay attention to. When we grasp what is being relayed, we can then act on the matter appropriately. Love is necessary when exhibiting knowledge on a matter in order to ensure that the weaker in knowledge isn't further weakened in his faith. Having said this, no matter how delicately one handles an issue, people will almost always find offense in religious and political dialogue. Eventually, one can "love" another to the point where nothing at all can be said. This is a trap the Christian must also avoid.

*Heavenly Father, I am very passionate about Your word, including the right application of every detail. I'm also passionate about other things, such as politics, adhering to set laws, etc. Because of how I perceive these things, I am zealous to express my beliefs, but I would ask that You help me to exercise what I believe in a charitable yet firm way. Give me the ability to balance right thoughts with amiability towards others, but without giving up on an inch of what is right in Your eyes. This is surely a gift which can only come from You, and so I ask for such wisdom today. Amen.*

**Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that *there is no other God but one.* 1 Corinthians 8:4**

"Therefore" begins the main discourse of the subject at hand, and yet it is relying on the parenthetical statement he just finished. The thought process thus far goes as follows:

- Now concerning things offered to idols:
- We know that we all have knowledge.
- Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.
- (linked to 1a) If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.
- (linked to 1b) But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.
- Therefore.... (after considering 1a-1b)

When the Bible gives a "therefore" it is always important to go back and see what it is there for.

And so, to begin his discourse on the subject, he reiterates the first half of verse 1 again by saying, "concerning the eating of things offered to idols." In essence, "Now that I have explained to you a more important issue which is directly connected to your question, I will now answer your question." And he does so immediately by saying, "we know that an idol is nothing in the world."

In this, his direct response is tied to "knowledge" as mentioned in 1a above. Everyone who has called on Christ should intuitively realize that an idol is nothing. It is a part of the creation and has no ability to change the outcome of anything. If something is sacrificed to it, it has no more ability to respond to the sacrifice than does a handful of dirt or a cup of water. Because this is so, then the sacrifice has no meaning either. It was a futile gesture to a futile non-god. And this is all the more certain because, "*there is no other God but one.*" This short phrase was preceded by "and that" which again ties it to 1a - "and that *there is no other God but one.*"

This is knowledge which every believer should certainly possess because they have rejected all other religious systems and have called on Christ as Lord. If He is Lord, He is God and there is none other. This is knowledge that should be certain. But though understood in some measure by all true believers, it may not have been properly processed by all of them. This will inevitably cause a conflict in them when considering the issue of food sacrificed to idols. When it does, their faith may be challenged. Before addressing this though, Paul will continue to speak concerning "knowledge" for two more verses.

Life application: When reading the Bible, it is a good habit to reconsider what was previously stated when coming to prepositions such as "for," "and," "but," "therefore," and etc. If the context is still unclear, try mapping it out in a simple manner and re-considering the context. This will often open up the passage to what is intended by the writer.

*Glorious Lord God! Today I am overflowing with joy in my heart simply because I know You personally. The world is spiraling into chaos. False religions are taking the upper hand all around us. There is insecurity, trouble, trial, and sadness everywhere... and yet, despite all of this, I have a more definite hope than these things could ever destroy. I have the surety of eternal life because the grave was defeated for me by Christ Jesus. What can man do to me? I am safe, secure, and serene because of Your Gift, my Lord Jesus. Hallelujah and Amen!*

**For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords) ... 1 Corinthians 8:5**

Continuing on with his thoughts concerning knowledge and love, Paul introduces a hypothetical argument using words translated as "for even if." It is important to understand that Paul is not implying that there truly are other gods, but that this is what

people may think in their confused world view. Even the Old Testament speaks in this manner. From the law itself, Moses shows that there are "many gods and many lords" -

"For the LORD your God *is* God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe." Deuteronomy 10:17

People all over the world bow to things they think are "gods" even though they aren't. The words in the Bible, including the quote from Deuteronomy and from Paul's words here, are meant to indicate the *belief* by some that these gods exist, but not that they actually do. They are no more real than the imagination of those who follow them. These "so called gods" are everywhere in the world and are to be found in all cultures. Some are found in "heaven" in the minds of those who follow them.

In this, thought include the "gods" of Greek and Roman culture such as Zeus, Apollo, Hermes, etc. Also there are the heavenly gods in the stars and constellations, and so forth. Then of course, there were (and still are) representations of them on street corners and in temples in every location. These would be the gods "on earth." But there were other such earthly gods - Caesar was proclaimed a living god; trees were believed to be divine; and certain mountains or valleys may have been believed to be places of divine presence. Even Paul and Barnabas were proclaimed gods after performing a miracle in Jesus' name -

"Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian *language*, 'The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!' <sup>12</sup> And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup> Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes." Acts 14:11-13

The apostles obviously argued against this, stating that the people "should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them." (Acts 14:15). This is the type of thing Paul is speaking of in verse 8:5. As noted, he is merely making a hypothetical argument. He is not arguing for the validity of such "gods."

He is relaying that some believe that there are other "gods" for a reason which will become evident in the coming verses and his thoughts are directed toward a loving attitude concerning our handling of delicate issues in the presence of those who still

struggle with these things. As the thought progresses, keep in mind that "knowledge puffs up, but love edifies."

Life application: When reviewing verses in the Bible, context must be carefully considered. Jesus quoted a verse from the Old Testament about "gods" which is often misused even from the pulpit today to indicate that we are divine beings when we come to Christ. Such is not the case, but error can creep in easily when individual verses are taken out of their intended context.

*Lord God, though I may lack intelligence in many ways, there is one thing I am perfectly confident of - You are God and the word You have given us is without error. There are no contradictions in it and it is the perfect guide for my instruction, my walk with You, and as a tool to train others in those things as well. May I never "pick and choose" which verses apply and which don't. Instead, help me to understand them in context and then to be obedient to them. Guide me in Your word. Amen.*

**...yet for us *there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.***

1 Corinthians 8:6

Continuing on with his "knowledge" portion of "things offered to idols" Paul finishes up with this verse. He has just noted that "there are many gods and many lords." In this, he meant in *perception*, not in *reality* as can be seen in this verse. "Yet for us *there is one God.*" Unlike the rest of the unregenerate world, we possess the knowledge of the absolute truth that there is one God. This is then in contradistinction to the lie that there are "many gods."

This one God is "the Father." In this, Paul is not speaking of the Father within the Godhead as separate and distinct from the Son and the Holy Spirit. Rather, he is using the term "Father" when speaking of God in the absolute sense. This one God is our Father. We know this is the sense in which he is speaking because he does not use the term "Son" when speaking of Jesus in the coming words. Instead, he will speak of Jesus in parallel thought. Therefore, "one God, the Father" is God who is the Father, "of whom *are all things.*"

God our Father is the Source of all things. They exist because He wills them to exist and nothing exists apart from His will. There is no other God and all of creation was created by Him, "and we for Him." This refers to His faithful believers who have put their hope in

the Messiah. We were created for Him and by Him to be a praise and a glory to Him. God so intended this and His will is effected in our existence and in our state in Him.

In parallel to that, Paul continues with "and one Lord Jesus Christ." It is important to note the absence of the word "Son" to understand properly. It is parallel to, not in addition to, his prior words concerning "the Father." Again, his previous verse noted that "there are many gods and many lords," a set of parallels - "gods" and "lords." He first addressed "gods" as opposed to the one "God." He now addresses "lords" as opposed to "one Lord Jesus Christ."

Understanding this is important because aberrant cults, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, try to subordinate Jesus by inaccurately analyzing this verse... "See there is one God, the Father, and so Jesus isn't God." Such misrepresentations fail to accurately handle God's word issued through Paul's hand. This "one Lord Jesus Christ" is "through whom *are* all things." It is set in parallel with the note about the Father "of whom *are* all things." God is the Source and Jesus is the member within that Source by which all things came into being; He is the Word of God (see John 1:1).

Finally, Paul says that it is the Lord Jesus Christ, "through whom we *live*." This is parallel to the thought concerning God the Father which said "and we for Him." Jesus is the Creator and He is the Re-generator. We exist physically because of Him and we are spiritually quickened by Him when we receive Him. All is a work of God and all is by Jesus Christ.

Life application: When you pray to Jesus, you are praying to God. When you pray through Jesus, you are praying through our Mediator to the Godhead. Jesus is God and Jesus is our Lord. By carefully examining Scripture in its intended context, we can see that there is no division between Jesus and God, and yet there is a Godhead in which the three Persons of the Trinity exist.

*Heavenly Father - gracious, glorious, and almighty, thank You for Your divine hand of grace which showers down upon us every wonderful blessing. You water the earth so that we are fed and re-nourished. You change the seasons for our enjoyment and for the flowering of different parts of Your creation. You heal the scars of the earth which come from time to time and You heal the wounds of our souls through the grace of Your own hand in the Person of Jesus Christ our Lord. In Him, we have the certainty of every spiritual blessing and the wondrous prospect of eternal life in Your presence. Thank You for Your attentive and divine hand of grace. Amen.*

**However, *there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.* 1 Corinthians 8:7**

Paul has been speaking of "knowledge" "concerning things offered to idols" for the past two verses. He now enters into the fact that "not everyone" has that knowledge by stating "however." This then is in contrast to what should be obvious, but it is knowledge which is lacking in some for whatever reason. And so, he continues by saying that "for some, with consciousness of the idol." There is a definite hindrance in their ability to accept anything offered to that idol, even though it is actually nothing at all.

Their conscience tells them that if something was offered to an idol and they were to "eat *it* as a thing offered to an idol," then they have somehow done something wrong. As an understandable example, suppose you were to go to the local Buddhist temple because they have a great farmer's market there. While there, you see meat being sold too. Because you're a big fan of steak, pork chops, and lamb cutlets, you decide to buy a few of each. But then you hear that the animals were sacrificed first as an offering to the idol at the temple, is it ok to buy that meat now or not?

Paul has just said that "an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* no other God but one." After that, he clearly explained what he meant in the next two verses. And so, the answer is "Yes, you may buy the meat." Your conscience tells you that there is no God but one and you know that the sacrifice has no validity at all. Therefore, your conscience on this matter is undefiled and your devotion to God through Jesus Christ is unhindered when you buy and eat those tasty delights.

However, there is another consideration to be made. Those who have a conscience about the idol, not understanding that it is nothing in all the world, may not recognize your liberty in Christ. This is because "their conscience, being weak, is defiled." If you buy and eat meat in the presence of someone like this, what will be the result? Paul will continue to analyze this situation, explaining that love for that weaker brother is more important than your correct knowledge of the matter. He will also further address the issue later in the book. As he said when he began this chapter, "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies."

Life application: If you find yourself in a situation where you may harm the conscience of a weaker brother, what you need to do is first act in love and not do what would cause them greater confusion. After that, you should take the time to properly instruct them in the matter, showing them directly from the word of God what is correct. Once you

have done this, you have shown love and respect for them and validated the stand by God's standard. If after that, they still disagree, you can do no more. They have willingly failed to see the true intent of the matter because there is no higher authority than what God has presented through His word.

To understand this, think of an issue from the US Constitution, owning a gun for example. If you have a gun and another person says, "You shouldn't own a gun; that is just wrong." All you need to do is take them to the 2nd Amendment and read it to them. After that, you show them your permit which authorizes you to own the gun within whatever state you belong to and maybe you even take time to show them your bill of sale. If they still say (and most lefties will) that you shouldn't own a gun, then disregard what they say. You are no longer under any obligation to be concerned with their conscience. It was defiled, you attempted to show them the valid proofs of their error, and they rejected the proofs. You can do no more. Go enjoy target practice without them.

*O precious heavenly Father, how I cherish my time talking with You. When I get up, I know You are there... "Good morning, Lord." When I head out, You are with me... "It's a glorious day, Lord." When I see a beautiful rainbow in the clouds... "Why thank You for that, Lord." When a friend who hasn't called on You comes to mind... "Lord, show them the truth of Your Son." Throughout the day, You are with me... "Woo hoo, Lord! A dollar on the sidewalk, thank You." During each meal, "Gracious God, thank You for this food." And as the day ends, I know Your hand is still upon me... "Thank You for the wondrous life You have blessed me with. Good night Lord." O precious heavenly Father, how I cherish my time talking with You. Amen.*

**But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. 1 Corinthians 8:8**

Taken in context with what Paul has been saying concerning "things offered to idols" this verse should be perfectly clear on several levels. And yet, it is astonishing that so many Christian sects and even aberrant cults fail to grasp the simple and clear language of his words. Here he starts with the word "but." It is then a contrast to what he just said, "...for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat *it* as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled."

The weaker in doctrine and understanding, the less informed in what Christ did, and those who are not yet properly instructed in the word may have reluctance to eat some

type of food because it is perceived to be defiled and thus unclean. But that is not the case. There is no unclean food for the Christian. As Paul will later state in chapter 10 -

"Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for 'the earth *is* the LORD's, and all its fullness.'" 1 Corinthians 10:25, 26

It is the Lord's earth and He has granted the things of the earth to man to eat. Only a particular group of people, and for a particular set time and purpose, were given dietary restrictions. That time and purpose was fulfilled in Christ Jesus and is now set aside and obsolete. There are no dietary restrictions imposed by the Bible for those in Christ. Paul explains why when he says, "food does not commend us to God."

It is not worrying about what we eat that is pleasing to God, it is a pure conscience, a right walk, and a heartfelt adherence to His word. Christ fulfilled the Law of Moses and we are to trust in His work, not our own. Concerning foods, the truth is that "for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse." Whatever we eat cannot harm our relationship, nor can it make it for a closer walk with Christ. It is a neutral matter.

If a thing sold in the meat market which had been sacrificed to an idol is not unclean, then this shows us that no foods are unclean. Pork is the typical example used by nutty cults and sects as being a "no no." And yet, it is certain that "whatever is sold in the meat market" includes it and any other type of meat. The pagans didn't care what meat was hanging in the market. They had no idea what the Law of Moses included. It is absurd to think that the act of sacrificing an animal to an idol didn't include pigs, dogs, horses, or any other unclean animal. Those sacrificing didn't pull out a copy of the Torah and search to see if the animal they were about to sacrifice to an idol was clean under the Law of Moses before defiling it by sacrificing it to an idol!

Life application: Think clearly on biblical issues! Don't be led astray by people with crazy agendas or ideas. If one doesn't eat pork because they are trying to please God, then anything else under the Law of Moses must also be adhered to. It is an illogical thing to pick and choose Scripture in order to make a point which actually doesn't exist. Instead, it only causes one to revert back to the need to fulfill the law in its entirety, an impossibility!

*Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do  
Do all to the glory of our great God  
Give no offense, as the Bible instructs you*

*To the Jews or to the Greeks in this life that you trod*

*Nor to the church of God, and those in it  
Instead attempt to please all men in all things  
Therefore, don't seek your own profit  
But the profit of many in all your doings*

*This, so that they may be saved  
By seeing your actions and how you have behaved*

*Yes Lord, I need help in this one for sure! Give me the right attitude to not be an offense to those who see my actions. Help me to use my obvious liberties in Christ for good and not for harm. The knowledge I have is less important than the love I display if that knowledge is used in a way which causes a stumbling block to others. So, Lord, help me to think clearly on the delicate issues of the faith and then to act wisely in my exercising of them. Amen.*

**But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 1 Corinthians 8:9**

Paul has been speaking of "knowledge" concerning the issue of "things offered to idols." He has clearly shown that eating something offered to an idol makes no difference at all and that the food is not defiled, because the idol is "nothing in the world." This is an inescapable truth when clearly reasoned out. However, his words today begin with "but." There is a contrasting thought which must be presented. When he began this chapter, he issued a parenthetical statement which introduced two thoughts. The first was "knowledge" and the second was "love." He will now begin to address that second issue.

Yes, we may have knowledge concerning our "liberty" in the matter, but is that the end of the issue? The answer is, "No." His understanding of the weakness of some leads him to state his contrasting thought. "But beware" tells us that this is a serious matter. The word translated as "beware" indicates to "look" into a matter or to "discern." If we have knowledge, we should mix that knowledge with discernment. And the reason is "lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak."

His use of the word "weak" is tied to "knowledge." In other words, where your knowledge is strong and sound, others may be wavering, unsure, or misinformed. If your knowledge isn't mixed with discernment, what will be the result in them? It will become

a "stumbling block." A stumbling block is something that trips one up. It is usually an unseen obstacle, such as an imperceptible raise in the level of one block on a path. It is just enough to cause harm, but not big enough to be noticed. At other times, a stumbling block may be perceptible, but the person may have their attention diverted to other things. Either way, the result is a fall.

Paul's coming explanation of this will move from the subject of knowledge in a person to that of love for another person. This then is a verse which transitions to that thought.

Life application: We are given rights (liberties) in Christ that are very clear and precise. However, they often require knowledge through study in order to be properly grasped. As study is something most people don't really cherish, have time for, or for whatever other reason, it is up to those who have studied to not use their knowledge to harm those without the knowledge, but rather to instruct them in right doctrine of what they already understand. As Paul noted, "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." Let us impart knowledge and do so in a loving manner.

*Lord God, Your word is certainly a treasure and a delight, but oftentimes people disagree on a particular point or precept. If I am certain of my position, help me not to be arrogant in my defense of it, but rather to impart that knowledge in love. With all certainty, arguing will only cause greater divisions and insurmountable walls will result. And so, help us to amiably work towards the one truth which You intend for us to see. Be with us and guide us as we search to rightly divide Your word. Amen.*

**For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?**  
1 Corinthians 8:10

Continuing with the discourse on "knowledge" in relation to "love" Paul now brings in an example from real life to help the Corinthians (and thus us) to understand more clearly what he has been speaking of. He begins with "for" thus showing that he is referring to a previous thought. This thought is that the knowledge of someone who uses their liberty in Christ may "become a stumbling block to those who are weak." This verse now explains that thought.

"For if anyone sees you who have knowledge" is speaking of the person who understands that an idol is nothing in the world. Their conscience is free from the superstition that an idol has any effect on anything. If such a person with that knowledge is seen "eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is

weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?" In this, the person of the "conscience of him who is weak" is the person who believes that an idol is actually something. It could be a weak believer or a person who is still trying to figure out if Christianity is true and worth following. What will be the result of such an action in their mind?

The answer is that they will then be "emboldened." The word for emboldened is "*oikodomēthēsetai*," and it is used only here in the New Testament. It carries the thought of "building up a house." In this then is an ironic expression because Paul is intimating that what he is building is actually destructive. Instead of being edified, he is harmed in a right understanding of the truth. Why? Because he may now believe that 1) it is ok to mingle the pure faith with other ideologies (syncretism); and/or 2) he may now believe that an idol is actually something with a force or power rather than "nothing in the world." Calvin translates this thought "a ruinous upbuilding."

In order to make this understandable to the readers in Corinth, Paul uses another word which is unique in the New Testament. It is the word translated as "idol's temple" here in the NKJV which is *eidóleio*. This was not a word used by the Gentiles. Instead, it was something that those who understood there was only one God used. A Gentile would name a temple based on the idol in the temple, such as "Athenaeum," the temple of Athens, or "Apolloneum," the temple of Apollo. To them, the temple was a reflection of the "god" within it. To the Gentiles, it was a reflection of any given idol within it; hence, the term "idoleum" was used to indicate "the temple of an idol."

Life application: The perception by others of our freedom in Christ is important. Until they have right knowledge of a matter, it is right that we not use our freedom in a manner which could destroy the very building which they are erecting in their knowledge of Christ.

*An idol is nothing in all the world, this I know  
But others may not understand this yet  
If to the temple of an idol I were to go  
For a tasty snack or for lunch, I may later regret*

*What if they misunderstood my going there?  
And thought that I worshipped the idol, just like the Lord  
They may think that they also can worship anyone, anywhere  
And that the Bible isn't God's only word*

*My knowledge may harm them in this way  
Though it was not my intent for it to be  
And so, my actions are important, everywhere and every day  
To reflect devotion to the Lord, yes to the Lord only*

*Heavenly Father, help me to act responsibly in all ways and at all times in an undivided devotion to the Lord. Keep reminding me that others are watching my life and actions and are making valuable judgments about my heart for Christ. Let me not be a source of their downfall or to their misunderstanding of the freedoms which I possess in Him. In this, I know that You will be glorified and others will be built up. Thank You. Amen.*

**And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?**  
1 Corinthians 8:11

This is speaking of those with a weak conscience who may be motivated to act in a manner contrary to their conscience by eating "those things offered to idols." If this happens, Paul says that "because of your knowledge" it will inevitably cause an offense to occur. This is written as a question - "...shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" However, some scholars argue that it is emphatic even if it is a question. Many translations actually cite it as an affirmative statement, such as the ESV - "And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died."

In other words, it is a predictable occurrence where one action follows another. In the weaker brother our actions will cause inevitable harm. However, what should be considered is what it means when he writes "perish." There is no doubt that he is speaking of someone who is already a believer. The term "brother" is used and this indicates someone already in the faith. Further, the fact that Paul is referring to a weak conscience implies a believer as well. There is a conscience concerning Christ, but it is not a developed one.

So, does the word "perish" imply a loss of salvation? The answer is, "No." There are several thoughts to support this notion. The first is that though he speaks as if something is leaning toward an occurrence, it doesn't mean the thing will actually occur (meaning a loss of salvation).

Secondly, though it says (as the ESV translates it "this weak person is destroyed"), is this referring to the whole individual or to the faith of the individual? Is the person's faith being used as representative of the person? This is the case because elsewhere a

believer is noted as having "forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins" (2 Peter 1:9). It is also confirmed by Paul's coming words on the issue.

Thirdly, just because one thing typically will follow another, it is in no way conclusive that such a thing will inevitably follow, but that it is the normal, natural, and likely result of such a thing. Considering that a person is sealed with the Holy Spirit, that which is natural can (and will) be negated by the greater spiritual act which previously occurred.

It is sure that nowhere else does Paul ever indicate that a believer could lose their salvation. And the contrary is true. The sealing of the Holy Spirit upon belief (Ephesians 1:13, 14) is a "guarantee." The one who has placed their faith in Christ, weak though it may be, is saved by His work. He truly is a brother "for whom Christ died." If Christ died for this person, then Christ also lives for that person. He will ensure a good end results. The next verse will absolutely confirm this.

An excellent connecting verse to this one is found in Romans. Our actions, especially towards our fellow brothers, should be seen in a positive and edifying light. Here is how he states this -

"Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

-Romans 14:16, 17

Life application: Jesus died for all. Those who receive this gracious offer become children of God and are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Is it worth destroying the faith of such a person over our actions, particularly what foods we are willing to eat? We generally eat three times a day and the meal is forgotten as soon as it is done. Let us not consider such a temporary thing as worth harming the faith of another believer!

*Precious Lord Jesus, You fulfilled the law on my behalf. You paid the penalty for my sins, and You went to the cross in order to do that. But You also did that for all people. Those who have received this gracious offer are now God's children and fellow believers. Would it be right for my actions to destroy the faith of one of them? If You died for them, then I should be working to edify them, not tear them down. And so, help me with this Lord. Help me to rightly instruct them and to be a good example of mixing knowledge with love. I know that with this, You will be pleased. Amen.*

**But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 1 Corinthians 8:12**

This verse begins with "but" which is set in contrast to what he just said. The preceding verse asked, "And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" The answer is actually stated by Paul in an interesting way. No, they won't "perish" in the sense of a loss of salvation as follows below:

"When you sin against the brethren" implies that we have caused an offense to occur. This person is weaker in their knowledge and thus more prone to falling or failing than another may be. Their lack of knowledge may cause them to act against their conscience in a matter that they are unsure of. Paul shows in Romans that any action which isn't in faith is sin -

"But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does not eat* from faith; for whatever *is* not from faith is sin." Romans 14:23

Therefore, to act in a manner contrary to conscience (which means that faith is lacking in action) is to act in sin. The conscience is wounded because there is a lack of proper understanding and this has led to an action which was taken which was not in faith. What is immensely important in this is that "when you sin against the brethren" in this way "you sin against Christ." The person is "in" Christ, having been saved by Him and having been brought into the family of God.

John Chrysostom asks, "What can be more ruthless than a man who strikes one who is sick?" What is needed is the healing power of right doctrine, not an arrogant display of knowledge about freedoms in Christ which are not clearly understood by the weaker brother. To sin against another believer (in this or any way) is to actually sin against Christ. In this case, it was because of an exercise of knowledge instead of a demonstration of love. What is needed is to instruct in right knowledge (which is certainly loving) and then to act together as faithful believers in Christ and in adherence to His words.

Understanding this verse confirms that the previous verse was not speaking of a loss of salvation. Paul had asked "shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" His answer is implicitly "No." The reason is because if we sin against Christ when we sin against the brother, it implies that the brother is "in Christ." If he is "in Christ" then he is safely in that position. The offense affects both the weaker brother and Christ. In

essence, it would be no less possible for that weaker brother to lose their salvation than it would for it to happen to Christ.

Life application: When we are saved, we move from Adam to Christ. We are once and forever united to Him and are positionally "in Christ." Therefore, when we sin against another believer, the offense is also against Christ. This is a sobering thought for us to consider and to remember. Let us act charitably towards those who are the redeemed of the Lord as we conduct our affairs.

*Heavenly Father, to be "in Christ" is the sweetest place to be. We are covered by the most precious Sacrifice. We are granted and given the most beautiful Garment. We are seated in the most sacred place. We have the greatest Defender and the most marvelous Mediator. We are secure in the mightiest hand and uplifted by the Giver of all grace. There is no end to the glory of what Jesus has done for us. To be in Christ is the sweetest place of all. Thank You for this honor. Hallelujah and Amen!*

**Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.** 1 Corinthians 8:13

This is the last verse of the chapter which has dealt with "things offered to idols." However, right at the introduction of the thought, Paul divided that major subject into two over-arching issues. The first was knowledge and the second was love. He then explained how the two do not always work harmoniously together and that love is the preferred avenue to follow when knowledge in a weaker brother is lacking.

The exercise of knowledge without love can lead to sin and so the words of chapter 8 have been given to help the one with knowledge concerning a matter in order to consider it in a way which promotes love first and foremost. The issue of "things offered to idols" was the main area of discussion because it came in response to a question submitted to him by those in Corinth. However, the concept rings true in whatever situation one may face, be it any liberty we have but which is not understood by the weaker brother.

To sum up his thoughts, he begins with "therefore." In this then we can see his final conclusion on this subject. It is an issue he also treated in Romans 14:19-22. Those verses perfectly compliment his thoughts in this chapter. He will also again speak on this subject in his words to the Corinthians. For this portion of the letter however, his conclusion is that "if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat."

The eating of meat no matter how tasty and delicious, and even if what he proposes to eat is actually acceptable, is not worth causing another to fall into sin because of what he knows to be right. Love towards the weaker brother is more important than what is consumed at mealtime. And this isn't just for one meal, but - as the Greek reads - "to the age." It is a term which means "forever." Paul would gladly give up on his liberties for all his days instead of causing his brother to stumble.

If stumbling is an offense, and if he is the cause of the stumbling, then he is actually causing the offense. This is a lesson for each of us as we consider our actions before our weaker brothers. Whatever gain we think we might have from an action, if it causes another to stumble, then it is not worth it.

Life application: The old saying "little eyes are watching" isn't just true with children who see the example of their elders. It is also true of those who are "little" in the faith. Let's endeavor with all of our heart to keep our actions in line with this precept in order to keep those less informed from stumbling.

*Lord, as I come before You in prayer, I know that I have erred in so many ways since my last prayers to You. My life is a constant stream of hoping to please You and yet continuously falling short of that goal. My words, actions, and interactions with others show me how desperately I need Jesus. Thank You for providing the wondrous salvation that could come in no other way. Thank You for my Lord, His work, His cross, and His resurrection. In that, I know that my erring ways are covered, forgiven, and cast away. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 9

**Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 1 Corinthians 9:1**

This first verse of chapter 9 appears to both look back to the concluding statement of chapter 8 and also forward to the main subject area of chapter 9 which concerns Paul's apostleship. Looking back, he has just noted that "if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble." Even as an apostle, which indicates that he had personally seen and been commissioned by the Lord, he was willing to make such a concession for his "weaker" brethren. If he was willing to give up such rights in this way, it should be considered an example for those in Corinth.

Looking forward, there are those who may have questioned his apostleship, something he will immediately defend in order to dispel such a thought. Additionally, there are those who may have felt he was abusing his rights, overstepping his authority, or unnecessarily inserting himself into their local affairs. He will defend himself concerning these and other issues as he progresses through the chapter.

And so, to begin, he asks rhetorically, "Am I not an apostle?" In essence he is saying, "I am an apostle." He meets the requirements of apostleship and he carries the commission of the office. Continuing, he asks, "Am I not free?" Elsewhere, he calls himself "a bondservant of Christ." This is not what he is speaking of, but rather that he has the freedom found in Christ that all other Christians also possess, including those freedoms which belong to the office of apostle. He should be free from working for money, but rather should be paid for his ministry. However, he will discuss later why he didn't exercise that right. This is the type of freedom he speaks of.

After that, a third rhetorical question, "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" The answer is with all certainty, "Yes." He saw the Lord on the road to Damascus; he saw Him in Arabia (as can be inferred from Galatians 1:17); he saw Him in Jerusalem (see Acts 22:17); he saw Him there at Corinth (see Acts 18:9); and, he had seen Him at least one other time as well (see 2 Corinthians 12:1). In having seen the Lord and been commissioned personally by Him (see Acts 9:15, 16), he met the necessary requirements of the office of Apostle.

Finally in this verse, he asks, "Are you not my work in the Lord?" The answer is surely once again, "Yes." He established the church in Corinth and was their "father" in the faith as he noted earlier in this epistle -

"I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."

-1 Corinthians 4:15, 16

Paul is taking the time to note that he bears the apostolic authority because he meets the requirements of an apostle. He is doing this in order to logically defend his words and his position on important matters. All of this can ultimately be traced back to the beginning thoughts of the epistle which spoke of divisions within the church. As an apostle, he was working for harmony within the church, not divisions. There is one Lord and He is not divided. Therefore, in order to demonstrate that his words were intended as a unifying and valid set of instructions, he is taking the time to defend his position as an apostle.

Life application: There are certain requirements necessary in order to claim the title of "apostle." These were for a set duration of time known as the "apostolic age" of the church. There are no longer any true apostles within the church and people claiming such a title only demonstrate that they are not qualified to bear the title because they have not properly understood the very basis for claiming the title. Hold fast to what is sound and in accord with Scripture and don't be led astray by those who make claims to titles which sound impressive, but which bear no weight or authority.

*Lord God, I do not mind doing menial labor or taking on otherwise seemingly boring jobs. You have given us this world in which we live and if someone doesn't pick up the trash, then Your world will be trashy. If someone doesn't clean the restrooms, then the restrooms of Your church won't be pleasant. If the trees don't get trimmed, then the house will appear shabby. Whatever work I do, I know that it can be something to reflect Your order, intent for that which is beautiful, and also a willing heart to not be proud or lifted up. In all my tasks, I will endeavor to bring You honor and glory so that others see it and praise You. Amen.*

**If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 9:2**

It can be inferred from these words of Paul that there were people who had come to Corinth and accused Paul of not being a true apostle. Some have speculated that it was from the camp of Peter, but this is unlikely, unless it was at a time before Peter fully grasped the nature of Paul's ministry. In his second epistle, Peter wrote the following words concerning Paul. They conclusively show that he believed in and supported Paul's

apostleship, including the authority of his letters which he actually places on the same level as all other Scripture -

"Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; <sup>15</sup> and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, <sup>16</sup> as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures." 2 Peter 3:14-16

Whoever it was who was attempting to undermine Paul's authority, he gives his own defense here to show that his ministry is a valid one. Beginning with "If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you." So, what if others don't accept his status as an apostle? This shouldn't matter at all to those in Corinth because those in Corinth were brought to Christ through his ministry. If they had called on Christ after hearing his words, then their actions validate that he was a minister of Christ. One cannot lead someone to Christ if they are talking about someone other than Christ!

In substantiation of this, he continues by saying, "For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord." Their conversion is the proof needed that he is, in fact, an apostle. He has already shown that he meets all of the requirements of being an apostle. Using that status, his work resulted in their conversion and thus "sealed" those necessary requirements of the office; they were a convincing demonstration of his apostolic authority. The "seal" (or Greek *sphragis*), is a seal, signet ring, or impression of the seal or ring which attests to the validity of what was conveyed. His words show that they are the attestation of his office, one that was sure and irrevocable.

Understanding this seal in the Corinthians, we can then rightly deduce that Paul's words are valid for doctrine, reproof, and correction. His letters, included in the pages of Scripture, are fully authoritative and they have been attested to by those who came to Christ through his ministry. Like Peter's comments about Paul above, the Bible is a self-validating document. It is a marvel and a treasure and it gives us the certainty that we are on the right track in the pursuit of our faith.

Life application: If you come to a time of doubt in your faith, the best place to go is to the Bible. The more you open it and read it, the surer you will be of He whom you have trusted. God has organized it in such a way that it will resolve your doubts, edify your

walk, and correct your thinking. Be content in the fact that you have properly trusted in God's provision when you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ!

*Well Lord, another day is here and I'm still waiting on Your return. Instead of worrying about that, I will rejoice in it. You have shown that I have another day to tell others about Your goodness. I won't waste it speculating on whether you'll be back tomorrow or the next day. Instead, I'll use the time You have granted in the way in which You intended... to glorify You, to give You praise, to tell others about Your offer, and to faithfully work in the job in which You have placed me. You'll be back at the right moment. Until then, I am content to wait. Amen.*

**My defense to those who examine me is this: 1 Corinthians 9:3**

The NKJV (cited here) phrases this verse as Paul's introduction to his defense when in fact he has already made his defense. The terms he uses for "defense" and "examine" are legal in nature, used during an inquiry. He has been legally challenged and he has legally defended his position. Therefore, this verse is referring not to what follows, which is a series of questions on which he bases his defense. Instead, they are a series of rhetorical questions in confirmation of what he has defended.

This verse then should end with a period, not a colon because the subsequent verses are merely rhetorical questions given as a follow up to these previously submitted facts:

- He is an apostle (verse 1)
- He is free (verse 1)
- He has seen Jesus Christ our Lord (verse 1)
- Those in Corinth are his work in the Lord (verse 1)
- The Corinthians are the seal of his apostleship in the Lord (verse 2)

He has been challenged and he has responded in a manner which proves his apostleship. From this springboard of his certified status, he will next show what rights he is entitled to in that status.

Life application: Understanding Paul's method of writing allows us to more accurately interpret his words. He was trained under the law and was skilled at identifying an issue and then defending that issue preemptively. This is an excellent way of handling a sensitive discussion which will keep others from thinking they have outwitted you. Thinking of contingencies that may arise and responding to them in advance will usually bolster one's viewpoint in the end.

*Be my defense O God as I face the enemy's darts  
When they speak against me, fill me with Your word  
Though they may have graphs, notes, and charts  
You are on my side; my Defender is my Lord*

*Knowing Your word is a most valued tool  
Because it was given by You to guide me through each trial  
Against the vain utterings of the wicked and the fool  
By standing on it, the attacks will end after a short while*

*Every good lesson given there is a great defense for us  
Because they are lessons which reflect the very heart of Jesus*

*Lord God, the more I read Your word, the clearer the difficult issues of this life become. I can see why bad things happen, even to the best of people. I understand that wickedness has an end. I find there hope and solace in times of depression and trial. In Your word I find these and so much more. Help me to direct others to this wonderful tool, guide, and path of sound reason where they also can find sure footing and contentment. This I pray that they will be edified and You will be glorified. Thank You for Your precious, superior word. Amen.*

### **Do we have no right to eat and drink? 1 Corinthians 9:4**

Paul's words concerning his rights as an apostle here have grown naturally out of his previous discussion about food sacrificed to idols. There, in verse 8:9, he said, "But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak." In that verse, the word "liberty" is translated from the same word as "right" which Paul uses here in 9:4. Though the subject has changed - from meat sacrificed to idols to the rights of the apostle, the example remains consistent.

Paul finished chapter 8 by saying that "if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble." This was immediately followed by his claim to apostleship. He has a "right to eat and drink" at the expense of the church. But he hadn't exercised that right as will be noted in the verses to come.

In not using this right, however, some may have come to the conclusion that he wasn't actually an approved apostle. In essence, "If Paul were an apostle, the church would pay his bills and he wouldn't be working side jobs in order to support himself." The same

could be concluded today - "Peter Preacher isn't really a pastor because he has several part time jobs. He is just 'playing pastor' at the church he preaches at."

However, Paul has preempted this line of reasoning by stating the somewhat parenthetical thought of verses 9:1-3. His apostleship is, in fact, validated by those in Corinth; they are the seal of his apostleship. As this is the case, then why doesn't he exercise his rights as an apostle? The answer will come in due time, but before it does, he will continue to rhetorically ask several more questions concerning apostles' rights. These questions will be answered from the words of Scripture including words from Jesus Himself.

Life application: Is it a mark of an unacceptable ministry that a preacher has side jobs in order to pay his wages? Is a small home-church of less importance than a large mega church? Using Paul as an example, surely the opposite may at times be true. The preacher, pastor, or priest who relies solely on the church for his expenses is in the comfortable position of preaching whatever he wishes without worry of where his bread will come from. Because of this, his heart may or may not truly care about the word which he has been called to present. But the one who stands behind the pulpit without receiving a full measure for his efforts is more than likely doing so because of a profound sense of care and respect for God's superior word. Which then is more likely to feed, defend, tend to, and be willing to give all for his flock?

*Precious heavenly Father! Thank You for those who strive to share Your word without trumpets sounded before them. Thank You for the quiet scholars who sit and analyze Your word, straining to understand every subtle nuance it contains. Thank You for the missionaries who truly care about the lost and not about the exciting travels and surroundings that accompany their duties. Thank You for the pastors of wee little churches off the beaten path who care more for instruction than they do for flash, pomp, and notoriety. And Lord, thank You even for the folks who clean the restrooms so that the church is tidy. Thank You for Your servants who possess a servant's heart. Amen.*

**Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as *do* also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? 1 Corinthians 9:5**

In this verse, Paul continues to show that he bears the rights of an apostle, whether he exercised those rights or not. His question, which is composed of several parts, is rhetorical in nature. In essence, it is a strong affirmation, not a perplexed question needing validation. In this verse, much interpretive abuse has taken place over the

centuries because of the policies of the Roman Catholic Church and the mishandling of concepts by early sects and individuals.

Paul begins with, "Do we have no right to take along a believing wife?" In this, the clear and obvious interpretation is that he is speaking of an actual wife. However, because of those who forbid the clergy to marry (and other confused thoughts), they interpret this not as a "wife" but as merely a sister in the Lord who would accompany an apostle. This however only brings in even greater difficulties and is certainly not the intent of the verse. Rather it is speaking of a right known among the Christians of that time. That right is that the apostles who were married could be accompanied by their wives and both the apostle and the wife were to be supported by the church.

This is the intent of "as *do* also the other apostles." Those apostles who were married were accompanied by their wives during their apostolic travels and they were supported by the church. Therefore, Paul's rhetorical question is, "Don't we have this right as well?" In response, a "Yes" answer must be given whether he were to accept the right or not. The "we" is speaking of Barnabas who accompanied Paul (who will be mentioned in the next verse). They were also entitled to this right.

The question next includes "the brothers of the Lord." Accepting this portion of the verse at face value has caused a great deal of apoplexy among many over the centuries. The cult of "Mary" worship and the nutty ideas that she is a "perpetual virgin" has led to unreasonable interpretations of these words. The word translated as "brothers" could be referring to children of Joseph and Mary, but it could also refer to children of Joseph from a former marriage, or even more distant relatives of the Lord.

Of course, those who heretically worship Mary will inevitably claim that one of the latter two was correct and that Mary never had relations with Joseph. Such biblical interpretations are inexcusably forced and unnatural. These were sons of Joseph and Mary, born after the birth of Christ Jesus as the Bible indicates elsewhere. They, like the other apostles, were entitled to this right and privilege as well.

And finally, a separate distinction is made for Peter - "and Cephas." This spirit-inspired wording was certainly intended to keep the church from heresy concerning leadership. The leader of a body is entitled to be married and is entitled to have the wife supported by the church. Despite the clarity here, the Roman Catholic Church, claiming that the Pope is directly linked to Peter, does not allow their Pope to be married; something completely contrary to the very model given in the person they claim as their first "pope."

Not only does this verse show that Peter was married, but other such indications are given in Scripture. In Matthew 8:14, 15 this is noted -

"Now when Jesus had come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them."

It would be rather nutty to acquire a mother-in-law and not a wife. A clear interpretation of this verse is that Paul had the rights of an apostle to be married and to bring his wife along at the expense of the church; that Jesus had half-brothers who were the sons of Joseph and Mary; and that Peter took a wife when he took a mother-in-law.

From these points we can deduce that:

- 1) it is right and acceptable that the clergy of the church may marry and that the wife should be supported by the church. Further, the ideology of a church which forbids such marriage is contrary to Scripture.
- 2) When the church clergy travels for church business, including missionary work, the wife should be supported by the church, thus keeping the clergy member from possible temptations during that period of absence and for the general well-being of the husband and his wife.
- 3) There is no obligation of a clergy member to be married, but there is also no tenet which would forbid them from marrying.

Life application: When evaluating the Bible, keeping one's thoughts free from presuppositions is always the right approach. If one comes to the text already supposing something is the case, then he will manipulate what is being read in order to fit what is already believed. This is not sound interpretation and it can only lead to great problems in doctrine.

*Many blessings You have upon us showered  
Kindness beyond measure You have poured up us  
Delicious food, clouds of white, and radiant fields which have flowered  
But none of these compare to our Lord Jesus*

*You send us rain in due time to soften up the earth  
And beauty adorns the mountains which stand before us  
Our hearts are filled with joy, gladness, and mirth  
But nothing compares to the delight of knowing Jesus*

*What kind of love! How You care for Your children!  
What kind of love You have lavished upon us!  
Indeed, You have been so good to the sons of men!  
By sending us Your greatest Gift, our Lord Jesus!*

*Glorious God Almighty! Of all the wonders and the joys You have given to us in order to delight our senses, fill our minds with wonder, and make us hope for even more as each day unfolds, above all this You have given us the most marvelous Gift of all by granting us a personal glimpse of Your heart and Your love reflected in the face of our wondrous Lord, Your Son, Jesus. Thank You for Jesus! Amen.*

**Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?**

1 Corinthians 9:6

This verse is not actually a new thought which is submitted to the Corinthians, but the completion of the series of questions which began in verse 4. Though stated as questions, they are rhetorical in nature and are to be taken as affirmative statements... "I and Barnabas have a right to earn a living from our preaching." By asking it rhetorically after having given the evidences of his apostleship though, he is merely showing the ridiculous nature of the situation.

There was seemingly, however, a group that felt that Paul and his ministry wasn't actually worthy of being supported by the church. It probably goes to the decision rendered in Galatians 2:9, 10 which reads thus -

"James, Cephas, and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along."

Maybe it was believed that because Paul was "only" sent to the Gentiles, he wasn't worthy of support. However, as history has borne out, his ministry and letters have been far more productive in establishing the church than all the other letters combined. His words have comprised the main doctrine of the church for nearly 2000 years. Despite this, and despite the true apostolic ministry that he had, he continued to support himself and work for a living.

It is known from Acts 18:13 that he was a tentmaker by trade. In this, he worked to support himself. The Greek word for "working" is *ergazesthai* and it indicates manual labor. Despite his tireless efforts in sharing the gospel, he was a man of physical labors as well.

One final note on this verse is that this is the last time Barnabas is mentioned in Scripture. The previous mentioning of him was in Acts 15. In that account, Paul and Barnabas had a great dispute about a matter which caused them to almost come to blows. They divided at that time, and there is no record of them having met up again. However, it appears from this verse that Barnabas took Paul's example of working for a living to heart and continued to follow this pattern in his own ministry.

Life application: There is nothing wrong with good hard work. In fact, the pastor who gets out and tends to the church grounds, works around his house, or works physically in some other way will be a positive example to those in the church to not sit around collecting welfare or other charity when they are fully capable of earning their own way. The Bible says in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." In this verse, the same word for work, *ergazesthai*, is used which was used by Paul 1 Corinthians 9:6. Don't be a sluggard. Rather, if your physical makeup and the economy around you allows it, be productive with your hands, not causing others to support you when you are fully capable of earning a living.

*Lord God, thank You for the work of my hands which You have given me to do. There are things to fix and clean around the house. There are lawns to be mowed, trees to be trimmed, and cars to be washed and waxed. And at my regular job, there is always something I can do to be productive. None of these things are demeaning or lowly, but rather they are worthy of my best effort and my sincere, heartfelt attendance to them. And so, Lord, establish the work of my hands and be glorified in how I follow through with each task. Amen.*

**Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?**

1 Corinthians 9:7

Paul now continues with three more questions which are rhetorical in nature. Each demands a response of "Nobody!" He begins with warriors. "Whoever goes to war at his own expense?" Do those who fight the battles for king and country do so at their own expense? No. Instead, they are fed, clothed, and paid by whoever they are fighting for. Even those who are mercenaries fight for pay by the power who has hired them.

If a soldier who is enlisted to take life is so paid for his service, how much more then should a soldier who is sent out to preserve life be paid for the warfare he wages. And Paul equates the ministry of Christ to an on-going battle. In Ephesians 6, he notes that-

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand"

-Ephesians 6:12, 13

Likewise, in 1 Timothy 1:18, he notes this to his beloved protégé - "This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare." The lesson from this is that the soldier of Christ should, in fact, be paid for his services by the church for whom he wages war.

Next he asks, "Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit?" Again, the question demands an answer that the vinedresser does partake of the fruit of the vine. It is right and expected that he should do so. In the very first such example of the planting of a vineyard in the Bible, this is noted -

"And Noah began *to be* a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. Then he drank of the wine and was drunk..." Genesis 9:20

Noah not only planted a vineyard, he also enjoyed the benefit of what the vineyard produced. Regardless of whether one finds fault in him getting drunk, the fact is that he partook of his vineyard. Later, in the Law itself and certainly the verse to which Paul is speaking, Moses notes these points to the people of Israel prior to their entry into the land of Canaan -

"Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying: 'What man *is there* who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it. Also what man *is there* who has planted a vineyard and has not eaten of it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it. And what man *is there* who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.'"

-Deuteronomy 20:5-7

Again, as he did concerning the warrior, Paul equates those who labor for Christ as "farmers." In 2 Timothy 2:6, he shows that the expectation is that the spiritual farmer should be allowed to participate in the benefits of the harvest in which he labors, when he says, "The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops." The lesson from this is that the one who works in Christ's field should be paid for his services by the church for whom he farms.

In his third question, he asks about the flocks of the field - "Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?" Again, the answer is that those who do so certainly partake of their efforts. Under the law, the tithe of the flocks and herds were taken to where the temple stood and they were eaten by the giver after they were sacrificed. This is found in Deuteronomy chapter 12 –

"There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you." Deuteronomy 12:6, 7

As before, the work of those in the leadership positions in the church is equated to that of the shepherd. In Acts 20:28, Paul states this to the leaders in Ephesus -

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

Peter uses the shepherd terminology again in 1 Peter 5:2. Thus, the lesson from this is that the one who tends to Christ's flock should be paid for his services by the church for whom he shepherds. From these three examples, Paul clearly defends the principle that it is not out of the ordinary for the one in leadership to expect to receive the benefit of his labors directly from the church.

Life application: In today's world, it is common for pastors and other clergy to be paid for their services. This is right and appropriate. However, it was never intended for people in such positions to be paid extravagant amounts. Those who have jet planes, million-dollar mansions, and flashy clothing and jewelry make a mockery of the humble, hard-working lives of the apostles who established the church. If your pastor lives a life of flash and pomp, you should find another pastor in a more Bible-centered church.

*O God, the Father of those who have by faith called on Christ as Lord, thank You for the wondrous hope of the future which You have granted to us. In this life, there are great days, good times, and moments of true elation. But there are also crummy days, times when nothing goes right, and moments of previously unimagined sadness. One day can be completely the opposite of the next. And yet, when things go south and life is dim, we have the assurance that the very best days we've had are not even a taste of a regular day when we are brought into Your presence. With this assurance, we can get through the tough times. Someday, we will see Jesus! Amen!*

**Do I say these things as a *mere* man? Or does not the law say the same also?**

1 Corinthians 9:8

After defending his apostleship, Paul has been asking rhetorical questions to bolster his rights as an apostle. He is entitled to partake of the benefits of being an apostle whether he exercises those rights or not. It can be inferred that because he didn't exercise them, others were using it as evidence that he really wasn't an apostle.

Because of his apostleship to the gentiles, there was certainly a dislike of his status among those who argued that the gospel was for the Jews, or at least for those who held to the law of Moses. That issue was resolved at the Council of Jerusalem, but it didn't change the hearts and minds of those in the legalistic faction of Judaizers. In fact, it hasn't changed them today, 2000 years later. Regardless of this, Paul's apostleship was valid and he was entitled to the rights and benefits of it.

In order to bolster this, especially in the eyes of those who held to Scripture (meaning what is now called the Old Testament), he will appeal to Scripture itself. He uses this particular formula abundantly in his letters. Instead of relying merely on human reasoning, Scripture will support his claims. In this verse, he uses two separate words to intensify what he is relaying. In his comment "do I say," the verb is *lalo*. In the comment "does not the law say" the verb is *legei*. The first word, *lalo*, is a general word; as a mere man. The second word, *legei*, is a more distinguished word; from Scripture itself.

Life application: Paul's argument from human reason is bolstered and intensified when it is combined with the very words of Scripture. This is an extremely useful point to consider and remember. Defending the faith from science and philosophy is a wonderful way to get people to consider the workings of God. However, only Scripture can specifically bring a person to salvation. One who relies on Scripture first for their worldview will always have a better understanding of the issues which surround us, be

they morality, Zionism, the nature of God, or a plethora of other things that swirl around us from day to day.

*Lord, there are many ways to look at a given issue, be it morality, prosperity, health, Zionism, the nature of creation, or even the nature of You who created. Because these things can be argued in different ways, I will always first consider them from the perspective of Your word. I know that in doing this, I will have the superior source from which to make my decisions about those issues, regardless of how they may appear in the world around me. I trust Your word above all else to be my light, my guide, and my source of understanding those issues which are addressed by You. Thank You for Your superior word! Amen.*

**For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? 1 Corinthians 9:9**

In his words of 1 Corinthians 9:9, Paul uses a common rabbinical technique known as *kal va-khomer* (from light to heavy) to argue his case. It is an argument as Chabad describes "whereby a conclusion is drawn from a minor premise or more lenient condition ("light") to a major or stricter one ("weighty") or vice versa, a fortiori argument. In common parlance, 'all the more so.'"

He has, for the past several verses, been arguing for the case that he bears all the rights of an apostle. In order to bolster that argument in a way which the "Judaizes" could not honestly refute, he turns to the very source of their claims for their laws, traditions, and heritage - the Law of Moses. There, within the law are written the words, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." This is stated in Deuteronomy 25:4.

The idea is that to muzzle an ox, who is participating in the labors of treading out the grain in order to separate the grain from the chaff, would show a disrespect for the laborer, even if it were a mere ox. Muzzling involved tying its mouth closed in one way or another or even placing a basket over its mouth so that it couldn't eat the grain, thus depriving it of the food that was in its eyesight. It showed a coldness of heart towards the brute beast that was unacceptable in the eyes of God.

Paul then asks, "Is it oxen God is concerned about?" The answer is two-fold. First, "Yes, God cares about the oxen or he wouldn't have placed the admonition in the law in the first place." For this to be prescribed showed that God did, in fact, care for the oxen. He showed the same care for the animals of Nineveh when speaking to Jonah. At the very end of the book, these final words are noted -

"You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?" Jonah 4:10, 11

However, in making his *kal va-khomer*, or "light to heavy" argument, Paul shows that though God did care for the ox, he displays more care for man, His highest creature. This is with all certainty (though Paul doesn't explain it here) because bordering the curious verse about muzzling the ox are examples of care for His people. Deuteronomy 25:1-3 deals with the punishment of an offender of the law and the mercy he was to be given. No more than 40 lashes could be meted out lest, "he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight."

And then after the note about the ox comes more verses which concern the care of His people. Specifically, the rights of, and care for, the widow of a dead man. The principle of the ox then, even within the law itself, implies something of greater weight than the mere words initially seem to entail. God is showing care for the ox and yet, the implication is of greater care for His people.

The verse is of such importance to understanding the greater principle intended by the law that Paul repeats it in his first letter to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:18.

Life application: The Law of Moses, though set aside in Christ, contains valuable insights into God's relationship with, and desires for, His creatures. Because the Old Testament is so heavily cited in the New Testament, it is not truly possible to grasp the depth of New Testament revelation without understanding that of the Old. Don't be afraid to dig into the Old Testament... it won't bite you, but rather it will edify your understanding of God's redemptive plans for humanity.

*Precious Lord! I am thrilled beyond measure to wake up in the morning and know that You are there. As the day unfolds, I can see Your hand of grace, leading me to beauty that surrounds me - rainbows and puffy white clouds are there if I will just lift my eyes and look. The food I eat... I will not take it for granted, but will remember to thank You for it. So many others lack the abundance I possess. Lord, thank You for Your attentive hand of care for me. And should it all disappear tomorrow, I will thank You for my lack, knowing that it was ordained by You. You are great and are always worthy of praise. Amen.*

**Or does He say *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. 1 Corinthians 9:10**

This verse refers to the previous verse. Taken together, they read -

"Do I say these things as a *mere* man? Or does not the law say the same also? <sup>9</sup> For it is written in the law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.' Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope."

Paul's question concerning the words of Deuteronomy 25:4 is whether God intended to mean an ox, or was He rather making a spiritual picture of a *fortiori* argument. Is it "altogether for our sakes?" The answer immediately follows - "For our sakes, no doubt." The context of the verse, which is in the middle of other passages dealing with human matters, indicates that it was actually referring to a human matter as well. However, this does not exclude a literal meaning also. The word translated as "altogether" is *pantos*. Albert Barnes, after reviewing the nine uses of *pantos* in the New Testament concludes -

"The word here, therefore, means that the 'principle' stated in the law about the oxen was so broad and humane, that it might "certainly, surely, particularly" be regarded as applicable to the case under consideration."

And this is exactly what one should deduce when reading the law in Deuteronomy. The logical thought process should be something like: "God has said to not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. The law is intended for us to understand and consider God's heart for us. If God is concerned about a mere ox as it labors, then how much more is He concerned about us! If I have employees under me who labor for me, I should give greater care to them than the law requires me to give to my brute beast." The man "who plows should plow in hope." The laborer shouldn't come home hungry after his day of work if he has been laboring in the processing of food all day. That would be an abuse of the bounty given to the one who hired the laborer. Likewise, "he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope." There are various ways to thresh grain depending on the type of grain. Isaiah explains this to us -

"For the black cummin is not threshed with a threshing sledge,  
Nor is a cartwheel rolled over the cummin;  
But the black cummin is beaten out with a stick,

And the cummin with a rod.  
Bread *flour* must be ground;  
Therefore he does not thresh it forever,  
Break *it with* his cartwheel,  
Or crush it *with* his horsemen.  
This also comes from the LORD of hosts,  
*Who* is wonderful in counsel *and* excellent in guidance." Isaiah 28:27-29

If an ox is not to be muzzled while it treads out the grain, then it logically follows that someone who beats out grain with a stick should also not be kept from partaking as he threshes. Therefore, the principle found in the law is God's way of protecting His creatures and keeping the hearts of His people from hardening towards His laborers. It is an ingeniously placed passage in Deuteronomy which points to much more than it at first appears.

From this springboard, Paul will move from grains to the gospel.

Life application: The word given to us by God spans thousands of years of human existence and yet it coalesces into one whole, united, and understandable work of literature. The reason this is so is because God is the ultimate Author of its words. He carefully, methodically, and slowly revealed His heart to us through His word in order to show us our great need for Jesus. As you read the pages of the Bible, never stop looking for spiritual applications and pictures of Christ. You will be abundantly rewarded as you do.

*O Lord, my heart often gets beating rather quickly as I read Your word. A sudden insight into something I'd never before considered will fill me with a sense of awe at how I missed that in the past. Reading a psalm will often elevate my soul to a higher place where my hope in You becomes surer than only a moment earlier. When I contemplate the words You spoke to and through Your prophets, I see history itself unfold. I stand ever in awe of the beauty revealed in Your superior word. Thank You for this immeasurable gift! Amen.*

**If we have sown spiritual things for you, *is it* a great thing if we reap your material things?** 1 Corinthians 9:11

Paul has been showing through the use of Deuteronomy 25:4 that the ox which treaded out the grain is actually making a greater statement about the labors of people. If an oxen isn't to be kept from eating the grain he treads, then how much more should the

human laborer be provided for through his efforts! He now transfers this thought directly to his apostleship, which he defended several verses ago as one shown to be valid and which actually was the means of transmitting the gospel to those in Corinth.

Because their coming to Christ came about through his efforts, then wasn't he entitled to be provided for through those efforts? In this reasoning, he states it from the greater to the lesser; from the spiritual to the material. This then is the opposite of the previous argument -

- From the ox (lesser) to the human (greater).
- From the spiritual (greater) to the material (lesser).

His words are "If we have sown spiritual things for you..." The "if" is to be taken as a statement of fact - "We have (definitely) sown spiritual things for you" (as he demonstrated earlier). Because of this, "*is it a great thing if we reap your material things?*" The question demands an answer that it is no great thing, but rather what would be expected. The ox was entitled, according to the law, to eat as he threshed. The context of the surrounding passage (and Paul's words of analysis concerning it) show that this naturally leads to the same entitlement for man in his labors. Therefore, it is no great thing to consider that those who minister in spiritual things should in fact reap in material things.

In both clauses, the "we" is emphatic, only bolstering the intent of his words, and the use of the word "great" involves a hint of sarcasm. He is showing very clearly that his apostleship is one which has been both helpful to them and deserving of their help to him in return. Despite this, Paul declined to accept such help from them. This will be seen as the chapter continues and the reason for it will be explained.

Life application: Paul says in Galatians 6:6, "Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches." There is good reason for this. The one who teaches spiritually is providing the most valuable of all benefits to those he teaches (assuming the word is being properly handled and rightly divided). Is it then too much to return to the teacher something of benefit for his material profit?

*Let him who is taught the word share  
In all good things with him who teaches  
For in that precious word, and only there  
Is found the true path to which heaven reaches*

*The one who so instructs has the most important duty  
And the one who is instructed should so avow  
With gifts and offerings, a thankful booty  
For spiritual instruction of the Who, the what, the how*

*For in learning the word, we learn of Jesus  
And in Him is found the true and only heavenly path  
It is His cross which has delivered us  
From condemnation and God's holy wrath*

*Lord, I thank You for the many great men who have instructed me in my spiritual walk. Some have passed long ago and only their writings remain. Some I've met from afar, through the television or radio. And some have come into my life by Your gracious hand so that I have personally met them and learned from them. For each of these people I am grateful to You. Thank You for those who have carefully and rightly divided Your word in order to instruct me about Jesus. Amen.*

**If others are partakers of *this* right over you, *are* we not even more?  
Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the  
gospel of Christ. 1 Corinthians 9:12**

After all the previous verses of chapter 9, Paul will begin to explain why he chose not to exercise his apostolic rights. Before he does though, he makes an obvious statement -

"If others are partakers of *this* right over you, *are* we not even more?"

He has spent seven verses showing how the rights of the one who labors include their entitlement to being supported by those they labor for. As this is a right which goes all the way back to the Law of Moses and which included brute beasts, it should be considered a universal axiom.

As it is, and because the other apostles used this right when visiting Corinth, weren't Paul and Barnabas even more entitled to using it? It was they who originally came and shared the gospel with them! In fact, Paul said to them that "you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord" (verse 3). Because of this undeniable fact, he was certainly entitled to the right of payment for his labors.

And yet, despite this certainty, Paul continues with "Nevertheless we have not used this right." This shows that Paul had an agenda other than profiting off of those in Corinth. If

sharing the gospel was his passion and his life's main purpose, and yet he didn't earn his keep from it, then it showed a sincerity of heart that others should have recognized. If a person played major league baseball for nothing more than food money and a place to sleep, it would show a true love for the game. But when there are millions of dollars up for grabs, one can never really tell if the players are on the field for love of money or love of the game.

The same is true with televangelists. Just because someone has great oratory skills, doesn't mean that their love for Christ is sincere. Knowing that there are literally millions of dollars available to those who preach the gospel, along with fame, power over others, and Lear jets waiting in the hangar, one can't really be certain that Christ is the purpose for the preaching. Paul desired to avoid any such pitfall in the minds of those he ministered to. Instead, he notes that they "endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ."

He was willing to go to great lengths and through any trials to share the gospel, even without exercising his rights as an apostle. The word translated "endure" is the Greek word *stegomen*. It means to cover closely (so as to keep water out). In essence, "to contain without leaking." The external pressures on a ship as it passes through heavy seas is immense. Such a test of the ship will show its true colors. If it survives such a beating, it is a worthy vessel to trust one's life with. Paul was showing to them that the message he preached was a worthy message; one in which another could trust with their eternal soul. There was nothing which could harm their fate, and Paul's willingness to suffer externally without cost or benefit was a demonstration of this.

The word for "hinder" is the Greek word *enkopēn*. It is only used here in the New Testament and it basically means an "incision" or a "cutting into." Hence Paul gives the idea of an impediment on a path which would interfere with following that path. If he were to come and lollygag around, eating food, schmoozing with the church, and expecting special treatment, those in the church could easily question his motives concerning the sharing of the gospel.

He wanted no such thing to occur, and so he worked diligently and without charge to share the wondrous message which had been entrusted to him.

Life application: About the secrets hidden inside each of us the Bible says -

"The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*,  
And desperately wicked;  
Who can know it?" Jeremiah 17:9

Only the Lord can truly search out the heart of man. But our eyes should be used to evaluate those around us, particularly those in positions of power or leadership. It is a foolish thing to implicitly trust someone who acts in one way while speaking in another. If a leader were to spend all of his time on the golf course while telling others about the importance of work, it would show a corruption of the heart which was obvious.

Likewise, if that leader's wife were to tell those around her to only eat certain foods she deemed healthy and yet she was often seen eating foods which weren't on that list, it would show the corrupt and twisted thinking of a person who merely wanted control over others. In such cases, evaluating the actions would show the heart of the person. Let us reasonably evaluate our leaders, both in the church and elsewhere, and not blindly follow them because they have fine speaking abilities or some other highly noticeable trait.

*Lord, help me to be discerning in how I evaluate others. Help me not to be overly judgmental, but at the same time, give me the wisdom to not blindly follow those in leadership positions. Help me especially in the church to properly and wisely evaluate leaders and to not get caught up in idolizing them or their great abilities. I know if that were to happen, I would blindly trust them, even if their message wasn't sound. Grant me such discernment so that I will follow Your word above all else. Amen.*

**Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat *of the things* of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of *the offerings* of the altar?**

1 Corinthians 9:13

From verse 4 until verse 12, Paul meticulously demonstrated that those who labor should receive compensation for their labors. Then in verse 12, he switched his comments to note that "we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ." He has moved from general labor to the specific labor, meaning work for Christ. Now in verse 13, he shows that those who labored for the Lord in the Old Testament received compensation for their efforts.

This move is to further bolster his previous comments about the rights of an apostle and how they should be entitled to support from the ministry. And so, he again reaches back to the mandates of the Old Testament law. One of the twelve tribes, Levi, was set apart

for ministering to the people. Within this tribe one group, the sons of Aaron, were called to the priesthood. In return for these mandated services, they were supported through the sacrifices and offerings of the people of Israel.

The first portion of his question deals with the Levites - "Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of *the things* of the temple?" Whether they knew this or not before Paul asked them, they knew it to be true now. The question is a rhetorical one and indicates that they do in fact eat those things. Likewise, he asks if they also knew that "those who serve at the altar partake of *the offerings* of the altar." This portion concerns the priests of Israel who, in fact, partook of those things.

There are numerous verses in the Old Testament law which so provided for the Levites and priests. Every third year, the Levites received the tithes of the people as a portion of their wages. From this a tithe went to the priests. When animal or grain sacrifices and offerings were brought to the temple, depending on the type presented, a portion may have been taken and given to them for their sustenance. When an animal was so sacrificed, the law even provided that the skins of the animal were to be given to the priests as payment. These could be sold for clothing, tents, parchments, etc. (This is found in Leviticus 7:8).

In all, the answer to Paul's question is that those who so minister and those who so serve do in fact benefit directly from their work. Using this line of reasoning from the Mosaic Law, he will next show that the Lord Himself directed something similar for those who share in the gospel.

Life application: Paul's words, though seeming to flip back and forth, actually form a well thought out progression. In following how he presents an argument and then defends it; we can learn also how to defend the tenets of the faith. There is nothing wrong with using Old Testament concepts for such a defense if those concepts carry through logically to the New Testament. However, we must be careful to not arbitrarily apply or claim verses from the Old Testament which actually have no relevance to a New Testament concept. Care then needs to be taken in how one approaches concepts and prescriptions found in the Old Testament.

*As the years pass by we grow in knowledge  
We change from children into young adults  
We move through school years and may head off to college  
And we learn in life from mistakes and from faults*

*Eventually though we to a certain point age  
Where we start to lose some of the things we once knew  
Our memories fade, whether a professor or a sage  
And sooner or later our time here on earth is through*

*But You, O God, are from everlasting to everlasting  
In You is a sure hope to have life anew  
And so, to You our eyes and our hopes we are a'casting  
For the wondrous resurrection and eternal days with You*

*Yes Lord God, our days on earth are few and full of trials and difficulties, but You have given an eternal hope to those who have called on Jesus. Help us to remember this in the times when things seem hopeless, toilsome, or painful and remind us that these afflictions are just temporary and passing away. Thank You for our sure and grounded hope in Jesus our Lord! Amen.*

**In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. 1 Corinthians 9:14**

Paul has made a logical and orderly defense concerning the rights of those who minister to others in spiritual matters. He even reached back to the law both from a spiritual application and concerning those who "serve in the temple" and "those who serve at the altar." In a final and unambiguous defense, he notes that the Lord Himself "has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel."

Although the gospel which was preached during the Lord's earthly ministry lacked a knowledge of the "church age" for both those He commissioned to teach it as well as those who heard it, it was still a preaching of the gospel. Though the disciples at that time expected the gospel to be immediately realized as one of an earthly kingdom, something He corrected them on in Acts 1:6-8, it was nonetheless the gospel proclamation. At that time, he gave these instructions to the twelve apostles -

"Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup> Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. <sup>7</sup> As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' <sup>8</sup> Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give."

<sup>9</sup> "Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts— <sup>10</sup> no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. <sup>11</sup> Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. <sup>12</sup> As you enter the home, give it your greeting. <sup>13</sup> If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you." Matthew 10:5-13

His words "the worker is worth his keep" indicates that these men were to be cared for during their travels as they carried this good news to the people of Israel. Based on this, along with all of his other supporting thoughts, it was clearly evident that Paul (and all who preach the gospel) are to be given the same support as they minister to others.

Paul's reference to "the Lord has commanded" implies that the words were already being circulated among believers. In other words, there were probably copies of these words from Matthew already out among the people. If not, then he would have most likely said something like "as Peter informed me, the Lord has commanded." The fact that he left the source out of his letter implies that the gospel narrative was already known to those in Corinth. It is an attestation of a very early date for the writing of the gospel record.

Finally for this verse, Paul notes that preachers "should receive their living from the gospel." In essence, he is equating the "gospel" with the "altar" of his previous thoughts. The work of the temple only prefigured the greater work of Christ. Thus, we see in Hebrews these words -

"We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. <sup>11</sup> The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. <sup>12</sup> And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. <sup>13</sup> Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. <sup>14</sup> For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come."

-Hebrews 13:10-14

Life application: Remember as you go to your respective place of worship, that your pastor is entitled to certain benefits and honors. If faithful in his proclamation of the gospel, which includes the whole counsel of God, then don't be timid to do something special for him from time to time. In many ways, serving as a pastor can be a brutal job. People get angry and leave for petty reasons and this will cut the metal of the toughest

man eventually. So let him know you support him as long as he continues to present the Bible in a careful and God-honoring way.

*Thank You Lord for another morning in Your presence. Today I will do my best to fix my eyes on You; to fix my thoughts on You; and to meditate on Your word as I go about my business. Please guide my every step, be with me in the decisions I make, and help me to remember to be good, kind, and courteous to others as the day unfolds. Help me Lord, to be the example of grace and goodness that You would desire of me. This is my prayer and this is my petition for the day ahead. Amen.*

**But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it *would be* better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.** 1 Corinthians 9:15

For the past 14 verses, Paul has clearly and methodically defended his apostleship and then his right to compensation for the conducting of the duties of that office. This right was one granted even by the Lord Himself. However, he now introduces a new direction concerning this by stating "but." In contradistinction to what he has clearly laid out, he says "I have used none of these things." This is not in defiance of the Lord, but in support of the cause of the Lord's church.

All of the rights and privileges that should be associated with the exercise of his office have been turned down by him. He will explain this directly in this verse and for the next three verses, and then he will divide that explanation into two separate reasons -

- His serving of men to impress upon them the gospel of Christ (verses 19-23).
- His desire to run the race and receive the prize set before him (verses 24-27).

In order to lay the foundation for those things, he continues with his thoughts by saying, "nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me." In other words, it is as if he were saying, "Though I am entitled to these benefits and as of yet have not received them, this letter is not to get you to recognize this and correct it." Instead, his words are twofold. First, that they recognize his apostleship as valid (which he has done). Secondly, to understand why he has not accepted the rights that go along with the position and why he will continue to not accept those privileges.

And to show the absolute determination concerning his resolve in this matter, he finishes the verse with, "for it *would be* better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void." To him, the impartation of the gospel was the most important

aspect of his life. He had been called out of darkness and into light directly by the Lord. He had received the highest measure of God's grace and he felt that to accept payment for such a wondrous gift would be worse than death. And if his life was sharing the gospel, then death would mean he could no longer share the gospel, something he earnestly desired to do. It is the strongest assertion possible that his motives were focused only on the sharing of what he had been bestowed.

Life application: People do certain things because they love to do them. We will pay large amounts of money to go mountain skiing, adventuring in the African safari, or go on an ocean cruise. Who would expect to be paid for doing such things? Paul's passion was sharing the gospel and so he was willing to share it without payment. And each person who truly loves Christ should likewise feel the desire and hunger to help in some way in this endeavor. Local missionary work, helping keep up the church, or even just carrying around tracts to hand out after dinner at a restaurant are ways to spread the message. What value is Christ to you? Are you showing it to others in self-sacrificing ways?

*Lord God, I know that I could never do enough to merit the great grace which has been bestowed upon me through the work of Jesus. And yet, I have to admit that I fail daily to even try. I pass by people who don't know about Him and don't take the time to share the good news. I rush out of church without thinking that maybe I could help with some small task. I spend a lot of time watching TV or silly videos, but I don't pursue You by reading Your word. Help me to change this attitude in my life and to draw closer to You while imparting my love for You to others. Amen.*

**For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! 1 Corinthians 9:16**

In his previous words, Paul tied the very continuance of his life in with the preaching of the gospel. He does this elsewhere as well. In Philippians 1, he wrote that there were two paths ahead of him. One was to depart and be with Christ (meaning he would die) and the second was that he would remain and continue preaching the gospel and teaching those he was a minister to. Here are his words -

"I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh *is* more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again." Philippians 1:23-26

If his life was literally tied to the performance of his gospel preaching, then how could he boast in preaching? One cannot boast in taking breaths, one cannot boast in the beating of the heart, and one cannot boast in the need to eat food. These are necessary things for the continuance of the person. Likewise, Paul could not boast in the preaching of the gospel. It was to him simply a necessity. Jeremiah felt the same burden -

"Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him,  
Nor speak anymore in His name.'  
But *His word* was in my heart like a burning fire  
Shut up in my bones;  
I was weary of holding *it* back,  
And I could not." Jeremiah 20:9

Jeremiah could not hold back what he was impelled to do without dying. If he were to hold back from food, he would die. Likewise, if he held back from speaking out the word of the Lord, his end would come. This is what Paul felt as well. As he says, "for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" As this was so, then how could he boast in his efforts in the gospel, the very thing that sustained his life? Rather, he had a boast in the gospel itself, not in his conveyance of it. In Galatians, he explicitly states this -

"But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Galatians 6:14

Life application: If you have been called by Christ, then you have a calling in Christ. The question is, have you allowed that calling to take root? A plant can only survive if it receives the nourishment it derives through its roots. And even if it survives, the amount it flourishes is derived externally as well - soil, water, sun, pruning, etc, all determine the health of the plant. Are you using your external sources properly - the Bible, prayer, fellowship, etc.? Determine today to let nothing hinder you in developing your calling in Christ.

*Heavenly Father, I know that a plant cannot be sustained unless it is fed through its roots. I also know that it can only flourish and thrive in good soil, the right amount of sun and water, and with proper pruning. As I know this by simply observing how the plant responds, then isn't this a truth that applies to me as well? How can I thrive in my walk with You unless I drink from Your word, commune with You in prayer, and fellowship with others who can build me up? I know it cannot happen without these things, so please keep me in the good field which provides these things. Amen.*

**For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. 1 Corinthians 9:17**

In his previous comment, Paul said, "I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" Therefore, this verse now follows logically from that thought. If necessity is laid upon him (meaning if he was compelled by a force he could not contain), then no reward should be expected. As he says, "For if I do this willingly, I have a reward."

Suppose he wasn't compelled to preach, but rather did it of his own free will. In such a case, he could expect a reward. When he showed up in a town such as Corinth, whatever pay they offered would be this reward and it would be his just due. However, this isn't the case with him and so he enters the word "but." This portion will explain the position he is actually in which is, "if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship."

Using a hypothetical (which is what applies to him) he shows that if one is under constraint to do something, they have been given a directive which is their obligation to fulfill. In this sense, he is likening himself to a bondservant (a term he specifically refers to himself as elsewhere). A bondservant is told what to do and he does it. No pay is expected for such services. Rather, the reward merely rests in pleasing the master of the house.

Like the bondservant, Paul's efforts in the gospel ministry were not for expected pay, but to fulfill an obligation that he was bound under. The reward is not from the work, but from the approval of the one who assigns the work. His approval and His reward is found in Christ, not in what he can gain from proclaiming Christ.

Life application: The more freedom one has realized in Christ, the more indebted to Christ the person must naturally feel. Paul's freedom from persecuting the church led him to an attitude of complete servitude to Christ. Some are freed from alcohol, some from drugs or murder or prostitution. Everyone will feel a different level of gratitude and willingness to return to the Lord a measure of appreciation. The question for each is, "How much do I feel I have gained in being saved by Christ?" The level of appreciation should be reflected in the level of willing return to the Lord without thought of receiving something for the effort put forth.

*Heavenly Father, the day You opened my eyes to Jesus, I realized the magnitude of the guilt I bore in Your presence. And with it, I realized the immense forgiveness I received through His death in my place. May the work I do for the cause of Christ be acceptable to You, but I know that no matter how much I put forth, it will never be even minutely close to the debt I have been forgiven. Please, never let me forget the significance of the cross, but to set my eyes, heart, and feet on the road of sharing this wondrous message, even if it means I give all in the process. He died for me; I will live for Him until I die! Amen.*

**What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.**

1 Corinthians 9:18

Paul noted already that "necessity" was laid upon him to preach the gospel and that he had no expectation of a reward of compensation from those he preached to. However, this doesn't mean there was no reward at all in his preaching, and so he asks, "What is my reward then?" There is always a reward for fulfilling one's duties.

If a person has a job and he fulfills his duties, he will receive wages for doing that job. However, if he is a slave, he won't receive any wages. Nevertheless, he has a reward. If he has a harsh master and he fails to work, the master may beat him. His reward then when doing his job is to simply not be beaten. If he has a kind master who would never beat him, he will still lose his reward if he fails to work. It will be whatever punishment the master decides upon. But being a kind and gentle master, when the slave does his job, the reward may be a smile, a thumbs up, or a thank you. Though none are required, they are a reward in and of themselves.

But there is also the reward of merely doing the job because it is a job that the slave loves. He loves his master, he loves the type of work he is doing, and he loves that it gets done. The satisfaction is in the doing. This is Paul's reward. As he says, "That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge." Because he had necessity laid upon him, he followed through with that which impelled him and he found satisfaction in that. Had he asked for or received any wages for his work, then it would mean he was being rewarded for something he *had* to do. In this, there would be a taking advantage of his rights in a way which he felt was inappropriate. Instead, he refused this right, as he says, "that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel."

Life application: If you are employed and have set wages and benefits which you regularly receive, then you are receiving what you agreed on when you took the job. If you are offered something from an outside contractor to "help" you make your mind up

about something which would affect the company you worked for, then you would be abusing your position within your company. Paul stood fast on the gospel. If he received something for his preaching, then others could claim that they had an influence on his doctrine, whether it was true or not. Others are always evaluating our actions and we are asked to be upright in our dealings with those we come in contact with. This is an expectation of the follower of Christ.

*Lord, there are principles which I believe - in my faith, in my morals, in my politics, and in other aspects of my life as well. They are what define me when others look at me. Help me to not be perceived as one who would compromise my principles, but to stand fast on them regardless of anything that challenges me in them. Above all, may this be true for my faith in Christ and in the teaching of Your word. Help me Lord to never compromise the doctrine which establishes me as Your servant. Amen.*

**For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 1 Corinthians 9:19**

The word "for" begins Paul's thought. It is then building upon his previous discussion. He said that he preached through "necessity," as one bound under a master and that his reward was solely in the preaching of the gospel. Hence, "for" shows an extra weightiness in what he will now say. "For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all."

Paul had no person that he was bound to. He was a Roman citizen and thus free within the Roman society. He was also liberated from the bondage of the law by Christ and had no person over him in Jerusalem. He was not accountable to the Sanhedrin or to the high priest. He had no boss over him. Instead, he made tents while working with his own hands. And he preached the gospel without recompense from those he preached it to. Thus, he was not bound to any person or group within the church. He was free from obligation to any and all humans as far as a society could consider a person.

And yet, despite his exceptional freedoms, he willingly made himself "a servant to all." The word translated as "servant" is *douloo* and is more appropriately to be rendered "slave" in this context - "I have enslaved myself to all." What would be the reason for such a choice? Why would this man, free from all constraints, decide to treat everyone around him as a master to whom he was indebted? His reason shows a beautifully pure desire for that which freed him on the road to Damascus - "that I might win the more."

The sole desire of Paul's life of work and toil was to bring others to Christ. His refusal to accept payment was because he was showing his status as one who is actually a slave to Jesus Christ. In this position, he was thus allowing himself to be considered a slave to any and all who *might* call on Him. It is the mark of a truly selfless individual who understood what it meant to be "in Christ" both for himself and those around him.

Life application: To what extent are you willing to spread the gospel? Are you willing to give up on sleep in order to get up early and prepare for the day's battle? Are you willing to forgo lunch if it means an opportunity to tell someone about your faith? Will you give up on payment for your efforts, or will you even be willing to spend money out of your own pocket to share your faith? What is Christ worth to you? At one time you were without Him, but someone took the time to lead you to Him. Now that right and privilege is yours. Don't squander it!

*Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help  
Whose hope is in the LORD his God  
Who made heaven and earth  
Even the beautiful earth where man does tread*

*Also, He made the rich and abundant sea  
And all that is in each of them as well  
He is the great and wondrous God of glory  
As the wisdom of His creation does tell*

*He is the God who keeps truth forever  
Who executes justice for the oppressed  
Who gives food to the hungry  
The LORD to weary souls He gives rest*

*Lord, who is it that can look up into the heavens and not see Your wisdom on display?  
Who is it that fails to see Your marvelous hand in the many creatures that walk the earth? Lord, who can deny the intricacy of how all the earth is balanced ever so perfectly so that even its wounds are healed and new life springs from them? Lord, open the eyes of such a person and show them that You are there, calling to them. Reveal Yourself and Your majesty by opening eyes that are blind. Amen.*

**...and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law;**

1 Corinthians 9:20

This verse begins to explain his previous verse where he said, "I have made myself a servant to all." He will defend this thought for three verses and give a summary in the fourth. As a "servant to all," he showed himself to the Jew as becoming as a Jew. He did this, as he says, "that I might win Jews." In Philippians 3:4, 5, he says this -

"If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews."

Paul was neither overly proud of his Israelite heritage, nor did he run from it. He held it in its proper place and to those around him, he lived as a Jew so that they could see there was no conflict between his national status and his faith in Christ. If through such a presentation of his life and heritage he could convince some that his Christian faith was the right, natural, and logical path for the Jew, then he was willing to use that approach.

But there was another aspect of him which he addresses in this verse. He goes on to say that "to those *who are* under the law" he became "as under the law." And again, he gives the same reason, "that I might win those *who are* under the law." Continuing on in Philippians 3:5, 6, he said –

"...concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."

Not only did he conduct himself in a way where he continued to live faithfully within his national heritage, but he did it as one who was obedient to the religious heritage of that national identity as well. There were many observant Jews in his time. They lived under the Law of Moses and followed the edicts of those placed above them.

Likewise, some of them lived within the strictest sects of the faith, as Pharisees or Sadducees. These people were those who were considered by others as the epitome of righteousness within the society at that time. Regardless of whether this was actually the case, because Paul originally came from them, he had the ability to demonstrate his obedience to the Law of Moses while at the same time showing that it in no way conflicted with his faith in Christ.

Unlike Peter who was actually unfaithful to the real principles of freedom in Christ while being observant as a Jew, Paul was able to work within both realms without showing any contradiction or hypocrisy between the two. And how could he do this? He gave up his freedoms in order to be a servant to all. This is exactly what his previous many verses were leading up to which concerned his true apostleship and the fact that though he deserved recompense for it, he didn't use that right. He was a man who meticulously fit his life into every category he could in order to win some to Christ.

Life application: In Paul's time, some Jews viewed themselves from a point of national identity. Others viewed themselves from a point of religious identity. This is still true today within the Jewish race. Should you have the chance to talk to a Jew, be he an observant Jew or a "national Jew" you can still show, directly from the Bible, that there is no conflict between their Jewish connection and the truth of Christianity. It can be extremely difficult to change their thoughts on this for many reasons, but it is possible. More than anything else, prayer and patience is needed. One cannot force Christianity onto another, but through the word of God, through a loving attitude, and through heartfelt prayer, it can come about.

*Heavenly Father, Your word is a word for all people. It is the message of hope and reconciliation for both Jew and Gentile, for men and women, for young and old, and for the smartest person or the one lacking any education at all. It is one that can touch any and all who are willing to set aside their pride and humble themselves before the One who came to grant peace and reconciliation between You and us, our Lord Jesus. Help me to tactfully and wisely handle this word so that those I meet along the way will see the glory of Jesus and call out to Him in faith. Amen.*

**...to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law;**  
1 Corinthians 9:21

Paul has been addressing his willingness to spread the gospel to all classes of people in all ways. In the previous verse, he addressed those who lived as national Jews as himself being a national Jew. He also addressed those who lived under the law (meaning those who lived as religious Jews) as himself living as if he were under the law. At the same time, he now addresses those who are "without law." This is a reference to the Gentile peoples, of whom he is the apostle.

In his apostleship to them, he lived "as without law." In other words, they are without the Law of Moses and he showed that they were acceptable to Christ in that fashion.

Paul notes that he so lived in that manner as well, through his words and through his writings. It is Christ which makes you acceptable to God, not adhering to the precepts of the law. However, he then qualifies his statement by saying in a parenthetical thought that though "not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ."

The law which he was under was God's law that reveals Christ. It is the understood law that man is infected with sin and that the only remedy to that problem is the cross of Jesus Christ. Christ is the embodiment of the law, having fulfilled it in our stead. When we place our trust in Him, we should have the desire to fulfill the law of conscience written on our hearts and be observant to the moral laws which are ingrained in us. Paul notes this in the early chapters of Romans. No one can be absolutely without law and be pleasing to God. Therefore, we are not without law toward God because we are under law toward Christ.

This "law" which he observed has now been revealed in the writings of the New Testament. Particularly in Paul's words which are doctrine for the church. When we follow these guidelines, we are emulating what Christ would have for us because they are the inspired words which have been given for this purpose.

Paul lived this life that he mentions so "that I might win those *who are* without law." Once they were won to Christ by him, they could be rightly instructed in the "law toward Christ." Faith through grace saves. However, salvation implies being obedient to the One who has saved us. We are not without law in this regard; we do not have license to sin. The teaching that being in Christ means we have complete license to act as we wish is known as the antinomian error and it is something that is warned against throughout his writings.

Life application: We are all slaves to something. If we are a slave to Christ, then we are free from sin's condemnation. However, we are not free from sin's consequences. If we live in sin after being saved by Christ, we will suffer the consequences of our sin. But we have been given freedom to live for Christ. Use that freedom wisely and live in a manner which will glorify our Lord.

*In Christ I am freed from sin's condemnation  
In Christ I have been saved through and through  
But in Christ I may still suffer tribulation  
This is something I should expect, I know it's true*

*How much more when I fail to properly heed*

*The words and directions He has given for my life!  
If I act against His words in tongue and in deed  
Should I expect anything but trouble and strife?  
Rather, I will keep my nose deep in His word  
And then apply its precepts to my walk each day  
In grateful obedience to my gracious Lord  
Yes, I will thankfully walk in His holy way*

*Yes Lord God, how can I expect to do my own thing and ignore Your word and yet be blessed by You? I will not be so presumptuous, but rather I will continue to meditate on Your word, cling to its precepts, and let them guide my walk to the very best of my ability. Be with me and strengthen me in this endeavor my Lord. And thank You in advance for hearing and responding! Amen.*

**...to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. 1 Corinthians 9:22**

So far, Paul has shown himself to be accommodating to others who viewed their faith differently than he did. He has identified himself as a servant to all, as a Jew, as one under the law, and as one without the law (meaning the Law of Moses, and thus implying a Gentile). He now, despite his vast knowledge of what it means to be a Christian, says that "to the weak I became as weak." This is certainly referring back to those he spoke of in 1 Corinthians 8. There he referred to believers lacking proper knowledge on certain issues.

An example of such a lack of knowledge might be eating pork. When someone didn't understand that eating pork was acceptable, he wouldn't have thrown it back in his face by having a pork-chop in front of him. Whatever the person's weakness, he would have made himself like them. He explained the need for this in that chapter with these words-

"And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? <sup>12</sup> But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

-1 Corinthians 8:11-13

He took his role as an apostle seriously and meant to never harm someone who viewed their position before the Lord differently. This included those weak in the faith. And the

reason for this was "that I might win the weak." To him, having the superior knowledge was of less immediate importance than demonstrating love to the one lacking knowledge. That person could later be properly instructed and also grow in his knowledge if he wasn't first chased away by Paul's actions.

And so, having described several different categories of people, he sums up his accommodations by saying, "I have become all things to all *men*." As long as it wasn't improper or harmful, Paul would work within the parameters he had been granted as an apostle in order to bring others to faith or to build others up in their faith. All of this was done with the noble cause "that I might by all means save some."

This final thought is tagged on to show that his adjustments were for a right and noble purpose, not to simply be a man-pleaser, something that he knew would lead very quickly to heresy. He even states this explicitly in Galatians 1 after speaking of exactly that scenario -

"For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ." Galatians 1:10

In all ways, Paul knew that the purity of the gospel was paramount, and yet within that purity there was room for accommodation. He always attempted to find that right and untainted balance as he walked through the life of his apostleship.

Life application: "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." These words of Paul should be remembered by those who have the greater knowledge. In exercising love while instructing in right doctrine, the immature Christian will be built up in his faith and in his heart as well.

*Heavenly Father, I look back on my early days as Your child and remember the passion I had - for You, for Your word, and for sharing the wondrous message of grace that I had received. Since then, I've grown in many ways, but has my passion in any of these areas cooled? Lord, search me out and ignite any flame which has died down. How much more should I love You now that You have carried me along life's path! How much more should I desire Your word, now that I have learned how to properly handle it! And how much more should I burn to share the gospel when I see how it has changed and shaped me! Return me to a longing desire to exalt You, O God! Amen.*

**Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.**

1 Corinthians 9:23

Summing up his thoughts of the previous four verses, we read Paul's reflection on why he became "all things to all *men*". He's already said that it was that he "might by all means save some." But for him, there is a wondrous bonus tied into that notion. By doing this "for the gospel's sake" Paul knew that this would make him a "partaker of it with" those who heard and believed.

And isn't this the burden on our own hearts for those we love? Don't we longingly desire that the people we share our daily lives with will also share heaven's glory with us? Paul looked even beyond his close associates and relatives and desired this for all men. He knew that he was once far off from the Lord and that only through his calling on the road to Damascus was his salvation possible. He looked for that same heartfelt conversion in others.

Life application: As you pass by people on the street, do you take the time to think "that is a person created in God's image."? Isn't every person of equal value when it comes to sharing Jesus? Even our enemies can be changed. Try to have Paul's attitude and realize that sharing the good news is something we should do at all times and with all people.

*Heavenly Father, don't let me be timid in telling others about Jesus. Keep me from shying back for whatever silly reason pops up in my mind. Instead, fill me with boldness to speak out this wondrous message which can change the eternal direction of others. I know that someone took the time to tell me and I'm grateful for it. Help me to remember this and to act on it Lord. This I pray that Your kingdom will be filled to overflowing! Amen.*

**Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.** 1 Corinthians 9:24

In this verse, Paul moves from his thoughts concerning serving men in order to impress upon them the gospel of Christ (verses 19-23), to his desire to run the race and receive the prize set before him (verses 24-27). In this, he begins with "Do you not know...?" This is a way of saying, "You certainly know." The reference he will now make will be to the Isthmian Games which took place on the Isthmus of Corinth. They were comparable to our modern Olympics and were something every person would be aware of. In Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, he describes these games:

"These, like the other games of Greece—the Olympian, Pythian, and Nemean—included every form of athletic exercise, and stood on an entirely different footing from anything of the kind in modern times. For the Greek, these contests were great national and

religious festivals. None but freemen could enter the lists, and they only after they had satisfied the appointed officers that they had for ten months undergone the necessary preliminary training. For thirty days previous to the contest the candidates had to attend the exercises at the gymnasium, and only after the fulfilment of these conditions were they allowed, when the time arrived, to contend in the sight of assembled Greece. Proclamation was made of the name and country of each competitor by a herald. The victor was crowned with a garland of pine leaves or ivy. The family of the conqueror was honoured by his victory, and when he returned to his native town he would enter it through a breach in the walls, the object of this being to symbolise that for a town which was honoured with such a citizen no walls of defence were needful."

This is the reference Paul is making. The athletes of his time, and those of ours as well, have the same end goal in common. They "all run, but one receives the prize." There was only one victor's wreath then and there is only one gold medal now. Those who are capable, well-trained, and endure the rigors of the race are the ones who win and receive their reward. Paul tells those in Corinth to act this way in their race to the finish. Writing to all, but with each individual in mind, he hints that each should "run in such a way that you may obtain *it*."

He will continue with his thoughts on this for three more verses, showing the necessity for each of us to train with rigor and to persevere in our steps all of our days as we look forward to the Prize which awaits us.

Life application: Paul's use of an athlete who strives to be the champion in the Isthmian games is an excellent example for us. We can look at those who work towards the gold medal in the modern Olympic games and understand what he was referring to. These people put out maximum effort for the thing they desired. If our desire is truly Christ, then we should be even more willing to put out all we can in order to please Him. We have one short life in which to earn our heavenly rewards. Let us not squander it, but strive forward with our eyes firmly fixed on Him!

*Lord God, there is a race set before me with the greatest Prize at the end. I know that in order to be the champion You would have me to be, I need to be fully trained, and so I will read Your word in order to comply with the standards of the race. I know that I will need to be ready for a long race because I don't know my life's end. And so, I will stay close to the fellowship of others who can build me up as I persevere. And I know that the victor's crown won't be mine unless I act in accordance with the rules. And so I will apply my training, not cheat in my perseverance, and will fix my eyes and my thoughts on*

*Jesus each step of the way. Be with me as I strive to complete the race with honor and with purity of my heart. Amen.*

**And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.*** 1 Corinthians 9:25

In his previous verse, Paul wrote that there are many runners in a race, but only one would receive the crown. He then implored those in Corinth to run their course in Christ in the same manner, setting aside all encumbrances and looking towards the Prize. Now, still using the Isthmian games as his metaphor, he tells them that "everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things."

Ancient writers note that those who were involved in the preparation for these games required ten full months of training, right up to the moment before the games began. Much of their training involved not only physical conditioning, but dietary restrictions as well. The thoughts of two commentators from those times read:

- Epictetus - "Thou must be orderly, living on spare food; abstain from confections; make a point of exercising at the appointed time, in heat and in cold; nor drink cold water nor wine at hazard."
- Horace - "The youth who would win in the race hath borne and done much; he hath sweat and been cold; he hath abstained from love and wine"

Such extreme conditioning would have been known to the people at Corinth and so Paul, without extra comment, states this in the plain form that the athlete was "temperate in all things." In this simple expression, he was intimating to those at Corinth (and thus to us) that we have an obligation to be temperate as well. We cannot expect to live an antinomian existence and feel that we are properly conditioning ourselves as we strive towards the Prize. Freedom in Christ is not freedom *to* sin. Rather it is freedom *from* sin.

Paul continues with his thought, noting that those who participated in these games conditioned themselves in this manner in order "to obtain a perishable crown, be we *for* an imperishable *crown.*" Think of the difference! The athlete in these ancient games was striving for temporary notoriety and a crown that would literally fall apart in a very short amount of time. The leaves would fall off, the twigs would become brittle and eventually break, insects could destroy it in a few hours, or any thief could carry it off and it would be gone. It was a temporary reminder of a temporary honor. All of that intense conditioning for something so ephemeral in nature.

On the other hand, the crown that we are striving for is an eternal one. It will never fade, never be taken away, and never lose its luster. Paul asks us to consider this and to determine that we will strive even more rigorously for our crown than those of the Isthmian games strived, simply because our reward is so much greater; infinitely greater because it is eternal.

Life application: In this verse and the preceding verse, he has made some notable contrasts that we should remember. The first is that of the earthly race which was in hopes of earthly results in contrast to the spiritual race which is in hopes of spiritual results. The second is that there was only one crown given in the earthly competition in contrast to the idea that all can obtain the crown in the spiritual race. And the third is that the crown in the earthly race is temporary and corruptible in contrast to the heavenly crown which is incorruptible and eternal. In all ways, the end result of the spiritual race is superior. Because of this, our conditioning in this race should also be superior in all ways.

*Lord, the race is set before me and the reward is an eternal crown that will never fade, never perish, and which will never be taken away. If I strive for prizes in this earthly walk which will fade away in time, how much more should I strive with all of my existence and every fiber of my being for that wondrous crown which You have promised? Help me to remember this and to determine each day to do my very best for the high honor of receiving Your everlasting crown of life! Amen.*

**Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air.**

1 Corinthians 9:26

In this verse, Paul sums up his thought concerning running which he has referred to for the past two verses by saying "therefore." Because of what he stated, his concluding thought is that "I run thus: not with uncertainty." In his run towards the Prize, he had a positive end and goal. The word he uses for "uncertainty" is *adēlōs*, a word used only here in the New Testament. It means something out of sight or obscure. For Paul, there was nothing obscure about his goal. He had a marked determination which led directly to Christ. The author of Hebrews says it this way -

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith..." Hebrews 12:1, 2

There was nothing that would hinder his race to the finish line, and to him that finish line was never out of his sight. After having conveyed this thought, he then suddenly switches from running to another metaphor, boxing. Not only was his race unhindered and with an end that was perfectly evident, but his attitude in reaching that point was also comparable to the boxer. Again, in this one verse he uses another word found only here in the New Testament, *pykteuō*. It specifically refers to a boxer; one who uses his fists in a match.

As he ran; so, he fought. In his battle, he was one who fought "not as *one who* beats the air." Before boxing matches then, and still in boxing matches today, boxers will punch the air in front of them as they warm up. It loosens the muscles and it gives an advanced demonstration of the fight ahead. When they do this, they don't arbitrarily let their arms flail about. Rather, they are focused and punch as if there was already a face being hit. They also remain focused as if punches were expected to come back at them.

Once the fight actually began, they would use this same marked determination to ensure that every punch landed on its intended target. If the target is missed, it becomes too late to control the arm and additional energy is lost as the body moves with the arms. The boxer becomes unbalanced and susceptible to a good pounding from his opponent. Additionally, the tendons and muscles can be more easily strained during such a miss. For this reason, "beating the air" rather than the body of the opponent was a big mistake, a mistake which could end in defeat.

Paul determined that any attack by Satan would be deflected and that his prowess as a fighter was to fight back with exacting blows, not just in defense, but in an offensive manner. He prepared himself for the battle and he always determined to be ready and on target with his actions.

Life application: Paul likens our time in Christ to a race and also to a boxing match. Both of these are extremely strenuous activities and the implication is that we need to be prepared both mentally and physically in order to meet the challenges we will face. The surest way to be ready is through three distinct avenues - 1) prayer; 2) fellowship with other Christians; and 3) reading, studying, and adhering to the word of God. If we do these, we will be like Paul as we strive forward. We will be prepared for the race and for the battle.

*Lord God, I thank You that You haven't left us here in a battle without tools to get us through it. You have given us the avenue of prayer to speak to You and wait upon an answer. You have given us the opportunity to fellowship with other believers and to be*

*built up and strengthened in our race and in the battles that come our way. And Lord, You have given us Your word to instruct us and to build us up in what we should do. We can face the challenges that come and we can even take the offensive position because we have Your word as our guide and our light. Thank You for these implements of battle, O God. Amen.*

**But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9:27**

To finish chapter 9, Paul shows the severity of the conditioning he placed upon himself in order to obtain his crown. He had just said that he fought, not as one who "beats the air." Using a boxing metaphor, he showed that like a boxer, he made every "punch" count in his training and in his fight to share the gospel. Now he continues on with the boxing metaphor. The word translated as "discipline" is the Greek word *hupópiázó*. It means to "strike under the eye" and thus to bruise, like a black eye. It is from the Greek word *hupópión* which is the part of the face under the eyes. It's used only one other time in Scripture, in Luke 18:5. There it is speaking of the widow who troubles the judge as she continuously comes before him seeking justice.

Paul strove in the same manner as she did, continuously bringing his body "into subjection." Here he uses an interesting term, *doulagōgō*. It means to bring into captivity or slavery as one would do when leading the losers of a battle off the battlefield. In this then, Paul is saying that his mortal flesh was the continuous loser in his battle. It was the flesh against the Spirit and the Spirit in him was always the victor. All of the worldly lusts and temptations were brought into this state of captivity, as he says, "lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

Here he was telling others to remain pure and undefiled in their walk. It would be hypocritical to act differently than how he preached. What a sad thing to stand at the judgment seat of Christ next to those he had preached to and have them receive greater rewards than he because of failing to bring his passions into subjugation! In order to avoid this, he lived as he preached. The term he uses for "disqualified" is *adokimos*. It comes from the idea of "bad metals." It indicates the metals that are put into the fire and fail the test for purity. They are scraped off and removed; they are worthless slag and thus are cast away.

Paul was determined to be pure and undefiled when he stood before the Lord and so he disciplined himself in a way that this would come about.

Life application: Paul's words here at the end of chapter 9 show that he struggled with the flesh like anyone else. If he had to discipline himself against it, it is an indication that discipline was needed. If we have a problem with weight, we won't lose the weight without working out our diet. If we have a problem with an addiction, it won't solve itself. Instead, it will need to be brought under control. This is the way it is for all things contrary to the word of God. We can either slip comfortably into rebellion or we can fight against it. Let us be found approved by adhering to the word and standing fast in the battle which rages within us!

*Lord, the flesh certainly does put up a fight  
I cannot deny that it wages war against me  
I struggle back at each punch and bite  
And focus my eyes so that You are all I see*

*Lord, help me in this raging battle  
Keep me close to You and obedient to Your word  
As the snake hisses and his tail does rattle  
Be with me and protect me, this I pray my Lord*

*You went to the cross to win the war for us  
And so, I know that You will be with me, my precious Lord Jesus*

*Lord, You know the conflicts that rage within me. You know my weaknesses and those things which tempt me. Help me Lord to stand strong against the devil and his use of these things which can only make me lose my sight of You. Give me the strength and determination to get into Your word each day and to remain obedient to it at all times. I'm so weak Lord, but in You I know that I have all the strength I need. Thank You for this assurance. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 10

**Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 1 Corinthians 10:1**

In beginning chapter 10, Paul will refer back to the issue of chapter 8, food sacrificed to idols. However, he is also building upon the thought which he has been discussing at the end of chapter 9, that of striving for a crown and the conditioning that it required. And so he begins with "moreover."

Many translators state "but" or "for" rather than "moreover" to either show a contrast to his previous words or a continuation of the argument rather than a new direction. Whichever is intended, he is addressing "brethren." The words are given to believers in the church for their edification and growth. To these brethren, he gives a phrase which is intended to open their minds to a passage of Scripture in a new way. He says, "I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea."

As he continues, it will become apparent that they are already aware of the exodus story. What Paul is making known to them is that there is a spiritual application to the story which is applicable to them (and thus to us) as believers. He will repeat the word "all" five times in the first four verses to highlight that what occurred included the entire body involved in the exodus. Despite that however, it wasn't received by all in the same way.

It then is a spiritual warning and admonition that will apply to those in the church. Yes, all were "under the cloud." This was the sign of God's divine protection for the Israelites. The terminology was used, for example, by David in the 105th Psalm -

"He spread a cloud for a covering,  
And fire to give light in the night." Psalm 105:39

That "all passed through the sea" means that the entire body of Israel, along with the mixed multitude who went with them, marched through the waters of the Red Sea and to freedom from the bondage and oppression of Egypt.

Life application: Paul shows us that the stories found in the Old Testament have been given for our instruction. In all, they will always point us to a stronger relationship with Christ if we will use them as they are intended. Not only that, there are spiritual

applications and pictures of future redemptive history which can be gleaned from these stories. As you read the Old Testament, always ask yourself, "How does this point to Christ Jesus?" In doing this, you will be pursuing Scripture as it was intended to be viewed.

*Everyday, O God, I love to read Your word. I know that every story in it and every detail given was selected by You to lead me to know You and Your heart better. And I know that all of it is intended to show me the work of Jesus. Help me to grasp this as I open Your word each day and help me to understand the treasures You have tucked away there for us to see. Thank You for this immeasurable gift, the Holy Bible. Amen.*

**...all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 1 Corinthians 10:2**

Paul, telling his readers at Corinth "that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea," now further explains this. In this exodus from Egypt which took place under the conditions he mentioned "all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." In other words, what they did is to be symbolically equated to what we have now done in Christ. The Israelites willingly followed Moses thus accepting him as their spiritual leader. They subjected themselves to the laws and ordinances that he gave to them and thus they were symbolically "baptized" as they were under the cloud and passing through the sea.

The same preposition which is used for baptism in Matthew 28:19 is used by Paul here. In this, we can see that those who are baptized into Christ are acknowledging an acceptance of His spiritual leadership and the laws and ordinances which He prescribes for us. The Old Testament is given in shadows and pictures of a greater reality found in Christ. God used little Israel for these pictures. We are brought out of Egypt (bondage to sin) through the work of Christ. We are baptized into this work, meaning His fulfilling the Law of Moses, and into His death and resurrection. Thus, we are acknowledging His authority over us.

Paul will continue with his thoughts and then show that the external rites must be accompanied by a change in our hearts and lives.

Life application: The wondrous stories of the Old Testament are all given for a purpose. When we read them, our eyes should be open to their true fulfillment in Christ. Paul uses several examples, such as the exodus from Egypt, to show us that this is the case. Therefore, always consider this and ask the Bible questions about the meaning of passages as you read them. It will answer back with beauty and treasure.

Baptism without any change in one's heart  
Has no significance, no meaning at all  
It should indicate a changed life and a fresh start  
And it should only come after a person on Jesus does call

Abraham first believed the promises of God  
Then he was counted as righteous in God's sight  
Only afterwards was he circumcised in the life he did trod  
He already had shown that his heart was right

Baptism then is a sign for the believer  
For the one who has first on the Lord Jesus called  
Go get dunked after being a receiver  
Of the Holy Spirit Who into Christ you He installed

*Yes Lord! Thank You for the grace You lavished on me, saving me through the faith I exercised in You. Now, help me to be obedient in all ways out of gratitude for the marvelous redemption which has ended all of my enmity with God. Through Your blood I am washed, purified, and acceptable; sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise for that wondrous day upon which I await! Amen.*

**...all ate the same spiritual food, 1 Corinthians 10:3**

Not only were those brought out at the exodus "baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea," but they also "ate the same spiritual food." Again, Paul is showing that the food which sustained Israel is symbolic of the true spiritual food which we participate in when we receive the Lord's Supper.

Exodus chapter 16 shows the first details concerning the giving of the manna (manna means "what is it?"). There is even a description of it as is recorded in Exodus 16:31 -

"And the house of Israel called its name Manna. And it *was* like white coriander seed, and the taste of it *was* like wafers *made* with honey."

This "spiritual food" continued to sustain them for the entire time of their wilderness wanderings. Once Israel had crossed the Jordan, we read this in Joshua 5:10-12 -

"Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. <sup>11</sup> And they ate of

the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. <sup>12</sup> Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year."

The giving of the manna was never forgotten by the people of Israel and it is referred to at various times in both testaments of the Bible. Even the psalms, while recounting the wondrous deeds of God, remembered the manna which sustained Israel -

"Had rained down manna on them to eat,  
And given them of the bread of heaven.  
<sup>25</sup> Men ate angels' food;  
He sent them food to the full." Psalm 78:24, 25

But, like all things of this nature, the physical reality of the manna pictured a spiritual truth. Jesus notes this in John 6:31-33 -

"Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' <sup>32</sup> Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'" John 6:31-33

The manna only anticipated the greater and true Bread from heaven, which is the body of the Lord Jesus. This then is what is pictured in the taking of communion, or the Lord's Supper. It is a remembrance of the work of Christ, looking back on His cross until He comes again.

Life application: Taking communion at church has no meaning unless one has received Christ as Lord. Only when the heart is directed towards Christ does the meal take on any true significance. When you receive the elements, it should be done with a humble and grateful heart for the wondrous blessing of being included in the body of Christ.

*Lord God, Israel had manna in the wilderness to sustain them for forty full years, but I know I have something much more wonderful. I have the true Bread of Life which came down from heaven to grant me eternal nourishment. I thank You for the honor and the pleasure of receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and for the weekly blessing of sharing in the Lord's Supper in anticipation of the day when He returns for His people. Even so, come Lord Jesus! Amen.*

**...and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:4**

So far in just three verses, Paul has shown the great amount of spiritual connection between the exodus and wilderness wanderings and their correlation to Christ. He has shown that the cloud and the sea pictured being baptized into Moses, meaning the Law given by the Lord. He has also shown that the manna they ate was "spiritual food." Now he shows that even the water they drank was a spiritual picture of Christ because they "all drank the same spiritual drink."

One cannot live long without water. God intended this to show that just as we cannot live without water, so we cannot live without being spiritually connected to Him through Christ. We are either dead in sins and trespasses, having inherited Adam's fallen nature, or we are born again through Christ. To show us that this was pictured in the exodus account, he says, "For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."

The people of Israel twice drank directly from water which issued from a rock. The first time was in Exodus 17:1-6 in a place called Rephidim (meaning "resting places") which was their 11th stop while traveling. The second is recorded in Numbers 20:1-11 at a place called Kadesh (meaning "holy"). This was their 33rd recorded stop. After they received the water, the places were renamed "Meribah," which means "strife" or "contention" because the people strived with the Lord over the water.

Paul says that in these places "they drank of that spiritual Rock which followed them." There is a Jewish tradition that the rock literally followed them wherever they went. This is not the intent of Paul's words. Rather, the idea of "following" them is that wherever they were, Christ was present. They contended with the Lord, claiming that He had left them to die, but then the Lord, through Moses, showed them that He was always there, ready to provide. This is the intent of saying that the Rock "followed them."

This Rock is then said explicitly to be Christ by Paul. In other words, the natural rock is merely a metaphor which is then left completely out of the true picture. If there was one rock in Rephidim and one rock in Kadesh and both gave water, then the Rock is a picture of Christ. If this is so, then it isn't just the rock either, but the water which issued from the rock which is also the intended symbol. As it says, "they drank of that spiritual Rock."

Understanding this, the rest of the Bible in both testaments uses the terms "rock" and "water" to describe the Lord. The rock is the unmovable foundation upon which our faith is grounded, such as in the parable of building one's house upon the rock in Matthew 7. The water is the water of life seen in John 4, John 7, Revelation 22, and elsewhere. The account from John 4 is both memorable and explicit -

"Jesus answered and said to her, 'Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,<sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.'" John 4:13, 14

Life application: When reading the Bible, one should attempt to remember things that are mentioned and see if later comparisons are made. Rocks, water, harvesters, the wind, trees, numbers, milk, types of grain, different types of work, and on and on. All of them having meaning and nothing is arbitrary. Each will give us insights into Christ, into God's plan of redemptive history, and teach us moral lessons as well. Nothing is superfluous and nothing is left out. The Bible is an amazingly beautiful compilation of words which all form to show us God's love for us. And it is all centered on the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

*Lord God, I know that whatever I read or study will be absorbed into my collective memory and mold me in some way. As this is certain, I will endeavor to read, contemplate, and absorb Your word above all else. As it reveals Your very heart for me, then obviously I will be molded more and more into Your image as I learn and apply it to my life. Thank You for this wondrous gift which will allow me to be shaped by You into a vessel of beauty and holiness. Amen.*

**But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness.** 1 Corinthians 10:5

Despite the Israelites having all of the privileges which Paul mentioned in the preceding verses (baptism in the cloud and the sea, the spiritual food, and the spiritual Rock), he shows that it didn't profit them at all in their spiritual lives. He leads into this with the word "but." Despite all of the proofs and all of the physical demonstrations of God's presence among them, instead of having faith that He would see their redemption through to a good end, they failed to trust.

What God looks for is faith in Him and His promises. What He got was rebellion and a stubborn, stiff-necked attitude. And because of this "with most of them God was not

well pleased." Because they lacked faith in Him and His provision, He rewarded them with what they accused Him of.

Time and again, the Israelites complained and accused the Lord of wrongdoing. One example is from Numbers 14:2-4 -

"And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, 'If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! <sup>3</sup> Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?' <sup>4</sup> So they said to one another, 'Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.'"

After this, Moses petitioned the Lord to pardon the people, but there would be a penalty for their lack of faith. This is recorded later in the chapter -

"Then the LORD said: 'I have pardoned, according to your word; <sup>21</sup> but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD— <sup>22</sup> because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, <sup>23</sup> they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it. <sup>24</sup> But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it. <sup>25</sup> Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valley; tomorrow turn and move out into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea.'" Numbers 14:20-25

The Israelites would receive the punishment that they deserved. Because of their lack of faith, "*their bodies* were in the wilderness." This was the very thing that they had said would happen and so their words were used as a witness against them. Despite this though, there was grace in the sentence. Instead of being snuffed out immediately, they would be allowed to live out their lives and raise their children until they were old enough to assume the responsibility of going into Canaan. This is detailed later in the same chapter -

"But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. <sup>32</sup> But *as for* you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. <sup>33</sup> And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are

consumed in the wilderness.<sup>34</sup> According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, *namely* forty years, and you shall know My rejection.<sup>35</sup> I the LORD have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die." Numbers 14:31-35

In the end, only two of the 603,550 registered males who were of fighting age were permitted the honor of entering the promised land. Figuring in the women, well over a million people would die as they wandered through the wilderness. Such was the price for lacking faith and rebelling against the Lord.

Life application: God asks for faith in His faithless creatures, so a little bit will do. He asks us to trust Him, even when times seem out of control. If we truly believe that He will fulfill His promises, we will continue to trust Him and to praise Him each step of the way. With this, He will be well-pleased.

*Heavenly Father, the lesson of those Israelites who perished in the wilderness should teach us that we need to trust You when times are tough or even seemingly out of control. Yes, life takes turns that lead us into deep and dark valleys, but You have promised to never leave us nor to forsake us. Help us to remember that You are there with us in those dark places and that You have a good plan and purpose for those times. Remind us that the dark valley is merely a short walk towards a bright and wondrous mountaintop. Thank You for Your ever-faithful presence. Amen.*

**Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.** 1 Corinthians 10:6

"Now these things" is speaking of those with whom "God was not well pleased." They had seen the miracles and been sustained by God's gracious hand, and yet they rebelled in various ways which Paul will explain in the verses ahead. Because of their rebellion he noted in the previous verse that "*their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness." It is all of this that he is referring to as examples.

This word translated as "examples" is the Greek word *typoi*. It could be referring either to the pictures of Christ and thus be translated as "types" or "foreshadowing events." Or it could be translated as "examples" and thus be referring to the scattering of the bodies based on rebellion. As he hasn't yet explained the examples which caused the deaths, some scholars insist that it is speaking of the pictures of Christ. However, because he

just mentioned the deaths of the people and he will continue to explain that, others insist this is what he is referring to. There is no reason to assume that he isn't speaking of the entire process though. The types of Christ and their subsequent rejection led to the deaths of the people.

Either way, Paul's continued statement in this verse is that we should learn "that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted." If we have been redeemed by Christ, then we should follow Christ, trust Christ, and fix our eyes on Christ. It makes no sense to call on Christ and then to ignore the very salvation that He has provided.

Life application: The Old Testament is often overlooked by many Christians. And yet, it has been given to show us the logical progression of redemptive history as God slowly reveals Himself and His plans to the people of the world. The Old Testament allows us to know where we have been, where we are going, and the pitfalls to avoid in our walk.

*Lord, I remember the tears of joy on the day I realized I was forgiven and free because of the cross of Christ. The weight of my past was lifted and the prospects of living in newness of life lay ahead like a path of gold. But at times, I forget that and find my feet heading off in wrong directions once again. Forgive me for my disobedience, help me in correcting my waywardness, and restore me to the joy of my salvation once again. I thank You for Your merciful hand upon me as I erringly walk in this temporary life on my way to glory! Amen.*

**And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." 1 Corinthians 10:7**

In the previous verse, Paul spoke of lusting after evil things. Continuing on, he next warns against becoming "idolaters as were some of them." The very people who had been redeemed from the bondage of Egypt, and who had seen the marvelous works of the Lord, fell into idolatry. Rather than honoring the Creator, they worshipped before the created. This account is found in Exodus 32:1-6:

"Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, 'Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'

<sup>2</sup> And Aaron said to them, 'Break off the golden earrings which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me.'<sup>3</sup> So all the people broke off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them*

to Aaron. <sup>4</sup> And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf.

Then they said, 'This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' <sup>5</sup> So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow *is* a feast to the LORD.' <sup>6</sup> Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."

Paul, citing this account and saying "As it is written" is intended to show that it was specifically recorded for our learning and our instruction. The people failed to conduct themselves in a manner which was in accord with the glory of the Lord which they had beheld. A question that could be asked then is "What was wrong about the people sitting down and eating and drinking and rising up to play?" The answer is not that the actions were specifically wrong, but the context of their actions was. They directed them towards the golden calf, not towards the Lord.

People need to sit down, people need to eat and drink, and the Bible shows that properly directed worship can be brought to a very emotional state. A great example of this last category is found in 2 Samuel 6. David danced and leapt before the Lord as the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the City of David. His wife Michal didn't approve of his conduct and rebuked him. His response was that, "*It was* before the LORD, who chose me instead of your father and all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel. Therefore I will play *music* before the LORD. And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight." 2 Samuel 6:21, 22

This verse which Paul is citing cannot be used as a reason to forbid dancing. There are churches that do forbid dancing and they use verses like this one to justify that stand. However, this is not the intent of what Paul is saying here. Rather, that is a manipulation of Scripture which cannot be justified.

Life application: There is nothing wrong with rejoicing and praising before the Lord. There are abundant examples given in Scripture which show people praising the Lord with their voices and in dancing. If our hearts and souls are directed toward the Lord, then we are given the freedom to jump and shout praises to Him or beat on drums as we praise Him. Surely the Lord is worthy of our praise.

*I will praise You, O God, with my voice and with my heart. I will praise You with my actions and in my deeds. I will praise You with music that glorifies You and with twirling dances of joy. Lord, how can I withhold the praises? You have done wondrous things for*

*me and I will surely pop if I don't return thanks and praise to You. You are great, O God. Surely You are worthy of praise. Hallelujah and amen.*

**We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.** 1 Corinthians 10:8

Paul is quite clear here, as he is throughout his writings, that sexual immorality is unacceptable. And this isn't just Paul, but it is a precept which permeates Scripture, even to the very last page of the Bible. Revelation 22:15 says that the sexually immoral will be excluded from entrance into the gates of the New Jerusalem. There, they are lumped together with dogs (those who are unclean and who would go after their own vomit), people who practice magic arts, murderers, idolaters, and those who love and practice falsehood.

In other words, sexual immorality is not an acceptable part of a Christian's walk. In today's world, this seems almost foreign to us. Even churches allow the most sexually depraved of people to participate in their services and excuse it by saying that God would "want them to be happy." Happiness is irrelevant. What matters is obedience to the Lord. As an example of this, Paul goes back to the account of the Baal of Peor in Numbers 25:1-9. There it says "the LORD's anger burned against them."

It was an incident they were reminded of later in Numbers and then in Deuteronomy before entering Canaan. They will continue to be reminded of it in the books of Joshua, the Psalms, and Hosea. Likewise, Paul reaches back to it to show the severity of the judgment for what occurred. He says that "in one day twenty-three thousand of them died." It was a huge price to pay for the faithless actions of the people.

As a note concerning this, Numbers 25:9 places the number at 24,000 instead of 23,000. There have been several suggestions as to how the numbers can be reconciled. It is possible that 23,000 were killed by the plague which resulted, and the other 1000 were killed by those who defended the Lord's honor by using the sword against their own countrymen. Another view is that the number could have been a round number. If it were 23,600, then it could be rounded up or down. Another explanation is that 23,000 fell "in one day" as Paul says and the other 1000 died the next day.

The most probable is that Paul was referring to those killed by the plague only and not those killed by the sword, thus showing the severity of the Lord's judgment. If this is the case, then it was a tradition handed down in the society and not something specifically

recorded in Scripture. The main issue though is in regards to sexual immorality. It is considered unacceptable and the Lord will judge those who violate this precept.

Life application: The Lord intends for those who engage in sex to be married - a male to a female. Any other sexual contact is considered immoral.

*Lord, You have granted to man that He can take a wife  
Someone to share their walk together all of their days  
You would have them to remain together till the end of life  
Living in holiness and bringing You honor and praise*

*Help us in our weakness to be stout and strong  
To be faithful to one another as the years go past  
Yes Lord, help us in this all our life long  
To be obedient to You until You call us home at last*

*Heavenly Father, I know that Your word is clear on the issue of sex. It is intended for the state of marriage and it is to be between a man and his wife. Your word shows that any other sexual contact is considered immoral and that You will judge the sexually immoral. This may not be popular, but I didn't write Your word and so I will proclaim this truth because You have ordained it. And Lord, help me in my weakness to be pure in this regard. The world is filled with temptation and so I ask for strength, wisdom, and fortitude concerning this issue. Amen.*

**...nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; 1 Corinthians 10:9**

The words in this verse continue to refer to the wilderness wanderings of the Old Testament between the exodus and the arrival of the Israelites in Canaan. During that time, this is recorded in Numbers 21 -

"Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. <sup>5</sup> And the people spoke against God and against Moses: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For *there is* no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.' <sup>6</sup> So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died." Numbers 21:4-6

God had time and again provided for the people and demonstrated His care of them. He had sent the Angel of the Lord before them to lead the way and to ensure their care. However, the people "spoke against God and against Moses." In this they were showing a willful disregard of God's care for them. Paul's words though, tie this account to Christ. "Nor let us tempt Christ." It is another implicit reference to the deity of Jesus. His presence was there with Israel in the wilderness. If this was Jehovah, and yet Paul now identifies Him as Christ, then the connection is obvious - Jesus is Jehovah incarnate.

Paul uses two different words for "tempt" here, the first being *ekpeirazōmen*. It is an important compound which means "to tempt out." In other words, "to try to the utmost." It is used only three other times in the Bible - in Matthew 4:7, Luke 4:12, and Luke 10:25. Each of these was a tempting related to Christ, twice it is quoted by Jesus during Satan's tempting of Him and once by a lawyer of the law.

To "tempt" when applied to man involves inducing him to sin. When it is applied to God, it carries a different signification, that of trying His patience and provoking Him to anger. This is what is being conveyed here by Paul. The people tried the Angel of the Lord's (Christ's) patience and suffered the consequences of their attitudes. We are instructed to not so tempt the Lord's patience now. He is the same Lord, eternal and unchanging. Our rebellion can only be met with His hand of discipline.

Life application: The warnings of the New Testament aren't given for us to ignore. How often do we hear Christian friends around us complain about how their life is going and yet we see that they have not been faithfully following the Lord. Should discipline be unexpected in such a case? Of course not. Our acts of disobedience will suffer consequences. Let us learn from those times and resolve in our hearts to be obedient to the word God.

*Lord, how often trials come my way. When they do, I wonder "Why is this happening to me." And then I hear a preacher instructing me from Your word and showing me that the wounds were actually self-inflicted. In my failure to adhere to Your word, I walked down my own path of disobedience and right into Your needed correction. When I think it's Your lack of care for me, I find it's actually my lack of attention to Your word. Help me in this Lord. Give me wisdom to stick to Your wonderful blueprint for my life. I know that things will go so much better when I do. Amen.*

**...nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 1 Corinthians 10:10**

The word used by Paul for "complain" is the Greek word *gogguzó*. It means to whisper, murmur, or grumble. He is asking his readers to not engage in this type of activity, which they clearly had been as they divided into factions. Rather than building one another up, factions that arise inevitably work to tear one another down. In the case of those in the wilderness, there were complaints against Moses. Because he was the one chosen by God to lead them, it was an indirect complaint against the Lord. This is evident because they "were destroyed by the destroyer."

There is not just one incident which involved this complaining, but a series of complaints which seemed to arise any time that things got a little bit tough. Instead of seeing the tough times as a chance for God to reveal His glory, they saw them as a chance to complain. When they did, the destroyer would reveal God's glory in another way. This destroyer is certainly the same one who killed the firstborn at the Passover and who continued to destroy pockets of resistance throughout their wanderings.

He further brought destruction to Israel and against Israel's enemies after they entered Canaan. This is recorded time and time again throughout the Bible. Paul's words show that this hard and unrepentant attitude against God is not just some "Old Testament" concept, but something that we need to watch out for as well. Were it not so, he would not have included the words here in 1 Corinthians. His words in the next verse will confirm this.

Life application: There is a difference between idle grumbling and calling out erroneous doctrine. Just because we don't particularly like a precept from the Bible or a teacher of the Bible, this is no excuse for grumbling against them. However, if someone is actively teaching a falsehood, they need to be called out for it. Too often, followers of an unsound Bible teacher will accuse his detractors of attempting to "divide Christ." This terminology is used to get the detractors to remain quiet, as if they have done something wrong when the opposite is true. The teacher of false doctrine is the divider of Christ. Never be afraid to uphold the purity of God's word above all else.

*The Bible is precious and altogether pure  
It gives us guidance for our daily walk  
And so, on its precepts I remain confident and sure  
And of its doctrines I will constantly talk*

*When someone teaches it in a way which is not right  
I know it is my duty to ensure their error is noted  
It is too precious to be treated with contempt or spite*

*And it should never be mishandled or misquoted*

*It is our guide and the book which is given to instruct us  
It is the wondrous gift of God to reveal His heart in Jesus*

*Lord, too often people attempt to defend the indefensible. When a famous teacher or preacher goes against Your word, they need to be corrected for it. And yet, because of the fame of a name or out of being star-struck, Your word is ignored and bad doctrine is allowed to take root. Which is more important to me? Lord, give me wisdom to rightly handle Your word and the strong will and desire to defend it, even above all else. It is far too wonderful to be treated with scorn. I will always stand on what I believe is the truth of Your word. Amen.*

**Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 1 Corinthians 10:11**

"Now all these things" is referring to the examples that Paul has cited from verses 1-10. But it is also certainly referring to all of the body of Scripture which comprises the age of the law. God chose examples from the life of Joshua, Samson, David, and others as well as from the time during the captivity with Esther and Mordecai, from the post-exilic times with Nehemiah and Ezra, and so many more examples for our learning and instruction. Ellicott notes that, "The verb "happened" is plural, referring to the multiplied occurrences which the Apostle has just mentioned; but 'written' is singular, referring to the sacred record in which the historical facts are handed down."

The lessons to be found in the Old Testament serve "as examples" for our instruction and edification, and "they were written for our admonition." We are to read them and learn from them, not simply ignore the Old Testament nor to read it as a mere curiosity of times gone by. God selectively chose these stories to teach us. It needs to be understood though that this was not the sole purpose of why "these things happened to them." Rather, they literally happened to the people as they lived out their own lives. A zillion other things happened to them as well, but these were selectively chosen for our learning. Therefore, there is the reality that God used the events of real people's lives to assist later people in how to conduct their own lives.

The word "happened" is in the imperfect tense to show the slow and successive unfolding of those events in history in order to reveal exactly what God determined we should know. And there is another, unstated, reason for these selected moments. They

are given to reveal Christ. Paul alluded to that earlier and Jesus says it explicitly in John 5:39 -

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."

Lastly Paul notes that these things occurred and were then recorded and given to us "upon whom the ends of the ages have come." This phrase shows us that the Church Age is the last age before the end times will be ushered in. The previous dispensations were leading to Christ; Christ has been revealed; and now that He has been revealed, we are living in His age of grace. Everything has worked in the past to bring us to this point in history, after which will come the tribulation period. Paul goes to great lengths in the book of 2 Thessalonians to show us this is true.

The sequence of events then is:

- 1) the rapture which ends the church age;
- 2) the tribulation period where the world will be judged for rejecting the grace of Christ; and
- 3) the millennial reign of Christ.

The fact that the church age has lasted 2000 years shows us the great harvest which has been on-going during all of that time. When it ends, the world will be ripe for judgment. Why? Because they have rejected the very words that we are looking at now - examples for our learning and admonition.

Life application: Don't just pick up the Bible and flip through the pages for something curious to read. Rather, pick it up and read it with fervent desire to know Christ and to learn from the past!

*Lord, You have chosen specific people and events of the past and recorded the details of their lives in order to instruct us on how to live rightly and how to avoid the terrible pitfalls of being outside of Your favor. Help me Lord to think on these wonderful passages and to apply them to my life, looking for Christ in every detail and also looking for the moral lessons that You would have me to learn. What a great God You are for having given us such a precious word! Praises be to You. Amen.*

**Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 1 Corinthians 10:12**

There is no reason at all to assume that Paul is speaking about a "loss of salvation" here. He has been using lessons from the exodus and the wilderness wanderings to show that the people lacked faith in God's continued hand of support for them. They failed to trust that what He started He would also see to its completion.

They had Moses to lead them, and yet they failed to trust him. They had the cloud and the pillar of fire there as a display of God's glory and they failed to acknowledge that He was there with them. When they became needful, they were given manna, water, and quail and yet they failed to trust that God would continue to meet their needs as time passed. They had seen the destruction of the armies of Egypt, and yet they feared going in to possess the land of Canaan. On and on it went, a lack of faith leading to times of judgment. Even Moses, because of His actions, was excluded from entering the land of promise.

These people, with the evidence right before their eyes, fell into disbelief time and time again. Paul admonishes us to be stouter and more steadfast in our faith and practice. We have the truth that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. We have the complete Bible given to us for our instruction and growth. We have promises in the word which show us that even death cannot separate us from the love of God which is found in Christ Jesus. And yet, we allow our faith to become weakened through temptation, through privation, and through neglect of meditating on His word.

At these times, we aren't going to lose our salvation. We "have" been forgiven; past tense. We "have" been sealed with the Holy Spirit; past tense. We "are" seated with Christ in the heavenly places; done deal. These things are told to us to remind us of this and to keep us from falling. And yet, from time to time, we hear of a great preacher, teacher, or Christian professor falling into sin; maybe adultery. We see people neurotically worrying about whether they will be raptured along with the rest of the church because they failed to cross a "t" or dot an "i".

Likewise, people come to Christ, but never grow in the knowledge of the word and they flounder about in a state of theological confusion. Others forget that they have been saved at all (see 2 Peter 1:9). We are asked to not only ensure our salvation by calling out to Christ for His unmerited favor, but to walk in our salvation, getting ever-closer to Him. If we do this, we will be firm and fixed upon the Rock and filled with the Water of life in those times when difficulties arise.

Life application: In the morning, read your Bible and think on Christ. During the day, meditate on the word and think on Christ. In the evening, pick up your Bible and read it again and think on Christ. Be firm, stand fast, and secure in your walk with Christ and you won't fall.

*Oh, my precious Lord. Help me never to think of myself more confidently than I ought to, but rather, help me to rest in You and not in my own strength. Help me Lord to not be prideful of the things I own or the knowledge I possess. But rather, help me to remember that everything I have is temporary and can fly away in a moment and that all of my knowledge came from You. In all things, help me to walk humbly and with humility all my days, ever-thankful for Your kind hand of grace upon me. Amen.*

**No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.**

1 Corinthians 10:13

In the preceding verse, Paul gave those at Corinth a warning when he said, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." Now he gives them a note of up-building and encouragement. The temptations that they faced in seeking divisions or facing decisions concerning eating or not eating certain foods, etc., are regular temptations that "are common to man." In other words, they are a part of the human experience, just like the temptations of those in the wilderness. There was nothing supernatural about their temptations and they could have resisted rebelling, but instead, they lacked faith in God's provision and fell into weakness.

Those at Corinth were following this same human pattern, but they had the power to prevail if they so chose. They had the truth of the gospel and they possessed the knowledge that "God is faithful." From those Old Testament passages, they saw that God never abandoned His people, even if they may have thought that He did. The Corinthians had the surer foundation, which is the word of God, to look into and see this.

As a further encouragement, Paul instructs them with the happy thought that God "will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able." God is not in the business of "causing" His people to fall. Rather, He has placed us in the stream of humanity and our experiences are those which humans can and should expect. In those experiences, temptations are a natural part of what occurs. This was seen in the Garden of Eden, this

was seen at the time of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, and it was seen when David saw the beautiful Bathsheba and desired her.

These and other examples show us that some failed and some prevailed. When Joshua and Caleb set out with the other spies to investigate the land of Canaan, they held fast to their faith in the Lord while the other ten weakened. It was a common human experience and each had the ability to stand fast in their convictions or to waffle in them.

As a continuation of his encouraging words, Paul then tells those in Corinth (and thus us) that with whatever temptation we face God "will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." As noted above, God is not in the business of trapping us in our weakness. Because we are humans and share what is common to humanity, then the weaknesses we face are merely human experiences and thus can be overcome, even from a human perspective. With the surer word of God and the sealing of the Holy Spirit, how much stronger should we be in the face of these things? There is never a scenario that we will face where defeat is inevitable. Rather, when we are pulled away by our own lusts, we voluntarily give way to sin.

This is why it is so important to follow the three avenues of spiritual strengthening that we have available at all times –

- *Praying to God.* We can simply talk to Him about our needs continuously. Every moment can be a moment of prayer if it is a conversation with Him.
- *Knowing the Bible.* If we read and apply the Bible to our lives, we will have that sure foundation on which we can stand when temptations arise. We can draw from the well and be reinvigorated with the lessons it has taught us.
- *Fellowshipping with other believers.* In our weaknesses, we can be strengthened and encouraged through communion with others. They can provide us the "pat on the back" that we need and they can often give us additional perspectives into the word of God that we may have missed.

Life application: Pray without ceasing, read and meditate upon God's word, and fellowship with other believers. In doing these three things, you will be strengthened and built up in your faith and in your walk with God.

*Heavenly Father, I love that Your word tells me that You are faithful and that You will not allow me to be tempted beyond what I am able. Your word goes on to say that with any temptation You will make the way of escape for me. I thank You that through this*

*promise I will be able to bear up under any test or trial that comes my way. I know that You are not in the business of causing us to fail, but instead You allow temptations to come our way in order to teach us and to strengthen us in our walk. Thank You for Your kind hand upon me and thank You for Your word which instructs and encourages me! Amen.*

**Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.** 1 Corinthians 10:14

"Therefore" is given to lead us to a summary thought concerning the previous words of instruction. In verses 1-5, Paul showed how the Israelites had actually partaken of the spiritual goodness of the Lord - the cloud and the sea, the spiritual food, and the spiritual rock (from which the water issued forth). These were there for the people and sustained them as they travelled. And yet, instead of clinging to that which gives life, they turned their backs on Christ and followed a different path.

In verses 6-10, we were shown that some fell into idolatry, some into sexual immorality, some into tempting Christ through their speaking out against Him as if He were incapable of properly providing for them, and some merely complained about their circumstances instead of being grateful for His provision. Paul showed that their lives were given as examples for us to learn from. He also instructed us that we should take heed of these things because we all share in humanity and are susceptible to falling as they did. But in a note of encouragement, he said that God will always provide a way out when we are tempted. This is where his thoughts have led to and they bear directly on his previous discussion about foods sacrificed to idols which was seen in chapter 8.

Eating foods is a neutral matter, even foods sacrificed to idols - because idols are nothing. However, idolatry is harmful and sinful. It is also tempting and destructive as his examples have shown. Idolatry leads to barriers between God and us and destroys our intimate fellowship with Him. Therefore, we shouldn't see how close we can get to it without going over the line. Instead, we should turn our backs to it and run from it. The Apostle John has the same word of admonition for us. As the final thought of his first epistle, he closes the letter with, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen" (1 John 5:21).

In spiritual matters, we are to remain in fellowship with God in ways which He has personally authorized such as reading and studying His word; praising, worshipping, and praying to Him; and fellowshiping with other believers. In doing these things, we will be kept safe from the sins which we can so easily fall into.

Life application: An idol is not necessarily a piece of stone, wood, or metal that is set up to worship, but rather it is anything which replaces devotion to God in our hearts. Sex, money, over-indulgence, etc., are things which tear our hearts and minds away from the Lord. Let us continually walk with Him and purposely flee from idolatry.

*Lord God, keep me free from the things which take my heart and eyes away from You. A million temptations come my way each day and some of them are more difficult to face than others. You know the ones which will try me the most, so remind me to put on the armor which will protect me from them. I know that You will always be with me and provide a way out of the temptations I face. And so, I ask in advance for eyes to see those paths of exit and to be strong enough to take them when those temptations arise. Thank You for hearing my prayer. Amen.*

**I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say.** 1 Corinthians 10:15

Paul has just written in the previous verse that we are to "flee from idolatry." This was based on his words concerning what occurred during the wilderness wanderings of Israel. Through idolatry, the people's hearts and actions were turned away from God and it resulted in punishment, death, and destruction. Such lessons were recorded to keep us from falling into the same type of situation. Now he is going to spend the rest of chapter 10 explaining this from the perspective of the work of the Lord and how we are to relate to that.

In his words of this verse though, there may be a hint of irony attached. He says, "I speak as to wise men..." Saying this, he uses the same word, *phronimos*, that he used earlier in his letter -

"We *are* fools for Christ's sake, but you *are* wise in Christ! We *are* weak, but you *are* strong! You *are* distinguished, but we *are* dishonored!" 1 Corinthians 4:10

He very well may be using that previous statement to help them realize that they don't know everything and that their actions can have the most severe of consequences. If this is his intent, then it explains why he showed those Old Testament examples first. And so, to now bolster their wisdom, he tells them to "judge for yourselves what I say."

Life application: The hand of Paul exudes wisdom partly because he was well educated in the things of God as a Pharisee before coming to Christ. He was able to tie the symbolism of the Old Testament in with the reality of what Christ had done. He was specifically chosen by the Lord to be His apostle to the gentile church. Further, he was

filled with the Spirit of God who led him in his writings in order for us to gain this wisdom and not fall into error. Remember that it is the epistles of Paul which are intended to guide the Gentile-led church until this dispensation ends.

*Heavenly Father, when I look at the process of how You have given us Your word, the Holy Bible, I am utterly amazed. You have used real men who were guided by Your hand in order to give us instructions for our lives and to reveal Your Son to us through their words. Every author is distinct and has an individual message and yet every book carries on the same exacting theme so that this marvel of beauty is one seamless whole. You are amazing, O God. You are great! Thank You for Your superior word. Amen.*

**The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?  
The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?**

1 Corinthians 10:16

Paul's previous words asked for us to flee from idolatry and then he immediately asked us to judge his words, as to whether they truly are words of wisdom (he said to them "I speak as to wise men"). In this then he is asking us to use wisdom and grow in wisdom by reflecting on his words of instruction. And so, he begins with, "The cup of blessing which we bless." Three thoughts on what this may mean arise. The first is that the cup is the means by which we receive a blessing. In other words, we are blessed as we partake of the cup. The second is that the cup is a cup by which we bless the Lord. And the third is that this is a Hebraism (a Hebrew term) which describes the cup.

Scholars argue over which is intended by Paul, but in actuality all three ideas have merit. The first is certainly true in one sense. We *have been* blessed (past tense) through receiving Christ, but yet we are commanded to participate in the Lord's Supper as well. Paul will note this in the coming chapter. The Lord surely looks with favor upon those who partake of this holy sacrament as He instructed us to do. The second concept has merit also. We offer our praise and thanks back to the Lord when we are obedient to His directive. Our taking of the cup is an act of blessing *toward Him* in this regard. And finally, the term "the cup of blessing" is comparable to what is mentioned in Psalm 116 -

"I will take up the cup of salvation,  
And call upon the name of the LORD." Psalm 116:13

In this psalm, the term *cos yeshuot*, or the "cup of salvation" is used. This actually then forms a pun on the name of Jesus, which is Yeshua. The "cup of Yeshua" was anticipated in the 116th Psalm. In other words -

"I will take up the cup of Jesus,  
And call upon the name of Jehovah."

It is an Old Testament picture of the incarnation of Jehovah in the Person of Jesus. Paul then is using the "cup of blessing," or *cos haberakha*, as a Hebraism - the cup stands in regard to the "state of blessing" just as the psalm's cup stood in regard to the "state of salvation." It is this "cup of blessing which we bless" that Paul equates to "the communion of the blood of Christ." This brings to remembrance the words of the Lord (which Paul will explain in the coming chapter) that the cup is His blood. But what does that exactly mean?

Because He held a cup of wine in His hand when He said that, it is intended to mean that it is a picture of His death, not a literal nor a spiritual drinking of His blood. Paul confirms this in his words of chapter 11 when he says that in the meal "you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." It is a *picture* of the suffering of the Lord; a remembrance of His work.

After this, Paul notes that, "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" Again, this is a pictorial remembrance of the broken body of Christ. Jesus held the bread in His hands and said, "This is my body." It is not His literal body, nor is it a spiritual body. Instead, it is a symbolic representation of His death. And in that death, we share "the communion." The Greek word for "communion" is *koinōnia*. It is a "participation" or a "fellowship" in this wondrous act. As Vincent's word studies notes concerning the Passover observed by the Jewish people in relation to the Lord's Supper, "The Passover was celebrated by families, typifying an unbroken fellowship of those who formed one body, with the God who had passed by the blood-sprinkled doors."

There is no reason to assume that we either literally eat the body of Christ (Catholic transubstantiation), nor that we somehow spiritually partake of the blood of Christ, becoming sharers in His divine life (Calvinist doctrine). When we call on Christ, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit and it is in that act that we share in His divine life. The cup and the bread as noted by Paul here are symbolic representations of that awesome position in which we stand.

Finally, there is curiosity by many as to why Paul places the cup first in this verse instead of the bread first as other verses place it. The most likely reason is that Paul took the extra time to deal with and explain the bread (verse 17) and so he dispensed with the matter of the cup first.

*I will take up the cup of salvation in my hand  
And I will call upon the name of the Lord  
It is in the name of Jesus where I take my stand  
And in His name, I am attentive to God's word*

*For He is the very Word of Life, this I know  
And in Him alone can I live and grow*

*I will take up the cup of blessing in my hand  
And in the name of Jesus will I ever bless my God  
It is in His name alone where I take my stand  
And in Him alone will I fellowship in the path I trod*

*How can it be, O great and awesome God, that You have come and united with Your own creation in order to redeem Your fallen children? It is beyond my comprehension and yet it is what Your word proclaims. And so, I place my faith, my trust, my hope, and my eternal soul in the Lamb who was slain to ransom me from the grasp of the devil. I thank You and I praise You for all You have done. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

**For we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of that one bread. 1 Corinthians 10:17**

In this verse, Paul builds upon the thought that, "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" He just stated this and now begins with "for we" in order to continue and expand upon those words. There is a grand church, filled with many people from many cultures and places. It is filled with men and women, young and old, and from people of every color. And yet, despite this diversity, we "are one bread *and* one body." The word "and" is not in the original and so a semicolon shows the thought better - "We are one bread; one body."

And the reason for this is that "we all partake of that one bread." Paul just showed that the bread is to be considered "communion" with "the body of Christ." Bread is made of many individual kernels of grain and yet it becomes one unified substance. Likewise, we are individually many people and yet we are "one bread" when we are in Christ. This brings up an obvious question - "Does the taking of the communion bread *result* in our being one body?" The question is important because it is the basis for what Paul is writing about in the first place.

In the coming verses, Paul is going to tell the Corinthians (and thus us) "I do not want you to have fellowship with demons." He will say this in relation to participating in sacrifices to idols and then he will build on that by saying, "... you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons." If thought through logically then, the actual bread is not what makes us "one bread." Rather it is the reception of Jesus Christ as Savior that unites us. The bread then is a symbolic representation of this. It is our way of remembering this bond and communing with the Lord in that remembrance.

And so, why is this important? The answer is that 1) It makes no sense for a non-believer to participate in the Lord's Supper. 2) The Lord's Supper is a symbolic participation only; it is not literally the Body of Christ (Roman Catholicism), nor does it mean that we are "spiritually" united with Christ when we take the elements (Calvin). If these were so, then anyone who was a non-believer would be either literally or spiritually communing with the Lord during the reception of the elements. Paul excludes this.

His words here are intended to instruct us that communion is a public demonstration of an inward reality, just as baptism is to be an outward proclamation of a change that has been rendered in one's life. Both are after-the-fact pictures and remembrances of the work of the Lord. Therefore, if we were to eat at the sacrifice of an idol (not the meat itself, but at the ritual of the sacrifice) then we are indicating to those around us that we are willing participants in that particular society or religion, including everything that it constitutes. And yet, if we are truly saved Christians, that participation has no true bearing on our position in Christ. Therefore, the consumption of the meat of the sacrifice cannot be the actual participation with that demon to which it is offered.

This may seem to be splitting hairs, but to Paul it is an immensely important theological distinction that he will explain in detail in verse 23-33. We can eat (as Paul clearly states and allows) the meat that was sacrificed to an idol without any conscience that it will defile us because it cannot defile us. In the same way, a person who is not saved and yet takes the elements of the Lord's Supper cannot be made holy through those elements. It is the *participation* in the ritual that Paul is especially concerned with, not the actual element that is used.

Life application: The careful evaluation of the details which build into a biblical doctrine are important for many reasons. If they are misinterpreted or misunderstood, then further departures from the truth of Christ are inevitable. Eventually, entire systems of improperly administered teachings will prevail. As Paul said earlier in 1 Corinthians "a little leaven leavens the whole lump." He repeats this in Galatians 5 and equates it directly with proper doctrine.

*Lord God, help my doctrine to be pure and undefiled. Give me wisdom to understand Your word and not to depart from it such as adding anything to it which You have not ordained or taking away from it something which You require of us. Seeing how just a small departure can lead to enormous heresy, I would ask that You send me proper teachers who will exalt Your word alone and who would rightly divide it and carefully present it. Thank You for responding to this most important matter. Amen.*

**Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? 1 Corinthians 10:18**

Paul has been speaking about the Lord's Supper and our partaking of it. How does that fit in with participating in pagan sacrifices? To do both would be completely contrary to the purpose of partaking in the Lord's Supper. As an example for them to consider, he now brings in a lesson from the law itself. In this, he begins with, "Observe Israel after the flesh." This is an unfortunate translation when rendered by the NIV and some other translations which say something like "Consider the people of Israel." In Greek it reads *blepete ton israel kata sarka* - "Consider Israel according to the flesh." He is making a statement about Israel who participated in the sacrifices at the Temple, regardless of whether they were really right with God or not, hence the term "according to the flesh."

All of Israel would go to Jerusalem and offer their offerings to God. Some truly believed and some simply went through the motions, but the sacrifices brought the people together as one. It separated them as a people and showed their united allegiance under the God whom they served. When they went to these sacrifices, they actually participated in most of them. Some, such as the sin offering, were completely burnt up. But most of them were handled differently as Paul notes in the form of a rhetorical question, "Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" The question demands an affirmative answer. "Yes, they are."

A portion of the sacrifice was burned on the altar, a portion of it was given to the priest who conducted the ritual, and the rest of the offering was returned to the one who offered it for him (and his family if applicable) to eat. In this, he participated in what was offered. But it wasn't mere participation, instead the word Paul uses is *koinonoi*. It was a communion with the altar, just as we commune in the Lord's Supper.

Regardless of whether these Israelites were "circumcised in the heart" or merely national Israelites who were only going through the motions, their sacrifices were a communion with the altar and they were thus identified with that altar, with the people of Israel, and with the God to whom the sacrifices were made. If this was the perception

by all who saw them as they offered, and if it was also the perception of their fellow Israelites who looked at one another as a corporate body, then doesn't our participation in the Lord's supper convey the same concepts? Likewise, what would people think if they saw us at the sacrifice to an idol?

Regardless of whether the idol is a true god or not (and we know that it isn't), that is irrelevant to the perception we are giving others by our actions if we participate in such a sacrifice when it is made. Paul shows that our actions have consequences because they produce perceptions in the eyes of others which may become a stumbling-block to them.

Life application: Paul shows us that the conscience of others is an important consideration for us as we conduct ourselves as Christians. We need to be understanding of others in our actions which could cause them to misunderstand our freedoms in Christ. However, this does not include all things that people may find offensive. If someone doesn't like something we do, like eating meat because they are vegetarians, that is their problem and not ours. Discernment and understanding of what could be considered a stumbling-block to others takes time to learn.

*Lord give me discernment in order to know  
What actions may harm the faith of another  
In this walk with You, it is my desire to show  
What is right in order to instruct my brother*

*Let me not be the cause of him to stumble  
But instead help me to be a good guide to show him Jesus  
What good is it to the team if I make the ball fumble  
That can only harm the goal set before us*

*And so, O God, help me to stick close to Your word  
And to always bring honor to Jesus my Lord*

*Heavenly Father, help my actions to be right and pure in Your eyes. Grant me the wisdom to conduct myself in a way which will keep others from stumbling in their own desire to know if You are God. Likewise keep me from hindering another's growth in You if they already have faith in You. In all things, let me not diminish You in the eyes of others, but to exalt You and bring You the glory You deserve. Amen.*

**What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? 1 Corinthians 10:19**

In 1 Corinthians 8:4, Paul affirmed that an idol is actually nothing. The fact that man worships something other than the Creator in no way means that it is anything other than the material it is comprised of - metal, wood, flesh, etc. In reality, it is an ineffective lie. Isaiah even uses that term when speaking of idols -

And no one considers in his heart,  
Nor *is there* knowledge nor understanding to say,  
"I have burned half of it in the fire,  
Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals;  
I have roasted meat and eaten *it*;  
And shall I make the rest of it an abomination?  
Shall I fall down before a block of wood?"  
<sup>20</sup> He feeds on ashes;  
A deceived heart has turned him aside;  
And he cannot deliver his soul,  
Nor say, "*Is there* not a lie in my right hand?" Isaiah 44:19, 20

Understanding this, Paul made the affirmation that, "an idol *is* nothing in the world" and that "*there is* no other God but one" (1 Corinthians 8:4). Since that time though, Paul has been using examples of God's judgment on Israel for following after idols. And then in the verse preceding this one he said, "Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" With this noted, some might come to the conclusion that he is equating the participation in an idolatrous sacrifice with that of the participation in the true temple sacrifices.

And so, he asks, "What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything?" His answer is, "No," and it is not what he is indicating. Rather, he is showing that the participation in the true temple sacrifices produced a bond between the people. "Israel after the flesh" was united as one, regardless of whether they actually believed in God or not. They went to the feasts, sacrificed at the temple, and ate of their offerings. Thus they were united in their rituals. If a believer were to join with pagans in their sacrifices, those pagans would feel this person was united to them in their belief. Thus he would appear to validate the idol as something even though it is "nothing in the world."

Life application: Our business is to exalt Christ, not idols, demons, angels, Mary, the saints, or anything or anyone else. Let us then exalt Christ, through whom God will receive His just glory.

*Lord God, today I would pray that when people see me, they would say "That guy is a reasonable fellow and he really believes in Christ Jesus. I want some of what he has got." Use me, O God, to lead others to Christ. Amen.*

**Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. 1 Corinthians 10:20**

In this, Paul makes a contrast to his previous thought. It read, "What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything?" The meat which had been sacrificed to an idol was merely meat, nothing more. In the verses ahead he will show that we can eat such meat without regard to our conscience (verse 27). However, to ensure that he isn't misunderstood, he does acknowledge that food sacrificed to idols is nothing and then immediately inserts "rather."

The meat is unchanged, but the sacrifice itself is wholly inappropriate to participate in. His words to support this are almost a reflection of a verse from Deuteronomy 32. In that passage, Moses speaks of the people sacrificing to false gods which are not God and thus they "forgot the God who gave" them birth. Here are his words -

"They sacrificed to demons, not to God,  
To gods they did not know,  
To new gods, new arrivals  
That your fathers did not fear.

<sup>18</sup> Of the Rock *who* begot you, you are unmindful,  
And have forgotten the God who fathered you." Deuteronomy 32:17, 18

By participating in a pagan sacrifice, they are turning from God to a non-god who is actually a demon. If the ritual isn't to God, then it must be to either the devil or a force under the control of the devil. This is the battle we are constantly facing; a spiritual battle against wicked powers. We are told about this in Ephesians 6. There Paul describes the reality of the situation as well as the protection we are to take against it. In verse 12, he says this -

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*."

As this is the reality of our actions, we should never presume to attend a pagan sacrifice. Paul warns against it because, as he says, "I do not want you to have fellowship with demons." Rather, we are to live in holiness and the exalting of the true God through our worship of Jesus Christ.

Life application: We cannot participate in pagan rituals and come out unscathed. Stand on the word, cling to the Lord, and fix your eyes and thoughts on Him alone.

*Precious heavenly Father, there are so many temptations in this life that creep in when I least expect them. How often I walk along, fellowshiping with You and feeling like I have everything under control. But then all of a sudden, I find myself thinking about or even acting on something which is completely contrary to what You would have for me. Then, I am reminded of my failings and my need to cling to You. Please give my fingers the strength to cling and never let go. And I will also remember that You have Your strong hand on me as well. I am secure in You because of Christ my Lord. Thank You for this assurance. Amen.*

**You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. 1 Corinthians 10:21**

Paul, having established that a believer who participates in a pagan ritual would actually be fellowshiping with demons admonishes the Corinthians that, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons." His words do not indicate an impossibility of physically carrying out such an action. Rather, they indicate the moral impossibility of it. This is certain because of what he will say in the next verse. We can actually do what he is warning against, but if we do then we are severing a tie of fellowship with the Lord when we do it. As he says in his second epistle -

"...what accord has Christ with Belial?" 2 Corinthians 6:15

The answer is that there is no accord between the two. By participating in pagan rituals, we stand alone with the demon and apart from Christ. This is because "you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons." It is an "either/or" situation. The severity of our actions in this matter is noted by Paul in the next chapter. There he

will say the following which is a precept that certainly includes the instruction he is now giving -

"Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." 1 Corinthians 11:27-29

In fact, Paul continues in this same set of verses noting the consequences of such actions. They were consequences already seen among the Corinthians -

"For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. <sup>31</sup> For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world."

-1 Corinthians 11:30-32

We must take care in how we conduct ourselves. The Lord protects His name jealously and is never pleased when His saved children bring discredit upon it.

Having said this, it should be noted that Paul's words here record the first instance of the words "the Lord's table." This terminology has been used by faithful followers of Christ for 2000 years as we have proclaimed "the Lord's death till He comes." The taking of communion in observance of this is one of the two ordinances commanded by the Lord - baptism and the Lord's Supper. Be sure to partake of this with gratitude and humility.

Life application: The Lord's Supper is a high honor to participate in. Some churches offer it a couple times a year, some once every month or two, but there is nothing wrong and everything right with taking it every time a congregation comes together. It is a continual reminder of the wondrous work of Christ for us.

*Lord, when I come to the table and receive the elements of my faith, I am humbled and honored to know what they represent. In Your perfection, You came and fulfilled the law which stood against us and which condemned us. And then, in Your great grace and mercy, You gave Your perfect life in exchange for my sins. They are nailed to the cross along with the law. In You I am set free. I thank You and honor You, and I proclaim Your death until You come again as I receive the bread and wine. Thank You for this privilege. Amen.*

## Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

1 Corinthians 10:22

As noted in the previous verse, we were told that we "cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons" and that we "cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons." In follow up to those words of instruction, Paul's question is, "Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?" In other words, by doing this thing which is morally wrong, we will with all certainty provoke the Lord to jealousy. It is the obvious result of participating in idolatry. In the giving of the 10 Commandments, the people of Israel were told explicitly that the Lord is a jealous God. This is stated in the fourth verse –

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; <sup>5</sup> you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God." Exodus 20:4, 5

Likewise, a few chapters later in Exodus, the Lord expresses His name as "Jealous." It is the strongest tie possible to the nature of Himself in relation to His redeemed people -

"...for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name *is* Jealous, *is* a jealous God." Exodus 34:14

And in a thought directly from the Song of Moses, we see how idolatry is exactly what provoked the Lord to jealousy after they were redeemed from the land of Egypt. It was a constant source of irritation to Him as He led them through the wilderness -

"They have provoked Me to jealousy by *what* is not God;  
They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols." Deuteronomy 32:21

These words of instruction as well as the words of chastisement were given to the people in order to get them to wake up to the holiness of the Lord and their need to cling to Him alone, forsaking all other "gods" which are not gods at all. Though the Law of Moses is now obsolete in Christ and is set aside by His work, we are dealing with the same holy Lord. His nature does not change and our relationship to Him in this regard also does not change. This is the intent of Paul's words which ask, "Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?"

And in order to solidify that, he finishes this verse with the question, "Are we stronger than He?" Vincent's word studies notes that, "The force of the interrogative particle is,

surely we are not stronger." In other words, it is an exclamation even though it is put in the form of a question. "We (definitely) are not stronger than He!" He judged His redeemed people Israel and we can expect the exact same Judge's hand when we fall into idolatry. Let us heed this warning.

Life application: In Christ, we have a new relationship which goes far beyond that of ancient Israel. We have a salvation which can never be lost and which unites us to Him so that we are one body. Because of this, we might feel that we are safe from judgment. This is not the case. Later in 2 Corinthians, Paul will speak of the time when we stand before Christ in order to receive our judgment. When that time comes, let us be found approved and not lose the wondrous heavenly rewards that would otherwise be granted to us. Our salvation is secure, but our rewards and losses are being earned through our present walk with Christ.

*O Lord - how often do I wake up and find that my strength for the day ahead is lacking. And it's not just physical strength, but sometimes it's my emotions or my internal motivation to meet the unfriendly prospects of relationships, job problems, or even some minor responsibility that I feel pressured by. And yet, as soon as I start reading Your word and thinking about Your strong hand of guidance that is with me, I begin to forget my troubles. Because You are with me, what can man do to me! I have all the strength I need and it comes from You. Thank You for this knowledge each day as I rise. Thank You. Amen.*

**All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. 1 Corinthians 10:23**

Paul reveals his thoughts on the delicate matter of eating meat sacrificed to idols in a verse which carries the same tone as he previously made in chapter 6. There he said -

"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." 1 Corinthians 6:12

In agreement with the thought that "all things are lawful for me," Paul will issue words to confirm that idea in verses 25-27. The Christian has the liberty to act in ways that demonstrate Christ's fulfillment of the law. We have been freed from restrictions once imposed upon us by that law. However, in agreement with the thought that "not all things are helpful," Paul will issue words to confirm that idea in verses 28 & 29.

There is the truth that our liberties are intended to grant us individual freedoms, and there is the truth that our individual freedoms should not be exercised when they negatively affect the sensibilities of others. Where "all things are lawful" there is the truth that "not all things edify." And if something doesn't edify, then it may actually be destructive. We have to consider the effect of our actions towards others if we are to demonstrate love towards them.

In a wise choice of words, McLaren gives us these thoughts concerning Paul's doctrine -

"He did not keep his 'theology' and his ethics in separate water-tight compartments, having no communication with each other. The greatest truths were used to regulate the smallest duties. Like the star that guided the Magi, they burned high in the heavens, but yet directed to the house in Bethlehem."

Life application: Let us use our freedoms in Christ wisely and for edification. When there is no conflict between what we may do and how it will negatively affect others, then go forward with a clear conscience. But if such a conflict arises, be wise, discerning, and considerate towards those whom we may offend. However, if our actions which uphold a biblical mandate are found to be offensive, that is another issue. We are never to compromise Christian doctrine for the sake of "tolerance."

*Heavenly Father, today I ask for wisdom in how I conduct myself in regards to my Christian freedoms. Help me never to offend by what is allowed but not necessary. But at the same time, help me never to compromise what is required at the expense of offense. Above all, my heart desires to show others Your grace while also showing them my obedience to You. I know this can't be done without knowing Your word, so please continue to reveal it to me for right doctrine and right practice. Thanking You in advance for hearing my request, I praise You. Amen.*

**Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.** 1 Corinthians 10:24

The words used by Paul here are still given in relation to food which has been sacrificed to idols, but they form a general principle for any debatable issue. He has already revealed that an idol is nothing, and he has also shown that participating in the sacrifice to an idol aligns a person with that idol and with those who sacrifice to it (even though the idol is nothing). He has shown a distinction between the meat and the ritual, but some may not perceive that distinction. They may tie the two together in their thought process and come to an incorrect conclusion concerning the eating of such meat.

In order to avoid such a stumbling-block in a person like this, Paul will continue to give words for us to consider. Remember, these words follow a general principle even though he is discussing a particular issue. In the end, love should be the first consideration as we conduct our actions before others.

As a side note, the word "well-being" is inserted for clarity, but it is a good choice of wording. Other versions say "good," "welfare," "advantage," and so on. The old King James Version says "wealth." When it was written, it meant more than what wealth means today and it implied a general sense of well-being. However, as times go by, words evolve and they no longer carry the same signification they once did. This is why it's always good to check with multiple versions and not get myopically fixed on one translation lest misunderstandings arise.

Life application: When we seek out our own well-being first, it is inevitable that others will receive less esteem than they should. It is impossible to exalt ourselves above others while exalting others above ourselves. Thus, we should walk in humility and defer honor to those around us. As the Lord says, "...whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

*Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king  
And do not stand in the place of the great  
For it is better that to your ear he sing  
"Come up here to a higher position, good mate!"*

*Humility is a noble and dignified trait  
And something which is highly esteemed by the Lord  
In due time He will exalt you, so patiently wait  
Until the day when He speaks to you a goodly word*

*Be patient and walk in a humble way  
Exalt others and do not your own esteem hunt for  
By doing so you will receive His favor some wondrous day  
When you are brought through heaven's open door*

*Lord Jesus, help me to be good to those around me and to place others above myself. I know Your word asks me to do this, but my human nature often gets in the way. Keep me from a boasting heart and the desire to stand above others. Instead, grant me humility and kindness to those I come in contact with. I know with this You will be well-pleased. Amen.*

**Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake;**  
1 Corinthians 10:25

Paul's words in this verse take us right back to the discussion of verse 17 which said, "For we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of that one bread." In that analysis, the question was raised, "Does the taking of the communion bread *result* in our being one body?" Paul's answer here shows that the answer is "No." He instructs the Corinthians (and thus the Gentile-led church) to "eat whatever is sold in the meat market." When we go shopping, there is nothing sold there which is forbidden. If we see a tasty delight of whatever kind of meat and regardless of where it came from, including from the sacrifice at an idol's temple, it is simply meat. If the eating of the meat (comparable to the taking of the bread) resulted in our being united to the idol, then we couldn't follow through with Paul's instruction. However, meat is meat and bread is bread. The eating of either doesn't result in our being united to the idol (meat) or united to Christ (bread).

Rather, it is the participation in the ceremony which others would see and thus identify us with the entity represented by the sacrifice, whether we actually were or not. Therefore, as perception is important for conscience' sake, we are to keep our conscience clear and at the same time we are to not negatively affect others' conscience through our actions. Understanding this, Paul continues with his thought by saying about our meat-shopping experience, "asking no questions for conscience' sake."

If we ask questions about the meat, what will the result be? If it was first sacrificed to an idol and that knowledge was passed on to us, it would then become a point of conscience, not merely of eating. But what if it wasn't sacrificed to an idol? It would make no difference at all. And so, we see that either way by not asking then no matter of conscience is connected to the meat. The meat doesn't change by the sacrifice; the meat in relation to us changes by the conscience (perception) of what the sacrifice means.

In this, we can see the truth of the statement "Ignorance is bliss." There is no defiling of our conscience by having others assume that we are participating in an idol's sacrifice, and there is no defiling of another's conscience by their assumption that it makes any difference at all to us about where the meat came from.

Life application: When Paul wrote to those in Corinth about buying meat, he said that we should "eat whatever is sold in the meat market." Two obvious points come up which have been shunned by many sects and cults.

- 1) The meat sold does not in any way adhere to the dietary laws found within the Law of Moses. And so,
- 2) the *type of meat* also does not in any way adhere to the dietary laws found within the Law of Moses.

If your church, pastor, denomination, etc., tells you that you shouldn't eat any type of meat (pork is always a good example), it's time to leave and find a new place to worship. Paul is rather clear here.

*Heavenly Father, I thank You that even though I don't adhere to the dietary laws of the Old Testament, I am still considered clean in Your eyes. My obedience isn't found in rituals and observances, but rather it is found in the fulfillment of those laws by Another. My trust is in the finished work of Christ, not in my pitiful attempt to meet standards that no one has ever met except Him alone. It is with great thanks that I can rest in Him and be found faultless in Your eyes. Surely He has done all things well! Hallelujah and Amen.*

**...for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness." 1 Corinthians 10:26**

This completes the thought of the previous verse. Read together, they say, "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for 'the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness.'"

This thought is seen first in Deuteronomy 10:14. It is then repeated twice in the psalms in both Psalm 24:1 and Psalm 50:11. The idea is that there is one Creator, and everything stems from His act of creation. Therefore, anything offered to an idol (which is nothing in all the world), isn't changed by that idol. It was an animal created by God and it has been given to man to eat. Only during the time of the law were dietary restrictions imposed on man - for a set purpose and a set time which ended when Christ fulfilled the law.

Now all food is considered clean and acceptable to eat. This is shown to be true in the account recorded in Acts chapter 10 and which is explained throughout the writings of Paul, such as in 1 Timothy 4:4, 5 –

"For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

Therefore, whatever is sold in the meat market is acceptable and may be eaten without regard to conscience. Paul will continue explaining this in the verses ahead and noting the exceptions as he goes.

Life application: The food we eat has been given by God for our sustenance. Whatever you eat, be sure to give a prayer of thanks over it, thus acknowledging that it is Christ who has made it clean. After that, enjoy your meal!

*Lord God, I want to thank You for the great variety of food You have given us. It is a wonderful thing to sit down and enjoy all the tasty delights You have given to excite our palate. Just like the fields which are adorned with a thousand splashes of color, You have adorned our plates with variety beyond measure. I can be sure that You truly revel in our happiness when I taste the many flavors You have created for us. Thank You for Your attentive care to our daily meals! Amen.*

**If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake.**

1 Corinthians 10:27

The previous thought that was given concerned buying meat at the market. About this, we learned that we could "eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake." When something looks tasty there at the meat market, we should feel no constraints on buying it and enjoying it. The next line of thought concerns an invitation to dinner by a non-believer. The assumption is that this is speaking of a private house or maybe an invite out to dinner at a restaurant, not an idol's temple (which has already been addressed).

If a non-believer invites us out in such a manner, and if we desire to go, then we are given complete freedom to do so. There is nothing that would forbid a Christian from going out for a meal with a non-believer. While out, we are also given the freedom to "eat whatever is set before you." It doesn't matter what has been prepared - all foods are acceptable to be eaten and none are considered "unclean" in and of themselves. This is so plainly clear and explicit that only an intentional twisting of Scripture can come to any other conclusion. But Paul adds on a restriction to the meal. We are to ask, "no question for conscience' sake." He will explain what this means in the coming verse.

Having noted this, commentators have attempted to insert personal opinions which do not align with Paul's words here. A couple should be highlighted. Some say that the thought "and you desire to go" is an insert which indicates that Paul was somehow

implying that it wasn't a smart choice, but that it is allowable none-the-less. This requires inserting a presupposition which is not supported by the entire context of the passage. Going back as far as 1 Corinthians 5, we read this -

"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.  
<sup>10</sup> Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. <sup>11</sup> But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person."

-1 Corinthians 5:9-11

There is absolutely nothing wrong with associating with the unsaved and Paul makes that perfectly clear. A second thought concerning the verse we are analyzing is that of drinking. Some commentators state that because Paul says, "eat whatever is set before you," but fails to mention the word "drink" it implies that Paul was a teetotaler and was indicating that the Christian should not consider imbibing if so offered. This is a complete misuse of Scripture based on a faulty presupposition. Paul has been addressing meats sacrificed to idols and he is continuing along with that thought. "Eating" a meal implies all that the meal includes.

If one doesn't drink alcohol, then they may refuse what is offered. If one does, there is nothing in Scripture to forbid partaking along with the host. Presuppositions inevitably lead to faulty doctrine and bad analyses of Scripture. It is inappropriate to use personal standards against others when providing Scriptural interpretation. This has nothing to do with "promoting" the drinking of alcohol. Rather, it has to do with promoting a sound interpretation which is consistent with Scripture.

Life application: Presuppositions need to be set aside when analyzing Scripture. If one doesn't eat certain meats, that is no excuse for imposing that standard on another. If one doesn't drink alcohol, that is no excuse for attempting to shame others into not drinking it. It is Scripture, given by God, from which we are to derive our doctrine.

*Heavenly Father, how often I feel as if I've let You down in my daily walk. I carry along with me the thought of things I wish I hadn't said or done, and it puts up a wall in my mind which keeps You out. But because of Jesus, I know the wall is of my own making. You have provided everything necessary for me to always be in fellowship with You. And so, help me to remember to leave these burdens behind and to go forward knowing that*

*in Christ I am already forgiven for my many faults. Thank You for this assurance I have because of the cross of Jesus. Amen.*

**But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness." 1 Corinthians 10:28**

Paul just got done telling the Corinthians that if they were invited to a meal by a non-believer and wanted to go, that they should feel free to eat anything set before them and to not ask questions about it. It is merely food, and it is to be received as such. However, he now qualifies that, beginning with the word "but." This is to show that there are exceptions to how we conduct ourselves. And so, he begins with "But if anyone says to you..." Most scholars interpret this to be speaking of a weak Christian who is making the statement. That could be true, but the speaker isn't identified and if he is just any attendee at the meal, then how could this be known?

Instead, it could be anyone at the meal, the host, a family member, a servant, or another Christian. The passage is left vague enough to show us that regardless of who speaks, the principle he will convey will remain true. And so, if such a person says, "This was offered to idols," then Paul's instructions are "do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake."

What this means is that the person who speaks, be it the host or a weak Christian or anyone else, may be harmed by your consumption of the food. If it is a non-believer, they may feel that to you Jesus must be just another "god." They will not come to understand your conviction that Jesus is truly Lord of all. If it is a weak believer, then their conscience toward Christ may also be harmed. They may question how the Lord, upon whom they called, is to be considered on par with the idol to whom the meat was sacrificed. Remember from earlier in chapter 10 that this is what Paul was referring to. People are associated with the idol when they participate in the sacrifice of the idol.

Because of this perception, we are not to eat meat which has been so identified "for conscience' sake." Paul will show in the coming verse that he is not worried about the conscience of the well-grounded believer, but of someone who doesn't understand our freedom in Christ. In advance of that, he reaffirms that "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness." This is an undeniable truth that the well-grounded believer can attest to. Because of this, his conscience is undefiled by what he eats. However, his actions in the eyes of others may be misunderstood.

Life application: If you understand that Christ alone is Lord, then you have the freedom to enjoy the world which He is Lord of. But such freedom comes with responsibility towards others who may be weak in their faith. It is not acceptable to exercise your freedoms while harming others in the process.

*Lord God, it is so wonderful to know that the world is Yours, including all that it contains. You have complete control over it, and everything is occurring as it should. When I see the many terrifying things which are happening around me, I have the assurance that it is temporary and I have the confidence that You have it all under control. I shall not fear what comes my way because I have my hope and trust in You. Amen.*

**“Conscience,” I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another *man’s* conscience? 1 Corinthians 10:29**

In the previous two verses, we were instructed that if we are invited to dinner, we can eat whatever is set before us, asking no question about it for conscience' sake. However, if someone were to say that the food was sacrificed to an idol, then we shouldn't eat it, again for conscience' sake. In this verse Paul explains that by saying "'Conscience,' I say, not your own but that of the other."

He has gone to great lengths to show that an idol is nothing and therefore it can have no effect on the food we eat. The meat doesn't magically transfer into something else, nor is there anything which adheres to the meat which would cause us to somehow become defiled. It is meat and nothing more. Therefore, with this knowledge, our conscience should never be affected by what we consume. However, the conscience of others may be affected.

If we eat meat that has been openly acknowledged as having been sacrificed to an idol, then those who know that we are Christians might think we are condoning the practice of sacrificing to an idol. Thus, their conscience will be defiled. Whether they are non-believers or weak believers, the result will be a defiling of the truth of Christ in their minds. This is what Paul is conveying.

And to complete this verse he says, "For why is my liberty judged by another *man’s* conscience?" He states this to show why it is not for our conscience's sake but for the sake of the other's conscience. We have full liberty in Christ because Christ is Lord. The earth is His and from Him came all things. Those who are strong in their faith know this and therefore their conscience will not be defiled by the knowledge that the food they are eating was sacrificed to idols. We also know that another man's weak conscience or

unclear thinking on an issue is not the source for judging our liberties in Christ. Rather, our superior knowledge should be the basis of our actions towards them.

Just because someone thinks we are doing something wrong has no bearing on whether we are actually doing something wrong. We are accountable to Christ alone and not to the conscience of another. As we know this, then we should be willing to sacrifice our liberties for the sake of another who doesn't know these things.

Life application: Once again, Paul shows that there are no foods that are unclean to the Christian. The issue of what is physically healthy isn't addressed by the Bible. The issue of what is morally acceptable is, and all foods are morally acceptable. However, there is the issue of the conscience of others. If our liberties cause them a moral dilemma, then we need to refrain from engaging in them until our position is explained and understood.

*Lord God, You have said in Your word that there is one way and only one way to be reconciled to You, through Your Son Jesus Christ. I will stand on the truth of this message above all else. You are not confused, and neither should I be. What You have spoken is what I will proclaim. What is most amazing is that You would even provide one way. The infinite grace displayed in the giving of Your Son is more than I can grasp. All hail the Lamb of God. All hail the name of Jesus. Amen.*

**But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for *the food* over which I give thanks? 1 Corinthians 10:30**

Paul has been referring to eating or not eating meat based on conscience, not personal conscience, but the conscience of another. If they are going to be negatively affected in their understanding of the work of Christ, then refraining from eating is the proper course to take. And yet, in the last verse he closed with, "For why is my liberty judged by another *man's* conscience?" The answer is that it should not be so judged. We have liberties and we are free to exercise them, knowing that the Lord has accepted us.

And so, we have two sides to the coin presented. The first is that of not harming another's conscience and the second is that we should be firm and fixed in our beliefs. In regards to that second premise, he says, "But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for *the food* over which I give thanks?" He indicates that the food is acceptable, he has given thanks to the Lord for it, and nobody should charge him with wrongdoing when he has done nothing wrong. The food should be eaten without further anxiety. The Pulpit Commentary does a good job of explaining this -

"He desiderated more considerateness and self denial on the one side; and on the other, a more robust and instructed faith, he would always tolerate the scruples of the weak, but would not suffer either weakness or strength to develop itself into a vexatious tyranny."

In other words, Paul was one to acknowledge that there are weak believers or uninformed non-believers that needed to be accommodated, but there are also contrarians that will perpetually nitpick another person to the point where they subjugate them to their every whim. They will do this just for the sake of being bossy or demonstrating a "holier than thou" attitude. One must be discerning and not let such people ruin the joy we have in the Lord or rob us of our freedoms.

In everything, we are to consider our standing in Christ and work as best as we can within that position. It is a precept that he laid out in Romans 14 and which he is reiterating to the Corinthians in his letter to them. Here are his words to those in Rome -

"Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; <sup>17</sup> for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> For he who serves Christ in these things *is* acceptable to God and approved by men." Romans 14:16-18

Life application: It is our duty to be considerate to those around us who are truly weaker in the faith and who lack in the knowledge of the Lord. However, it is also our responsibility to not let people who willingly act in a contrary manner toward our freedoms in Christ rob us of our joy. If someone is shown the truth of a matter, such as that all foods are acceptable, and they still charge you with wrongdoing, then ignore them. Enjoy your lobster and let them eat peas.

*Lord God, everyday the news seems to get worse and worse. It seems that bad news and uncertainty prevail. There is anxiety and there is confusion everywhere. And yet, Your book is written, and it says that there is good news ahead for those who put their trust in You. I will not be shaken in my faith even if the sky falls and the earth quakes. In You I have peace, contentment, and more than abundant joy. In You I have Christ my Lord. No worries here! Amen.*

**Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**  
1 Corinthians 10:31

This verse is commonly known as the Christian's great "first principle." Paul has been speaking about foods sacrificed to idols, our Christian liberties regarding that, and our need to consider others' conscience in the process. He has shown that by following this pattern which gives glory to God, we will be neither overly offensive towards others, nor complacent in our duties and responsibilities towards Him.

This then is the reason for the word "therefore." It looks over the entire discourse he has thus far penned on the Christian's responsibilities and sums them up in an all-inclusive statement. "Whether you eat or drink" covers everything he has written about concerning the issue of idols and our liberties and responsibilities regarding them. "Or whatever you do" adds in every aspect of our life; nothing is excepted. With each step we take, with each breath we breathe, with each day we go off to work, or with every penny we spend on the things we need or desire, nothing is exempt and everything is included. In all things we do, "do all to the glory of God."

Being filled with the Spirit is not an active process. Rather it is passive. We are sealed with the Spirit the moment we receive Christ as Lord. We have all the Spirit we will ever receive at that moment. But the Spirit can get more of us as we cede our life to Him. When we do, He fills the voids that exist in our humanity. As the Spirit is fully God, then He will only do in us that which glorifies Himself, and therefore God will be glorified. It is a synergistic relationship of us ceding to the will of God and allowing God to be glorified in the process through the Spirit's work.

Unfortunately, in what seems almost unappealing to most Christians, we cannot be in God's will if we don't know what His will is. Thus we must read, study, and practice what is given in His word. There is no "short cut" and no external injection of right knowledge which leads to right practice. Either we study and then put into practice His word, or we are not glorifying God as we should. This is an inescapable truth.

As a great summary of this verse, we can look to the eloquent words of Ellicott -

"The quality of each act depends on the spirit which guides it, and the motive from which it springs. The commonest thing may be done in a high Christian spirit. The greatest deed may spring from a low and selfish motive. A religious act done in a secular spirit is secular. A secular thing done in a religious spirit is religious. This is 'the great first principle' of Christian life."

Life application: Doing all things to the glory of God means that we must know what will bring glory to God. Knowing what will bring glory to God is knowing what God has

shown will bring glory to Him. Knowing what God has shown will bring glory to Him is knowing His word which is given for this purpose. Know your word; put your knowledge into practice; and give glory to God.

*Lord God, Your word says that in whatever I do, I am to do all to the glory of God. This is tougher than I dare to admit. My mind wanders, my thoughts roam to things that may not be holy, and my actions seem to overtake me by impulses that are hard to control. You know my limitations and my weaknesses. And so, Lord, strengthen me for this battle and give me the single-minded desire to fulfill this precept and to do everything for Your glory. It is what I wish, and I know it is what You desire. Be glorified through my actions. Amen.*

**Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God,**  
1 Corinthians 10:32

The words of this verse are clear and explicit. In giving no offense, we are seeking the glory of God and thus honoring Him. The reason for this is obvious. If it is God's will that none "should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9), then our avoiding offense in others is in line with God's will. Instead of chasing people away from Christ, we should be leading them to Christ. And to ensure that we don't misunderstand or misapply the precept to one category of people and not to another, he gives the all-encompassing thought that we are to act in like manner to either "the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God."

The Bible's two main categories of people are Jews and Gentiles (represented here by the term "Greeks"). We are to have the same standard for both categories, not holding ill-will towards the unconverted Jews as so many do. They have the same need for Christ as do the Gentiles. And then, as an additional category, Paul speaks also of the "church of God." In this, he has made a distinction between the unconverted (Jews and Greeks) and the converted (the church of God.)

Those in the church deserve the same care because there are differing levels of maturity. If offense is given to the weaker in the faith, it could cause them to stray from their faith. What a price to pay over something as trivial as eating a meal! It is our obligation to edify others, not tear them down.

Having noted that the words are clear and explicit, there is yet an obvious qualification which needs to be addressed. It is true that we are to "give no offense," but this is true in indifferent matters. We are never to forsake proper doctrine at the expense of

"offense." Tolerance quickly becomes the death knell for the sound Christian church. As soon as "tolerance" becomes of primary importance, doctrine can no longer be adhered to in a proper way. Thus, the church very rapidly becomes no church at all. The truths contained in the Bible are firm, fixed, and unchanging. Be ready to stand on biblical truth, even at the expense of offending others who are belligerent against it.

Life application: If your church won't stand on the truth of the Bible, it will quickly be no true church at all. An example of this is John 14:6 – "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" Either that is true, or it isn't. It is highly offensive to state to an unbeliever who rejects Jesus that they will never enter heaven's gates, but instead are destined for hell. However, Jesus has spoken, and the Bible has recorded His words. If a church will not proclaim this simple truth, it is not a true church at all. Stand on the Bible, be firm and fixed in your resolve to proclaim Christ, and be willing to take whatever abuse and insults will come your way because of it.

*Fixed and unchanging is the word of God  
It proclaims a message which must be adhered to  
Let us stand on its truths while in this life we tread  
Are you also willing this to do?*

*What is more important than obedience to the Lord?  
What profit is gaining the world and yet losing your soul?  
And so, be willing to accept the truth of God's word  
Fear not in obedience, for He is in control*

*He will exalt you for your faithful adherence to His book  
And will reward you for your willingness to proclaim it  
When you look back on the noble path that you took  
You will be honored that to His word you did submit*

*Heavenly Father, it seems like every day people get more confused about Your word. The world will find any and every reason to fight against its truths or to manipulate them so that evil rather than good is what they declare. Things once thought perverse are proclaimed as if they were Your will. Help me to stand firm on the truth of Your word and to never compromise pure, right, and holy doctrine - even if it means offense to others. I ask this that You will be glorified as is right and proper. Amen.*

**...just as I also please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved. 1 Corinthians 10:33**

In this paragraph, Paul has noted that everything we do should be to the glory of God and that we are to give no offence in the process. As shown though, that is concerning issues of conscience, not issues of doctrine. We are never asked to do something which will be at the expense of upholding right doctrine. But in those areas where conscience is an over-arching concern - be it "to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God" we should be willing to look to the example set before us; that of Christ who "did not please Himself" (Romans 15:3).

With Christ as our ultimate example, Paul notes that he had attempted to be like-minded and that we could use his example. And so, he notes "just as I also please all *men* in all *things*." Why would Paul note himself as an example, rather than stating it as he did in Romans 15:3? The answer is that Christ is an overall example to those who would follow Him. He is the Head of the church and the fulfillment of Scripture. But though He is the first example to the church, Paul is an example *within* the church. In other words, Paul's ministry included outreach to those outside the church for evangelism and those inside the church for doctrine and edification.

Therefore, there is nothing wrong when he uses himself as an example. He is showing how to act under the Headship of Christ, and he is doing it to please "all *men* in all *things*." In fact, he says "not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many." Rather than accepting the liberties that he had been granted in Christ, he was willing to forego the exercise of them and not tread on the conscience of another. He could have enjoyed certain meats, but he would abstain if it were to harm another's conscience. To him, finding joy in the Lord was more pleasing than finding joy in a banquet.

In all things, his hope was to bring about a great knowledge of Christ in others so "that they may be saved." This was his highest hope for all whom he met. If he could lead them to Christ, even if it meant doing so at the expense of his personal liberties, then to him it would have been worth it. Matthew Poole sums up this thought for the well-grounded believer. Yes, Christians have great liberty in Christ, but "... notwithstanding that liberty, yet they ought to have respect to the spiritual good and salvation of others, and to do that part which their judgments inform them will be, as least to the spiritual damage and detriment, so most to the spiritual good and profit, of the souls of others with whom they converse."

Life application: What is the value of another person's salvation? What is the value of another person's proper doctrine? Are we willing to destroy the chance of people coming to Christ simply because we "can" do something? Or would it be more prudent to stop and consider if our actions, though allowable, might be detrimental towards another person. We have been left here not to indulge ourselves in our freedoms in Christ, but to be examples to lead others to Christ.

*O God, there are those times where I could really kick myself for having done something stupid which might make others question my faith in You. What kind of an example am I of the title "Christian" when I demonstrate my failings in front of them? Help me to always consider this and to do those things which will make others want to seek You, not run from You because I have brought dishonor on Your great name. Help me in this Lord. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 11

**Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.** 1 Corinthians 11:1

Although this first verse of chapter 11 sums up the thoughts of chapter 10 in a succinct way, it is appropriate that it begins chapter 11. It is a good transition to the points that are ahead as much as it is a summary of the points which have already been made. As noted in the previous evaluation, there is nothing wrong with Paul asking others to imitate him. This is especially so because he follows up the thought immediately with "just as I also *imitate* Christ."

Paul's example is Christ. As this is so, then those who have learned from Paul can rightly use his example as one to emulate. He is an example within the church of Christ who is over the church. He isn't asking for eyes to be on him, but rather he is noting that his actions are in line with the expectations of Christ. And throughout his writings, it is Christ whom Paul both explains and exalts. In Philippians 2, he writes these words about Christ to the church -

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup> but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:5-11

He is the Head of the church and the fulfillment of Scripture. And though He is the first example to the church, Paul is an example *within* the church. In other words, Paul's ministry included outreach to those outside the church for evangelism and those inside the church for doctrine and edification.

Life application: Until the epistles were written, there was only verbal instruction and emulation of the conduct of the apostles and other disciples for believers to follow. Now, with the Bible complete, we have what we need to understand both in the example of Christ and how to be obedient to it. Further, we have the conduct of the apostles recorded - when they were in line with the truth, when they failed and were

rebuked for it, etc. If we study the Bible, we will be able to develop a proper understanding of how to conduct our own affairs in the presence of our glorious Lord.

*I am so grateful to You for Your word, O God. I don't need to trust the nutty ideas of people, I don't need to follow the newest fad or fashion to be accepted, and I don't have to worry if I am right with You or not. Because of the Bible, I have all the information I need to have a right relationship with You and to know what is and what isn't acceptable. I pray that those around me will come to read, study, and cherish Your word, just as You would have them to do. The world would be a whole heap more wonderful if this would happen! Amen.*

**Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you. 1 Corinthians 11:2**

This verse begins a section which will continue through 1 Corinthians 11:16. It will take thoughtful care to properly evaluate, and it is an area which is greatly misunderstood and has been often misinterpreted, leading to some divergent traditions within the church. He begins with "Now I praise you, brethren." Paul is very good about giving praise where praise is due and calling out wrong doctrine or attitudes when necessary as well. By beginning this with a note of praise, he is ensuring that they will perceive his words with the proper mental attitude which should only solidify their continued right performance.

It should be remembered that Paul has been addressing items which were submitted to him in writing. This is one of the reasons for his letter to them in the first place. In 1 Corinthians 7:1, he said, "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me..." He has been going through this list and answering their questions. This section will be no different. There must have been an issue concerning something he said to them about which they are asking further clarification. Understanding this, he continues with "that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you."

This is his compliment, and this is what sets the tone for the further instruction which will now be presented. In his statement, the word translated as "traditions" indicates something which had been delivered to them by the instruction of the apostles, not a tradition of the past which was of a cultural nature. These are issues which stem from the church itself and not something which he or another apostle brought along from their own pre-existing traditions.

Lastly, in 1 Corinthians 11:17, we will read Paul's words which say, "Now in giving these instructions I do not praise *you*, since you come together not for the better but for the worse." This rebuke will in no way contradict his words of verse 2. Though the Corinthians had kept the traditions as they had received them, they will need correction concerning the issues of liberty and brotherhood. After he completes the thought he is now addressing, Paul will deal with those issues to ensure the church functions well within those parameters.

Life application: As with all things, we need to have a clear understanding of the context of a teaching in order to understand if it applies to us or not. In the case of the church, our teachings are those which come from the epistles, particularly the letters of Paul. His words have been given to us in order for us to have sound, healthy churches. All of Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for our understanding of God's redemptive plans for man, but not all of Scripture is applicable at the same time in the same way.

*Lord, the more I read Your word, the clearer it becomes to me. I can see why the words of the apostles are so important to read and understand. You have given us the church for a set period of time in history and You have given us the words of these men to guide the church during that time. Help me to properly evaluate these instructions and to then live according to what they say. My Christian walk is made so much easier understanding this! Thank You and Amen.*

**But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. 1 Corinthians 11:3**

What will be said for the next few chapters of instruction is given for order, propriety, and edification of the church. It is intended to keep things functioning properly and it is set doctrine which, if not adhered to, will lead to dysfunction, disorder, and eventually to chaos within the church. Some of the words which are coming are directed to proper male/female hierarchal conduct. The instructions are in no way intended to diminish the role of women in the church, nor to subjugate them in a merely "cultural" way. Rather, the words are intended to instruct on what is right and proper at all times during the church age.

In the preceding verse, it was noted that the Corinthians were to be praised for having kept "the traditions just as" Paul had delivered them. However, there were questions that had obviously arisen, and he is now answering those questions for the proper functioning of the church. But instead of simply saying "women are to pray with their head covered" he starts with a much larger and broader aspect of the issue to which he

will address. Thus, by showing the overall nature of hierarchy, his words will demonstrate why things work as they do and why certain things are proper, and others are not. Therefore, we can draw accurate conclusions from the points which he provides.

And so, he begins with, "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ." The first obvious question which should arise is, "Is this referring to male-believers or all people?" At first, it would seem that this must be referring to all men because the next thought is "the head of woman *is* man." This seems to be referring to all women. However, elsewhere in 1 Corinthians it says -

"As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man."

-1 Corinthians 15:48, 49

This sets a clear delineation between believers and non-believers and indicates that those born only of the dust have Adam as their head. Therefore, Paul's words are referring to those within the church. His next thought is, "and the head of Christ *is* God." This leads to another obvious question which must be asked, "Is this saying that Jesus is not God?" The answer is, "No." The Bible elsewhere indicates very clearly that Jesus is God. However, Jesus also subordinates Himself to the Father such as in John 14:28 -

"You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I."

Further, just because a man is the head of the woman, it doesn't mean that the woman isn't a human. Therefore, we can see that there is a hierarchy within the Godhead itself and that there is a hierarchy within humanity as well. Again, the idea of a hierarchy within the Godhead is also confirmed in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28

"Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For 'He has put all things under His feet.' But when He says 'all things are put under Him,' it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."

Paul has shown that there is a great and eternal hierarchy within the Godhead. Though Christ Jesus is fully God, and though the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are co-equal within the Godhead, there is an order and a propriety in dealings between the three. In understanding this, we can then understand why there is also an order and a propriety in how men and women conduct their affairs within the church.

In Galatians 3:28, Paul says that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Yes, this is true. It is also true that within the Godhead all are One. And yet each has its individual role and responsibility. And the same is true within the church. We are all one spiritually, but we are individuals who are accountable to staying within the parameters set down by God in His word.

Life application: When we violate the tenets of Scripture, for whatever reason, we usurp what God has intended. When we do so willingly, it is a direct slap in His face because we ignore what He has stated. And this is true regardless of how we feel about an issue.

*Lord God, Your word has been given to us with such tender care and with such specificity that I really am without excuse when I act in a manner contrary to what it says. And yet, I tend to do so quite often, not because I purposely want to, but because of the battle raging in me. My flesh wars against my spirit. Help me to be victorious in this struggle and to stand fast on Your word. And above all, help me never to sin presumptuously. Keep me from that above all else and I'll be sure to give You thanks, praise, and honor for Your kind hand upon me. Amen.*

**Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonors his head.**

1 Corinthians 11:4

This verse and those to follow show what is orderly and proper in terms of conduct within the church. Paul doesn't explain why he says these things; thus, it assumes that those in Corinth would understand his words without the need for explanation even if we today don't. Knowing this, we can look at the situation as it was when Paul wrote. It was, and still is, the custom of Jews to pray with their heads covered by a tallit; a prayer shawl. It is a sign of their unworthiness to communicate face to face with God. Greeks, on the other hand, were known to pray with their heads uncovered.

Because of these differences, those in Corinth must have added this to their list of questions. Which is correct and why? There are several good reasons for Paul's words, and they would have been understood without further details in the response.

First, the removing of a hat or turban (or whatever head covering was used) was considered a sign of respect towards a superior. Those who wear hats today will still often do this. It would have been disrespectful to do otherwise. Therefore, as a sign of respect to our Head, who is Christ, we should have our heads uncovered when "praying or prophesying." Otherwise, we would dishonor our Head (meaning Christ). The Greek word for "head," which is *kephalé*, carries both the idea of a physical head as well as one in authority just as it does today.

Secondly, if we are "in Christ" because of our faith in His work, then we have become worthy before our heavenly Father. This is not because of our own righteousness, but because of the righteousness of Christ which has been imputed to us. To keep our heads covered, as the Jews obviously continued to do, was to imply that they remained unworthy before God. It was an unnecessary show of piety which was set aside by the work of Christ. It demonstrates a failure (albeit probably unintentionally) to accept the honor granted upon us as believers in Him.

And thirdly, as he noted in the previous verse, "the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God." If women are present in the gathering, then another issue arises. As the head of woman is the man, then the man actually dishonors his Head (meaning Christ) when he renounces his authority over the woman by being covered in the presence of the woman, over whom he is the head. For at least these reasons, and possibly others which were understood within the Corinthian church, Paul has given us these instructions.

Life application: There is an order and propriety in how we are to conduct ourselves within the church and while presenting ourselves before the Lord. And yet, we need to understand that we can take things to unintended extremes which can only lead to legalism. Care needs to be taken concerning how we conduct ourselves while at the same time we need to not push personal peeves concerning an issue to the forefront of our church life. In all things, adhering to the word of God will keep us from going beyond what is written.

*Purify my heart, O God. Sanctify me and make me an acceptable vessel for Your use. Keep me from straying from Your word, and help me to be fixed, firm, and faithful to its precepts. When others need help in their walk with You, give me the ability to lead them to correct understanding, but without the confrontation which so easily arises in our attempts to discern what is right. In all things, help me to reflect the glory of Your Son so that others will see Him and desire His presence in their own lives. Amen.*

**But every woman who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. 1 Corinthians 11:5**

Paul will note elsewhere that it is right for a woman to "keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak" (1 Corinthians 14:34). He will also state, "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence" (1 Timothy 2:11, 12). Therefore, Paul is not giving instruction on the public assembly of the church in 1 Corinthians 11:5. The items he is addressing here are explicitly forbidden in those other two verses. Therefore, we know he is giving general guidelines for specific occasions not particularly pertaining to a church gathering.

He is addressing issues one at a time in his letter and slowly revealing proper conduct for believers. Therefore, to use this verse as a text to indicate that it was either right or acceptable for a woman to speak or lead in the church will result in improper handling of the entire intent of his instructions. His concern at this point is not to determine the correctness of that issue, but to ensure proper conduct of this particular issue.

In cases concerning this matter, which are being addressed in response to an inquiry by the Corinthians, he now gives the continued response. First, he gave instruction concerning the man and what was to be considered orderly and proper. Now he gives the contrast by beginning with the term *pasa de*, or "every moreover" which is thus translated "but every..."

He then notes that "every woman who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonors her head." This, like the previous verse, uses the double signification of the word "head." The first time it is speaking of her literal head. The second time it is speaking of her "spiritual head" which was defined in verse 3 as "man." If a woman prays or prophesies with her physical head uncovered, she dishonors her spiritual head, man, who has authority over her. If she does this, then he notes that "for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved."

The question which obviously arises then is, "Does shaving a head have significance in the culture at that time?" The answer is "Yes." Scholars agree that among both the Jewish culture and the Greek culture long hair was considered honorable and a glory to a woman. The Bible gives several examples of when a woman would shave her head -

- Ritual cleansing from leprosy, Leviticus 14
- Completion of a Nazirite vow, Numbers 6

- Shaving one's head for the dead (in a negative context), Deuteronomy 14
- Shaving one's hair in mourning as a captive, Deuteronomy 21

Each of these were out of the ordinary occasions; the norm was to have long hair, thus identifying her as a woman under authority. Seeing the cultural shame of a woman being shorn, it leads to understanding the significance of her retaining her long hair. As a woman wears her hair long as a sign of her subjection to man, so the man wears his hair short as a sign of subjection to Christ.

Life application: Paul meticulously handles matters, going from subject to subject and addressing issues in an orderly fashion. If his writings, like any part of the Bible, are taken out of context, inevitable confusion or incorrect doctrine will result. His words are always directed toward the ultimate goal of exalting Christ. Therefore, special care and respectful handling of the word of God is of paramount importance.

*Lord, above all else, I desire to be pleasing to You as an obedient follower of what You instruct. And so, help me to understand Your word as I read it. And then help me to correctly apply it to my life. Help me not to make up my doctrine as I go, but to rely on a careful evaluation of what You have laid out in Your instruction manual. I know without that, there will be lots of problems ahead of me, but with it, the wheels of life will glide smoothly. Thank You for providing the instructions which will allow me to please You. Amen.*

**For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. 1 Corinthians 11:6**

As seen in the preceding verse, there were instances noted in the Old Testament when a woman's hair was to be shaved. Those instances were for specific purposes and not as a usual custom. Paul builds on that now. He noted that praying with her head uncovered is the same as if she were shaved and now he says if she isn't covered, "let her also be shorn." In the first half of this verse, Paul is giving a direction. If she is going to disregard the first, she shames her head (meaning the man under whose authority she stands). If she does this, then she should be shaved as a shame to herself.

In the second half of the verse, he notes that "if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered." The intent is that because it is shameful (and presumably no woman would want to be shamed in this way) then she should cover her head to avoid the first shame (to her head, the man), which would result in the second shame (that of being shorn).

To shave the head is to "unveil" the head. What was given by nature as a covering and what serves as a fashion statement in women, is removed in the process of shaving the head. These natural traits are lost and that which is considered unnatural is what results.

What Paul is saying in this verse is not specifically a command, but rather it is an attempt to get his audience to think through to a logical conclusion what it means for a woman to pray or prophesy with her head uncovered. If she insists on this, then she also by default should insist that she be shorn (either explicitly or implicitly by her actions). And if she does this, then it implies that the concept of equality between the sexes does not actually apply in all cases. As Ellicott astutely observes -

"...it is illogical to argue in favour of any general principle as if it were of universal obligation, when you yourselves admit that it is not applicable in some cases."

God has shown us in His word what is right and appropriate, and He has shown that there is a hierarchy which exists and is to be adhered to. When it is violated, it upsets what is natural and proper. Unfortunately, many accepted principles of the New Testament are simply dismissed in today's churches. This is especially true in churches which have deviated from the principles concerning propriety of conduct regarding women. If these principles are ignored, then the floodgates of Scriptural deviation are opened wide. In essence, it is a rejection of Christ's Headship over His church.

Life application: One cannot simply ignore verses or precepts which they don't like without opening up a rushing torrent of bad doctrine. Every word of God has been given to instruct the people of God and thus a refusal to accept every word can only lead down one sorrowful path of eventual apostasy. It may take time, but it is the inevitable outcome.

*O God, thank You for my time of prayer. Thank You for the quiet moments with You before I rise. It's just You and me in close fellowship. Thank You for the prayers I share with You in the morning as the day gets started, for the prayers while I'm walking with You throughout the day, for the prayers that come while I work, and for the sweet time of prayer that we share over meals. Thank You O God for the time of prayer as I get into Your word, reading that treasured book. Thank You for the prayers I share with my fellow believers as we study Your word or fellowship at church. And thank You for the prayers which end my day, in the quiet moments alone with You before I fall asleep once again. Lord God, thank You for the ceaseless prayers I share with You! Moment by*

*moment my life is spent communing with You. Thank You for this treasured time of prayer. Amen.*

**For a man indeed ought not to cover *his* head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. 1 Corinthians 11:7**

The words thus far on this subject have been referring to the relation between women, men, and Christ as pertaining to the church, and order within the church. Now and for a few verses, they will refer to the relation between women, men, and Christ as pertaining to creation and order within creation. It is a switch to the concept of the woman in relation to the man who is created in the "image and glory of God." For this reason, man should not cover his head.

This then is the answer to the problem addressed in verse 4. Because man is created in God's image he should reflect that image when he is performing one of the two awesome duties of praying or prophesying. However, "woman is the glory of man." This indicates her glory (it does not say "image") is once-removed from God. Does this in any way contradict Genesis 1:27?

In that verse it says -

"So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

The answer is, "No, this is not a contradiction." Paul only says woman is the "glory" of man. If "image" were implied in this context, the fact would still remain that woman is in the image of man and man is in the image of God. This would indirectly mean woman is in the image of God. We can see that Paul is carefully using his words to show that the creation account itself supports his directives concerning covering one's head while praying or prophesying.

The Pulpit commentary once again describes the relationship quite eloquently -

"As moonlight is to sunlight, or as the earthshine is to the moonshine. Man reflects God; woman, in her general nature in this earthly and temporal dispensation, reflects the glory of man."

Life application: Nothing demeaning or spiteful is flowing from the pen of Paul as he gives his directives for men and women in the church. Rather, that which is most

glorifying to God is his intent. Because this is so, to reject his words is to deny God the glory which is intended for God in his words. Let us not be found in such an untenable position.

*The words of the Bible are meant to show God's glory  
The directives found there are for that intent and aim  
And so, as we peruse the wondrous redemption story  
Let us consider our actions as bringing glory to His name*

*When we stray from the words intended for us to follow  
We then deny Him His just and rightful due  
That is certainly a horrid pill to taste or to swallow  
And so, to His word, let us be faithful and true*

*He will reward us in due time for adherence to His word  
And nothing we do in His name will He overlook  
And so, in everything we do, let us glorify our Lord  
By following the directives that have been given in His book*

*Lord, even if the whole world comes against me and cries out "tolerance!" towards sin, if Your word says otherwise, then I will stand on Your word. You have shown what conduct is acceptable and what is to be deplored and spoken against. But everywhere, people are caving in to societal pressure and towards that which is unholy and profane. Give me strength to endure even if it costs me my freedom or my life. Your word, O God, is my light and Christ is my true life. Amen.*

**For man is not from woman, but woman from man. 1 Corinthians 11:8**

The details of the creation of man and the subsequent creation of woman from man are recorded in Genesis chapter 2. They confirm points which are pertinent to Paul's argument. Man was created first by God, directly from the dust of the earth. After this, woman was created for the help and benefit of man. Her creation came about from man, not from the dust of the earth. And her creation was not for her own benefit, but for the benefit of the man.

Three citations from that Genesis account will show this -

"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." Genesis 2:7

"And the LORD God said, '*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.*'" Genesis 2:18

"And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. <sup>22</sup> Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man." Genesis 2:21, 22

It can be seen then that just as Eve stood in relation to Adam, all women stand in a general relationship to all men. In other words, there is order even in this issue which prompts thought and implies a hierarchy.

Life application: The Bible progressively reveals truths which are to be applied in a logical sequence in order to properly grasp what God is doing in redemptive history. Taking things out of that logical order will inevitably lead to disorder. For example, societal breakdown can be directly tied to not following the patriarchal system of family rule. When the father is removed from family headship, all of society suffers. Paying attention to what God has ordained will keep individuals, families, societies, and even the state of man on earth in proper functioning order and in a right relationship with God.

*Wondrous heavenly Father, thank You for the sweetness of honey, the wonderful flavor of salt, the hot spices of peppers, the nourishing milk of the cow, and the delightful juice of the grape. Thank You for the immense number of fruits, the many types of grain, and the different flavors of fish and meat. Everything has been arranged to fill us with enjoyment and variety to get us to think through what a great and generous God You are. And so today, I want to acknowledge how grateful I am for all the wondrous flavors which excite my taste buds. And Lord, thank You for pistachio nuts too. Amen.*

**Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.** 1 Corinthians 11:9

Stated in concise form, Paul reiterates the thought of Genesis 2:18 -

And the LORD God said, "*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.*"

Man was not created for the woman, but rather "woman for the man." Thus, the man has been given headship over the woman. And yet there is a benefit from the subordinate position. Because her true happiness is dependent on him, she has an

entitlement to his care and protection. If one thinks of Christ and the church (as Paul is making this connection) then they can rightly see this. Christ will be pleased with His church when His church is in its proper subordinate position. When they follow His instructions and meet His plans as they are laid out, He has the onus to care for them as His word states.

The concept here is not one of tyrannical rule over a wife, but one of love, care, and protection. Women who cast off this model only prove themselves unworthy of all three of these points, just as a disobedient church will have its lampstand removed when it stands contrary to the Lordship of Christ (see Revelation 2:5).

Another point to consider concerning this verse is that it fully supports the notion of creation, not evolution. It further implicitly teaches short-term creation. In addition to countless other verses which people want to ignore or claim as allegorical, Paul acknowledges that humans were created; we did not evolve. If man was created, it was in a day and it was in the manner which the Genesis account states. Otherwise, Paul would have nothing to back up his statement in this verse.

Due to the logical progression of creation and the introduction of what is termed "good" in the creation account, the sixth-day of creation was one literal day. As the pattern is a literal day for the sixth day, then it would be a complete abuse of the text to assume that the other five days were not literal. Allegory schmallegory. The Bible's proclamation of the events of Genesis are backed up by the words of the apostles, and more importantly, by the words of Christ.

Life application: There is nothing demeaning in the Bible concerning the roles of men and women and the hierarchy which is noted there. Instead, it is how God has ordained these things so that we can also understand the other hierarchies which exist. We don't rule over Christ; He rules over us. If we get our levels of subordination out of order, only chaos will result. This is perfectly evident as western society has progressively thrown off the patriarchal family.

*Lord, I cannot sit still when contemplating the wonders found in Your word and then comparing them to life around me. You created woman for man and what is more wonderful than that! You gave us different crops which produce a harvest at different times of the year to keep us busy and filled throughout the year. The trees put out their seeds, nuts, and cones at regular intervals so that the squirrels always have fresh food. The sun comes up at the right time and it sets in the right place. I could go on forever*

*pondering the greatness of Your works. It is just as Your word says it should be. Truly You are glorious beyond measure! Amen.*

**For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.* 1 Corinthians 11:10**

“For this reason” is referring to the hierarchy mentioned in verse 9. The covering mentioned earlier is a symbol of authority over the woman. Based on this statement, we can then interpret the meaning of “head” from verse 11:5 as “authority” and not the physical head. An example of this is found later in Paul's writings in 1 Timothy 2:12 –

"And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence."

This "covering" shows the authority placed over her and therefore what Paul writes in 1 Timothy is both explicit and expected. The modern church which is inundated with women pastors, preachers, teachers, reverends, and the like is therefore in willful disobedience of the word of the Lord. There can be no rewards for disobedience, and so the work they are doing, even if it brings others to Christ, will only bring self-inflicted loss.

Paul then explains this by saying, "because of the angels." What exactly does this mean? There is no verse elsewhere in Scripture that explicitly refers to this statement. A search of several sound and notable Bible commentaries indicates the following:

"Thus would the apostle have the women appear In Christian assemblies, even though they spoke there by inspiration, because of the angels, that is, say some, because of the evil angels. The woman was first in the transgression, being deceived by the devil (1 Tim. ii. 14), which increased her subjection to man, Gen. iii. 16. Now, believe evil angels will be sure to mix in all Christian assemblies, therefore should women wear the token of their shamefacedness and subjection, which in that age and country, was a veil. Others say because of the good angels. Jews and Christians have had an opinion that these ministering spirits are many of them present in their assemblies. Their presence should restrain Christians from all indecencies in the worship of God. Note, We should learn from all to behave in the public assemblies of divine worship so as to express a reverence for God, and a content and satisfaction with that rank in which he has placed us." Matthew Henry's Commentary on the whole Bible

"What this means, I do not yet understand." The Geneva Bible

(In a lengthy discourse on the subject) - "I do not know what it means; and I regard it as one of the very few passages in the Bible whose meaning as yet is wholly inexplicable." Barnes Notes on the New Testament

"...who are present at our Christian assemblies (compare Ps 138:1, "gods," that is, angels), and delight in the orderly subordination of the several ranks of God's worshippers in their respective places, the outward demeanor and dress of the latter being indicative of that inward humility which angels know to be most pleasing to their common Lord (1 Co 4:9; Eph 3:10; Ec 5:6). HAMMOND quotes CHRYSOSTOM, "Thou standest with angels; thou singest with them; thou hymnest with them; and yet dost thou stand laughing?" BENGEL explains, "As the angels are in relation to God, so the woman is in relation to man. God's face is uncovered; angels in His presence are veiled (Isa 6:2). Man's face is uncovered; woman in His presence is to be veiled. For her not to be so, would, by its indecorousness, offend the angels (Mt 18:10, 31). She, by her weakness, especially needs their ministry; she ought, therefore, to be the more careful not to offend them." Jamieson, Faussett, and Brown

"The insubordination of women in refusing to acknowledge the authority of their husbands would offend the angels who, under God, guard the created universe (cf. Col 1:16; Eph 1:21), and know no insubordination." The Wycliffe Bible Commentary

The commentaries from the Geneva Bible and Barnes above are certainly honest commentaries on this subject, although they don't help very much. Due to the variance of opinion on the matter, and the lack of direct scriptural links which actually support the statement, there is truly no harm in stating "I don't know what this means." However, the comment by Matthew Henry and the "evil angels" makes at least partial sense.

What is likely is that this is referring to the words of Deuteronomy 21 –

"When you go out to war against your enemies, and the LORD your God delivers them into your hand, and you take them captive, <sup>11</sup> and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and desire her and would take her for your wife, <sup>12</sup> then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. <sup>13</sup> She shall put off the clothes of her captivity, remain in your house, and mourn her father and her mother a full month; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. <sup>14</sup> And it shall be, if you have no delight in her, then you shall set her free, but you certainly shall

not sell her for money; you shall not treat her brutally, because you have humbled her." Deuteronomy 21:10-14

There, it notes that a woman who is taken captive is to shave her head and trim her nails. The exact meaning of "trim her nails," is debated, but both observances are implying that there is a change in authority from her family to this man – her husband.

Understanding this, Young's Literal Translation of these words say, "because of the messengers." This is surely Paul's intent. The Greek reads, *dia tous angelous*, "through the messengers." Paul is referring to those who gave us the Scriptures. Using the term "angels," or "messengers" when speaking of those who gave us the five books of Moses (meaning Moses and also to some extent Aaron) is not unique. The same idea is found in Galatians 3:19 & Hebrews 2:2 (see those commentaries).

In the end, Paul knew what he was writing and the Corinthians at that time understood it. Because of this, we can trust that the statement "because of the angels" is valid in and of itself. It is a tenet which we can know is both sound and reasonable.

Life application: Even if we don't fully understand "why" tenets are given in the Bible, or further - even if we don't understand the explanation given for the "why," if we understand the directive then we need to be obedient to that directive. Not understanding why something is directed is not an excuse to disobey the command.

*Lord, I've come to the conclusion that I don't completely understand the reason for some of the things You have told us to do in Your word. But I have enough sense to know that not understanding "why" isn't a reason to be disobedient to You. You are God and I am man.*

*Maybe someday I will understand the "why"*

*But until then I will still comply*

*When You direct me in something, it is my duty to do it without question or complaint.*

*All glory to You! Amen.*

**Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 11:11**

Paul's words thus far have shown that there is an understood hierarchy that exists between men and women. Because of this hierarchy, there are restrictions and rules which are to be adhered to in this relationship. However, Paul begins verse 11 with the word "nevertheless."

The introduction of this word is to have the reader stop and consider what he will present next. They are words which indicate that even if there are defined lines of authority in the male/female relationship, they are not to be abused. Care is to be exercised so that this relationship isn't harmed or somehow perverted in a way which degrades the female. And so, he says, "neither *is* man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord."

The fact is, despite a hierarchal relationship, men and women in the Lord need each other and complement each other. In Genesis 2:23, 24, it says –

And Adam said:

"This is now bone of my bones  
And flesh of my flesh;  
She shall be called Woman,  
Because she was taken out of Man."

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Since that time, all men have been born of a woman. Men and women have an undeniable natural interdependency, and though woman is subordinated to man in the family and in the church, it is a subordination intended for order and propriety, not for heavy-handed rule or abuse. The need for a woman to continue the species is seen in a notable way in the book of Ruth. When Ruth, Naomi's stepdaughter, had a son the women of Bethlehem rightfully called out the value of Ruth saying -

"...for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him." Ruth 4:15

What seven sons could never have done without a woman, namely bearing a child, Ruth was able to do in her union to Boaz. As is evident here and throughout Scripture, the subordination of women is not without purpose and their importance is not only noted, but highlighted.

Life application: If you are in a discussion with a modern feminist and they tell you the tired old line that the Bible diminishes the role of women, tell them to quit with the clichés, read the Bible for themselves, and grow up.

*Lord God, thank You for the women in my life. There is a continuous and unbroken stream of them from the first woman, Eve, all the way down to my wonderful mother.*

*And then... kapow! You gave me a wife to cherish, love, protect, and make great dinners for me. I can't imagine life without her. And in due time, along came a daughter as well. She is a joy to my life and a blessing to those who know her. What a great God You are to have created woman for man. They sure are swell! Amen.*

**For as woman *came* from man, even so man also *comes* through woman; but all things are from God.** 1 Corinthians 11:12

This verse begins with "For." Paul has taken a broad concept and is bringing it down to very specific points to be considered. Because of the delicate nature of this passage, it would be good to stop, go back, and review the main prepositions and conjunctions as they are given to show us the sequence of thought from the beginning of the passage.

Remember particularly that this is considered a "tradition" established through the apostles for the church. It is not merely a "cultural" thing which pertained only to the Corinthians, but it is an expected propriety during all of the church age. Note the main thought of verse 2 which is to "keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you" and remember it while considering each highlighted word while reading 1 Cor 11:2-12

"Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you. <sup>3</sup> **But** I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God. <sup>4</sup> Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonors his head. <sup>5</sup> **But** every woman who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. <sup>6</sup> **For** if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. **But** if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. <sup>7</sup> **For** a man indeed ought not to cover *his* head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup> **For** man is not from woman, but woman from man. <sup>9</sup> Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. <sup>10</sup> **For** this reason the woman ought to have a *symbol of authority* on *her* head, because of the angels. <sup>11</sup> **Nevertheless**, neither *is* man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. <sup>12</sup> **For** as woman *came* from man, even so man also *comes* through woman; but all things are from God."

In the first half of verse 12, Paul builds on verses 11:8 and 11:11. In the second half of the verse, he reminds the Corinthians (and thus all readers) that both men and women are not independent of God, but are subject to Him as the creation is to the Creator. The

mystery of God's ways is demonstrated here. Eve was taken from Adam's side, but man since then has come through woman.

A point that should not be missed is that even Christ came through a woman who came from both a man and a woman. Christ is the Head of man, but man fell and all who are born of man are fallen in Adam. However, because Christ came through a woman but not directly from man, the fallen nature of Adam was cut in Him. It is the fulfillment of the picture made by the rite of circumcision. The cutting of the male organ was a picture of cutting away the sin nature of man.

Eventually, Christ came and fulfilled that picture. Now, when one calls on Him, they move from Adam to Christ and thus the sin nature is likewise cut in that person. Therefore, Christ is our Head and therefore we owe Him the respect of staying within the parameters of what His word mandates for us. And so, the coming verses concerning hair and head coverings are given to show us what is right and proper. Paul has shown in this discourse why it is so.

Life application: What may seem arbitrary and unnecessary in a command or exhortation is often not so when properly understood. Taking the time to review passages and looking for key markers within each passage will help us to solidify our understanding of why things are expected. In the end, it should always come back to what is honoring to our Lord.

*What a wonderful thing it is to walk in Your presence O God! No matter where I am and no matter what I'm doing, I know that You are there with me. When the day is long and frustrating, if I just stop for a moment and remember this, things get easier and make more sense. When things are going well, the thought makes them even better because I realize that the blessings weren't accidental, but really gifts from You. No matter what the situation, it is always better when I remember that You are right here with me. Thank You for Your gracious hand upon me heavenly Father. Amen.*

**Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 1 Corinthians 11:13**

Paul asks the Corinthians to judge, to make a correct decision, concerning this matter. When Paul says, "judge among yourselves" he is asking them to see how obvious the matter is; there should be no question as to a right determination. Because of the context, he expects the reader to understand that it is not proper for a woman to pray

to God with her head uncovered. It is a rhetorical question which demands a "No" answer. A woman dishonors her head when she does so.

Going further, the petition isn't merely to "judge" but to "Judge among yourselves." An open judgment among the people will show what the individual heart may attempt to hide. As an example, to understand the universal nature of this, or any such issue, we can look at the issue of abortion. People make claims about the propriety of abortion all the time. They even do it in public forums. However, if two or more people were in an honest debate on the issue - one without personal attacks or red herrings, the truth would come out.

If one were to ask, openly and frankly from a natural perspective (which is what Paul is doing concerning the issue he is addressing) as to the morality of removing a live baby from a woman and murdering it, the proponents of abortion would have no true argument. Unfortunately, the morality of the issue is never addressed in this manner. Rather "legality" or "personal feelings" are inevitably introduced, and the abortion issue continues to cast its deathly pall over society.

Paul is using the same tactic here. He could ask, "Is it legal for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?" The answer, at least within Christian circles, is certainly "Yes." He could ask, "How do you personally feel about the issue?" If he did, he would receive all kinds of responses and the most vocal group would prevail, regardless of propriety. However, he returns to the very basics of the issue. He first shows the nature of the Godhead itself. He then shows the nature of propriety within creation. And finally, he asks his question. He cuts out the argument before it begins and so his answer to their question will not need further clarification or explanation later.

If only we would follow the same pattern in our own moral decisions we would have them more in-line with what is right and proper in the eyes of the Creator. Unfortunately, Christianity in great measure has become a religion of personal likes and dislikes and of clinging to what is legal instead of what is moral. Rather than following these temporary avenues, the Christian should pursue personal (and corporate) obedience to God and to His word.

Life application: Am I discerning the obvious when I read the Bible and making correct decisions based on this discernment? Or am I overlooking exhortations which apply to me without giving them proper consideration? Am I trying to insert my personal likes and dislikes at the expense of right doctrine? If so, Lord - please change my heart.

*Heavenly Father, please continue to instruct me properly in Your word. Help my moral choices to be based on Your right thinking rather than on the convoluted and unholy thinking which permeates the world in which I live. If I am to be a cast off from the world for sticking to Your word, at least I'll have You there with me as I walk the lonely path to glory. Thank You for hearing my prayer. Thank You for being attentive to it. Amen.*

**Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?** 1 Corinthians 11:14

Paul brings in "nature itself" as a witness to his instruction. This is based on his previous verse which called out, "Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?" Just as it was obvious to those in Corinth concerning that issue, so this one is obvious as well. His words about natural revelation are that "if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?"

If one is a great traveler, they will come to the conclusion that wherever he goes and in whatever culture he finds himself, it is normally rather easy to distinguish men from women. One doesn't travel to the heights of Tibet and find this to be untrue. Nor does one travel to the deepest jungles of Africa and find it to be untrue. Men and women are usually easily distinguished between one another. And the general distinction is that of hair. How the hair is worn generally makes the first notable distinction between the sexes.

Paul's observation, based on nature, is again "if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him." This thought however needs to be taken and contemplated with extreme care lest a discouraging line of legalism enter into one's theology. First, the natural question should be, "What is to define 'long hair' on a man?" Is it more than a marine-style jarhead haircut? Is it more than one inch? Is hair on the collar a dishonor? What if hair goes past the neck? What if.... what if (perish the thought!) the hair is found to touch the shoulders? Just what is the definition of "long hair?"

It must be misunderstood that the Bible never contradicts itself. However, the following people were Nazirites from birth (a consecration detailed in Numbers 6) and never cut their hair throughout their entire lives – Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist. Amos 2:12 indicates there were other Nazirites in Israel, and even Paul took such a vow in Acts 18:18. If some of these men of God never cut their hair and others didn't cut it for extended periods of time, then how can Paul's words be reconciled with hair that goes past the top of the ear (as so many legalistically minded people seem to define "long hair")?

Having long hair, in and of itself, cannot be a shame or dishonor to a man because men of God were known to have had long hair. Therefore, this would be a contradiction in the Bible. Understanding this, it must be the *appearance* of the long hair which is dishonoring to his head. If a man looks like a woman, then he has passed from manliness to femininity. This, in and of itself then, would be dishonoring to him. It would be in then line with the precept found in Deuteronomy 22:5 for example –

"A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this."

Men are men and women are women. God intends for men to look like men, and He intends for women to look like women. Further, the actions of the man are to be manly actions and the actions of a woman are to be feminine. These concepts are stated implicitly throughout Scripture. Therefore, it must be that Paul is referring to an *appearance of femininity* concerning long hair in this verse. If long hair causes a man to appear to be a female, then he has assumed an appearance which would place him in a point of subjection as described in the earlier verses of this passage. But man is to be under the Headship of Christ, thus honoring Him directly.

If a man has a beard, no matter how long his hair is, he will certainly not be mistaken for a woman. However, if the long hair on a man becomes the primary point of identifying him as a female, then he has brought shame upon himself.

Life application: Who decides in your church how long your hair can be? If someone is walking around with a ruler and checking length, he probably has more serious problems that should be watched. Legalism is a poison which can only bring about a congregation full of neurotic people. In all precepts, taking the time to think the issue through from a "let Scripture interpret Scripture" viewpoint will generally lead to healthy, happy congregations.

*What a joy! Thank You O God for the freedoms You have given me in Christ. Way too often I hear people of the world claiming that faith in Him is some type of bondage or some type of joy-limiting walk. But the closer I get to You, the more freedom I find. Surely a person can serve only one master and I know that sin is a raging, destroying enemy. But You are a kind, gentle Lord. The further I am from sin, the closer I am to perfect freedom. Thank You for the gentle yoke of Christ. Thank You for the wide and expansive pastures to which You are leading me! Amen.*

**But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for *her* hair is given to her for a covering.** 1 Corinthians 11:15

As we can see from this verse, the many traditions of various sects or denominations which require bonnets, or some other type of covering based on the thought in verse 5 have misinterpreted Paul's intent. They ran ahead without finishing the passage and properly applying his words. Rather, his intent was and is that a woman's hair is given to her for a covering. No bonnet or other headpiece is required as a sign of authority. Her covering is her long hair; it is a glory to her and to her husband.

Therefore, if she does not have long hair as a symbol of her authority, then she should wear a covering. If she will do neither, then she has shamed her husband and should be shaven herself as a sign of shame (verse 6). Just as a Nazirite had long hair as a mark of separation to God, a woman should have long hair as a mark of submission to her husband. This again brings in an obvious question though - "What defines 'long hair' on a woman?" And a second question then arises - "Who decides what the definition is?"

As no biblical advice is given on either of these questions, two possibilities are:

- 1) Just as a man should not look feminine with long hair, a woman should not look masculine with short hair.
- 2) The husband should be consulted in the wife's hair length so that he is not dishonored by her appearance.

If these two requirements are met, then the matter should be concluded. Were there other references in the Bible concerning this, then greater restrictions or freedoms could be imposed, but none exist. Therefore, let the father or husband of the woman be pleased to determine what he feels is appropriate for the woman's hair length; her covering.

Life application: Legalism is a poison which should be avoided at all costs. The Bible gives details for proper conduct. Adding to them can only harm the congregation and lead down unhappy paths.

*Lord, You created woman for man, what a gift!  
And You ordained that they should be joined as one  
When a man has a bride, his spirit she does lift  
And to him she can add times that are fun  
Together they can walk the road of life*

*Hand in hand sharing in each joy and trial  
Blessed is the man who has a good wife!  
Who comes home to such a friend who can make him smile*

*Thank You Lord for the beauties around us  
Who grace us with joy and make our lives complete  
And help us to do the same for our Lord Jesus  
Our Husband and Lord, our precious Savior so sweet*

*How great You are O God to give us glimpses of our heavenly walk with You here in our earthly walk with our beloved spouse. Thank You that we have one another to share in the joys, the trials, the ups and the downs. In every circumstance, we learn more about each other and we grow in love. And someday, we will join You in heaven's paradise, united forever in an even greater way. Thank You for this wonderful promise. Amen.*

**But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor *do* the churches of God.** 1 Corinthians 11:16

From verses 2 until 16, Paul has been addressing the issue of hierarchy within the church, within creation, and what is proper concerning the covering of one's head. His argument has been with authority and he has written it as if his statements were obvious; they are a given. And so, because this is true then there is nothing else left to fall back on which would be proper. What he has written is the only right and acceptable view concerning the matter. With that he says, " But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor *do* the churches of God."

Those who are contentious about the issue, or disagree with his conclusions, are left without any other acceptable custom or practice; this is how things should be. Modern scholars have tried to isolate this and other arguments made by Paul, saying they are merely cultural and applicable to the people in Corinth, but no longer apply in our modern and "enlightened" world. This is not the case at all. Two reasons for this are made known:

- 1) His arguments not only covered the church, but they are understood from nature itself (as noted in verses 7:12).
- 2) In this verse, he says that there is no other custom to be found among either the apostles (we) or in any other established churches (the churches of God). The principle is to be universally applied and only those who are "contentious" will

stand against it; they are the very people that necessitated his letter in the first place (see 1 Corinthians 1:10 concerning "divisions").

Therefore, as this is in "all the churches of God" it cannot be a cultural issue isolated only to Corinth. Nor can this apply only at the time of Paul's writing. It is authoritative doctrine for the Church in all locations and for all time.

Life application: It is tempting and easy to say that a difficult issue in the epistles was merely "cultural" or "temporary." However, when the context of the entire passage is carefully reviewed, it is discovered that this is generally not the case. The words of the apostles, particularly Paul, are given to the church for all ages and in all times. We disregard them at the expense of proper doctrine and right living.

*Lord God, I see Your hand everywhere I turn. When I look at the different grains in various types of wood, I can tell what the type of wood is. I can know what that particular wood is good to be used for, and I can anticipate a different delightful smell from each piece. If You have taken such immense care to give us such wonderful diversity in mere trees, then how much more wonder is there for me to seek out in a zillion different things. No matter where I look, I see Your greatness on display, and so I praise You! Amen.*

**Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. 1 Corinthians 11:17**

In verse 2, Paul began his discourse on the head and head coverings with a word of praise –

"Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you."

Now, he is transitioning to a new discourse, a most sensitive and important matter, which concerns the Lord's Supper. In this, he begins with "Now in giving these instructions, I do not praise *you*..." We know then that his coming words are words of instruction on a matter which requires correction. He has gotten word concerning it and he isn't pleased with what he has heard.

The word "you" is not in the original. Rather it says, "Now in giving these instructions I do not praise..." The lack of praise isn't directed toward the people so much as it is directed toward the actions of the people. This is then set in contrast to verse 2 where

he directly praised the people. Here, the actions of the people are not to be praised. And the reason is noted - "since you come together not for the better but for the worse."

The people are gathering, but the actions of the gathering are more harmful than edifying. He will explain this in the verses to come, but this verse has set the stage for it in a tactful and yet firm manner.

Life application: Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians 11 shows us a sound way of addressing others over delicate issues. He has praised the people but withheld praise for their actions. Additionally, he first began with praise and then moved to the withholding of praise. This sets a much more positive tone than immediately entering into rebuke; something which would only cause his readers to tune out at the beginning. We can and should learn from this style of approach.

*Heavenly Father, I thank You for the blessing, privilege, and honor of worshipping with the people I meet up with each week. Together we open Your word and learn from it; together we sing songs to You as a united voice; together we pray for one another and others as well; and together we share in the Table of the Lord, remembering His death until He comes again. What time could be better spent? Thank You for this wonderful part of my week, without which, I would be far less able to handle the other affairs that come up. Thank You and Amen!*

**For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. 1 Corinthians 11:18**

Beginning with the word "for" connects this thought directly to what he just said - "...I do not praise *you*, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For..." The issue he will mention is one which does not justify praise because their coming together is "not for the better but for the worse."

What seems a tad bit odd is that he says "first of all" but never explicitly states "secondly" or some other word to define a subsequent point. This isn't a problem, but it does imply that the issues he will raise were known to be separate issues. This is merely the first and most important of them. A second, separate, issue is that of the improper exercise of spiritual gifts, particularly that of speaking in tongues, which he will address starting in chapter 12.

For now though, the matter is something that occurs "when you come together as a church." This then isn't referring to a specific building which would be "in a church," but rather as a congregation wherever they happened to meet "as a church." Different locations would have been used instead of a single, regular meeting place. What was probably a common closing statement of the times would be something like, "Next week we'll meet at the house of Flavius Dwyerinius over on State Street. The Lord bless you and keep you. See you then."

It was in such gatherings that Paul notes, "I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it." The word used for "divisions" is schisma. It is the same word he used in 1 Corinthians 1:10 when pleading that such divisions wouldn't exist among those in the church. A schisma, or schism, can be equated to a tear in a piece of cloth. It is something which completely divides. Paul had been informed that such tears in the fabric of their fellowship existed, but he graciously adds in, "and in part I believe it."

By including that, he is using tact. He knows full well that they exist because of the reports, but he is also showing them that evil reports are always to be taken with a grain of salt unless they are confirmed. And this is true even when they come from someone of high integrity. He is therefore allowing in his words the thought that maybe things were actually not as bad as presented.

Life application: The Bible shows us in many instances and in various ways, that we should not listen to those who divide the church on purpose. Murmurings and grumblings must be backed up with evidence and those who present untruths need to be called out for their actions. If necessary, they should be expelled from the church. However, true reports need to be addressed and corrected as well.

*Lord, help my tongue to be one which heals wounds. Keep me from using it to tear apart others or to inflict harm. When I speak, I pray that those around me will believe my words at face value as words of integrity. And this, not because of my name, but for the sake of Your name, which I bear. The honored and distinguished title of "Christian" is of the highest value, and I pray that my words will always reflect honor upon it. Guide me in this each day as I walk in Your presence, O God. Amen.*

**For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. 1 Corinthians 11:19**

Paul had just said, "when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you." After that he said, "and in part I believe it." Immediately after that, he

begins this verse with "for." The word in Greek is *dei*. It implies "because." It is the logical outcropping of any such type of assembly that "there must also be factions among you." In other words, there will inevitably be sects or divisions within the congregation which will spring up.

An interesting confirmation of this is found in the book of Acts. From Acts 1-12 the Jewish church is highlighted and the focus is heavily on Peter. However, from Acts 13-28, the Gentile church is highlighted, and the focus is almost exclusively on Paul and his ministry. Read the following seven sets of verses from Acts, noting the same term "one accord" in each -

- These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. Acts 1:14
- When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. Acts 2:1
- So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, Acts 2:46
- So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, Acts 4:24
- And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. Acts 5:12
- And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. Acts 8:6
- it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Acts 15:25

Seven times this term "one accord" is used. The last such occurrence was in 15:25 at the Council in Jerusalem. After that, the term is never used again in the book of Acts. It was a common trait of the early Jewish church; it is a trait which is completely lacking in the developing Gentile church. It can be understood from this that it was expected and recorded early that the Gentile church agreed (and continues to agree) on very little.

Paul's words show us that such factions exist because it is inevitable that they would exist. It is no surprise to God and it is a necessary outcropping of the Gentile church. If there were harmony in all the churches and that harmony included actual heresy, then everyone would be participating in heresy. At this time, the Roman Catholic Church, for

example, is riddled with bad doctrine and outright anti-biblical practices. If they were "the church" then everyone would be in the same boat.

If this were the case, then the only expected result would be complete judgment on the church, the entire church - just as there was on the nation of Israel and on the temple when they followed that same path of apostasy. But rather, in Revelation, Jesus is noted as walking among the lampstands (which represent the churches) and when one church falls to a level of apostasy where it is no longer a church, He removes its lampstand, signifying that He no longer considers it a valid entity. (See Revelation 21-2:5).

It is an ingenious system of protecting the church throughout the Church Age. In seeing these factions, the people could then research and see "those who are approved may be recognized among you." A classic example of this is the Protestant Reformation. There was a schism in the church which necessitated seeing who was in fact approved by God (meaning who was adhering to the word), and who wasn't. This cycle is repeated often as churches move away from Scripture and new leaders arise who hold fast to its truths.

Life application: God knew in advance what would occur within the church, and He gave us many interesting clues to show us this. He also expects us to pay attention and to cling fast to those who hold to Scripture, not deviating from its precepts. To fail to do so will only lead to not being approved by Him and to being rejected as a body of believers.

*Heavenly Father, thank You so much for those I attend church with. Thank You for those who read Your word, believe Your word, and cling to Your word. They demonstrate a soundness of believer that I wish to emulate and highlight in my own life. Give me the desire to reject any teacher who strays from what You have written and keep me on the safe, sure, and sound path which leads to glory. How I love Your word; how I thank You for those who share this passion! Amen.*

**Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.**

1 Corinthians 11:20

This verse leads to all kinds of theories and speculations about the taking of the Lord's Supper. It also leads to ideas which really miss the point. An example of this is that the term "supper" indicates an evening meal, which is when Christ shared the elements of the commemoration. Therefore, some have claimed that the evening is the proper time to participate in the memorial. The point of coming together for it, however, isn't one of "time of day" but rather in remembrance of the work of the Lord.

To insist on commemorating the ordinance in the evening adds in a level of legalism which is unnecessary. Paul's point in this discussion, like the previous issue concerning head coverings, is that of propriety of conduct. In verse 18, he noted the divisions which he had been informed of. Then in verse 19 he gave the seemingly unrelated note that "there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you." This isn't unrelated, but the explanation won't be fully realized until later in the discussion. "Who are approved" are those who are acting properly. If they are "recognized among you" then the opposite would be true, and those who weren't approved would be known for their improper actions.

But for now, Paul begins with "therefore" to show that he is building upon what he said. It is tied to the "factions" he mentioned along with the actions of the people within the factions. Because of these things, he notes that "when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper." Instead of what they should be demonstrating, a united group who are there to remember the work of the Lord and to commemorate it, there is disharmony. This will be seen in the coming verses.

Life application: The ultimate aim of church meetings isn't to satisfy oneself. Nor should there be divisions over matters for some to attempt to be exalted in the eyes of others. Rather, the aim of gatherings is to exalt and glorify the Lord. Anytime a gathering occurs that isn't directed toward that goal, something else will inevitably fill the void and it will lead to disharmony, not unity.

*Lord, as I go to church to worship You, help me to remember that I'm going to church to worship You! I don't want to lose sight of the very thing which calls us together as a congregation. And so, in praise, in prayer, in listening to the preacher, and in any other thing we do, keep me remembering that it is all about You. I know that with this in my heart, You will be well-pleased. Amen.*

**For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk.** 1 Corinthians 11:21

In the previous verse, it was noted that when they came together, it wasn't in the manner of the Lord's Supper (literally - "it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.") Paul now explains why this is so. In evaluating it, all we need to do is think of a modern "potluck supper."

"For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*." Instead of bringing along the food and leaving it for all to share in (which is what the known customs of the time

reveal) the people would get right into the food they brought, thus there wasn't a fellowship in the meal, but rather a sense of greediness in it. People were just diving in to make sure they got a full belly, regardless of what others received.

Because of this, the result was that "one is hungry and another is drunk." The contrasts are obvious. One person who may have been poor and couldn't bring much was left with an empty stomach; the other who got right into the meal overindulged and got "drunk." As hunger implies deprivation and as drunkenness implies over-indulgence, the two are noted to highlight the situation. Because there was a lack of fellowship and sharing, it thus could not be the Lord's Supper of which they partook. Rather, it was a feast of self-interest, not humble remembrance.

A final point on this verse is that the word "drunk" is the Greek word *methuó*. It means exactly as translated, "drunk." In an honest evaluation of the passage, it can be taken in no other way. Although highly unpalatable to many, the obvious conclusion to be made is that the gatherings of the early church included alcohol. Whether this was acceptable or not will be realized in verse 22. The conclusion is obvious from the text itself.

Life application: It is proper to objectively evaluate issues found in the Bible without inserting presuppositions about the matter at hand. In other words, we are to "let the chips fall where they may." Only then can we be considered to properly handle and rightly divide the word of God.

*Lord, I love You. Who else would step down from an instrument of torture and death and say to the person who put Him there, "It's ok, I did it for you." Who else would be willing to carry away my evil heart, my wicked deeds, and my faithless life in this way? How great You are. Lord, I love You. Amen.*

**What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.** 1 Corinthians 11:22

This verse, coupled with the previous verse, is intended as one very strong rebuke of this particular practice of the Corinthians. They were meeting at their observance in a way which disregarded the holy nature of the meal. In his astonishment at their conduct towards one another, he says "What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?" In other words, "If you want to engage in a feast, isn't that a better place to do it? Why would you bring food to this gathering and then sit and gobble it up in front of those you are supposed to be fellowshiping with?"

This then leads to the next obvious thought, "Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?" The intent of the gathering was first and foremost to remember the work of the Lord. Secondly, if there was to be a meal, it was intended that those with much should bring something along for those who had little or nothing. These poorer brethren probably didn't even have their own homes, making the contrast all the more poignant. But instead of sharing, people would sit down and eat and drink what they had brought. If this was the attitude, then they should just stay home and eat and drink.

Based on this, his obvious questioning comes forth - "What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise *you*." Their actions could not be condoned. Christ came to serve others and left the example for us to follow. This concept of serving and sharing was lost during their feasts and left Paul with no choice but to write his words of correction concerning the matter.

As a side issue which is necessary for proper doctrine on an important topic, it should be noted in this verse that Paul never rebukes the gatherers for the notion that "another is drunk" which he stated in the previous verse. In other words, the fact that they had consumed alcohol isn't even addressed. Instead, he tells them to simply eat and drink at home if they were to handle the other issue (that of over-indulging at the expense of others) in an inappropriate manner. If one were to find fault in this verse for drinking alcohol (as many scholars attempt to do) then they must also find fault for them eating food as well, which would be ludicrous.

The subject of drinking has divided many churches. However, if it is looked at from an objective viewpoint, there can be only one obvious conclusion as to whether it is acceptable or not. Unfortunately, personal passions about subjects such as this inevitably lead to false interpretations of Scripture.

Life application: Whatever you do, do it to the glory of God and without harming others in the process.

*Lord, who am I to decide matters of faith and religion? Certainly, I am not the one for such things. But You are! And You have given Your word for this very reason. In standing on Your word, it is You who are the ultimate Judge. And so, with all confidence in what is right and holy, I can make sound decisions about the all-important issues which affect a right relationship with You. Thank You for Your word which allows this certainty. Amen.*

**For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; 1 Corinthians 11:23**

Because of the error of the gatherers at the observance of the Lord's Supper, Paul now takes time to spell out the solemnity which the occasion deserves. And so, he begins with, "For I received from the Lord." This means with all certainty that Paul was told directly from the risen Christ about the events of the night before His crucifixion. This very well may have occurred while he was in Arabia (see Galatians 1:17) during a time of personal instruction because of his calling and commission as "the Apostle to the Gentiles." The fact that the "I" is emphatic and singular shows that this was not passed to him by another, but by Christ Himself.

"That which I also delivered to you" indicates that he had already instructed the Corinthians on this matter when he was present with them. The letter he received told him that his words were not acted upon, and so the letter includes this instruction to be maintained as proper doctrine. If followed, error wouldn't creep in again as it had. Unfortunately, even though we have the letter included in the Bible, error still creeps into this most solemn ceremony. However, correction is available by merely opening the Bible and reading it. How sad it is that this simple procedure is so enormously neglected or mishandled!

"That the Lord Jesus" is given to show believers that the ordinance was instituted by the Lord Himself. Further, it is exclusively of the Lord. He didn't ask one of the disciples to conduct the affair for Him. Rather, the entire ordinance is of Him.

"On the *same* night in which He was betrayed" is an account which is recorded in various ways in the four gospels. However, the description which most closely follows Paul's words here is that of Luke. With only a few minor variations, they match exactly. The only real differences are that Luke says, "given for you" while Paul leaves out "given." Also Luke omits, "This do, as often as you drink *it* " after the giving of the cup. Despite this, they are implied in his words "in the same manner" during the giving of the bread.

Finally, it says He "took bread." This was at the time of Passover. In the law, the Passover requirements say this -

"In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. <sup>19</sup> For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is

leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* a stranger or a native of the land. <sup>20</sup>You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread." Exodus 12:18-20

The bread which was consumed at Passover was unleavened; it had no yeast. In the Bible, yeast pictures sin. Just as leaven makes bread rise, so sin puffs up an individual. The bread itself was a picture of the sinless Bread of Life, Christ. Because of this, it is proper to present unleavened bread at the observance of the Lord's Supper. This is not a legalistic addition to the rite, but rather it is what is proper and honoring to Christ. To use a common loaf of bread is to abuse the very picture which is being made in the ceremony.

Life application: Traditions are often one of the worst cancers in a church body. When a tradition is introduced and is elevated to the level of Scripture, then only a degradation of the sanctity of Scripture can occur. However, if a tradition finds its roots in Scripture, it is proper and honoring of God - who gave Scripture, that we follow through with the tradition. How much more important then is proper adherence to the ordinance of the Lord's Supper! It is a tradition which is actually mandated by the Lord Himself.

*How sweet and pleasant it is to come, O Lord, to Your table  
To share in communion with You in the bread and cup  
Yes, I will participate as often as I am able  
And to have a time of reflection before we sup*

*I will think on You, my Lord, who died on that tree  
I will think on the cross, where my sin was washed away  
I will ponder the relation between You and me  
And I will call to remembrance Your work; the price You did pay*

*Glory to You Lord, how You care for the sons of men  
We will continue to fellowship at this table until You come again*

*Lord God Almighty, wondrous are Your ways and splendid are Your deeds. From Your hand came all things and to You they belong. Thank You for the life You have blessed us with. Thank You for the freedom to choose the path we take. And thank You for Jesus who washes away the error that comes as we walk on that path. Through Him, I praise You, now and forever! Amen.*

**...and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 1 Corinthians 11:24**

Paul continues with words of instruction concerning the Lord's Supper which he received from the Lord. On the night of His betrayal, He took bread and then gave thanks over it. A common form of thanks at such a time as this would have been -

*"Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth."*

This then is a picture of the coming resurrection of Christ. Though the Bread of Life would be laid in the tomb, He would come forth from the earth in victory. The term "had given thanks" is the Greek word *eucharistesas*, from which we derive the term Eucharist. Thus this is often called such. After the Eucharist, "He broke it." Bengel comments on this,

"The very mention of the breaking involves distribution and refutes the Corinthian plan - every man his own."

In other words, he is showing that the breaking of the bread implies parceling it out to all attendees. This is set in contrast to the improper attitude mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:21 which said,

"For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk."

Next, after breaking the bread, the Lord instructed them to "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you." If nothing else (and there is more, but not as biblically explicit), these words show that the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation is not only wrong, it isn't even well thought out. This teaching says that the elements given by the priests of the Roman Catholic Church literally become the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. In essence, one is literally eating His flesh each time that they take Communion. This is also similar to the doctrine of the Lutheran Church which teaches consubstantiation. It is similar to, but not quite the same as, the Roman Catholic teaching.

In refutation of this, Benson wisely notes the following -

"As the clause, which is broken, cannot be taken literally, because it would imply that Christ's body was broken, or put to death on the cross, at the time he said this, contrary to truth; so the clause, this is my body, cannot be taken literally: for the two clauses making but one proposition, if the clause, this is my body, which is the subject of the proposition, be interpreted literally, the predicate, which is broken for you, must be so likewise. Consequently, the proposition will import, that the bread in our Lord's hands was converted into a thing which at that time had no existence."

Said differently, if the bread is literally His body, then how could he hold it in His hands and say, "This is My body?" Likewise, in breaking it, His own body would have then been broken at that time. Neither was the case. Rather, He was showing that the elements are symbolic representations of His body and blood, not the actual elements.

In closing this portion of the instruction, Paul finishes with, "do this in remembrance of Me." The word "do" is *poieie*. It means "be doing" or "continue doing." It is to be a common, continual practice when the church comes together. There is nothing wrong, and everything right, with continuing in this practice at every gathering. After all, it is in remembrance of the Lord Jesus which is the very purpose of gathering together in the first place.

Life application: The Lord's Supper is a symbolic remembrance of the work of the Lord. Be sure to participate in it as often as your church holds it. And if they don't hold it often, then show them the words of the Lord. What is frequently treated as an inconvenient side issue is actually the heart of where our faith and practice should lie.

*Heavenly Father, I want to thank You today for the greatest Gift of all. It is what all of Scripture points to and it is the highlight of all ages. Thank You for the giving of Your Son in order to redeem us. Thank You for His perfection, His merciful kindness, and His grace towards us. Thank You for His atoning sacrifice at the cross of Calvary. And thank You God that He was found faithful in His work and sinless in His being. Death could not hold Him, and He arose. Praise You, O God! He arose! Thank You for the resurrection which guarantees that I will rise as well. Hallelujah and Amen!*

**In the same manner *He* also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."**

1 Corinthians 11:25

"In the same manner" is referring to the Lord's previous handling of the bread - its blessing, being broken, and being passed to the disciples. It is in this same manner that "*He also took the cup after supper.*" The words "after supper" are used only by Luke in the gospels. It is an addition which is intended to mark a distinction between an ordinary meal and that of the Lord's Supper. And although it doesn't mention that He blessed the cup, He would have done so, just as He did with the bread. In the blessing, He would have spoken these words -

*"Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine."*

This again creates a picture. Christ calls Himself the "true Vine" in John 15:1. He then said to the disciples that they were the branches which bear fruit. The Creator of the fruit of the Vine then is a picture of the work of the Lord and of His work through those who belong to Him. As Paul notes in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

The cup after the Lord's proclamation would have been shared with the disciples, and the proclamation is, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." It is obvious, just as it was with the bread, that it is only a sign and a symbol of the work of Christ, not literally His blood. Therefore, both the bread and the wine are symbolic of the body and blood of the Lord, and also of the covenant which is ratified in Him.

The term "My blood" is being set in contradistinction to the blood offered in the Old Covenant of which the law was comprised. In Hebrew 9:11, 12 it says -

*"But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."*

What the Law of Moses could never make perfect is realized in the shed blood of Jesus. Thus, the law is set aside by the work of Christ, completely and entirely. As Hebrews says again,

*"In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete."* Hebrews 8:13

The second supersedes the first, thus annulling it entirely. It is this marvelous work which we remember when we partake of the Lord's Supper. And the Lord says that this is to be done "as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." Anytime the church gathers, it is right and appropriate to partake of the Lord's Table in remembrance of His great work which has obtained eternal redemption for His people.

Life application: When you come to the Lord's Table, it should be with the remembrance that it is His death which is being proclaimed. It was the highest price imaginable to restore us to God, so remember to partake of the elements with profound gratitude and respect.

*Lord God, there are days when things just don't start right and it seems as if inevitably things continue to go wrong after that. When these times come, help me to remember that all things, even the difficult trials of the day, are being worked together for my good. Give me the ability to keep my composure and trust that the trials will pass, and I'll soon be back on a smooth path. And thank You that You are there with me through these times! Amen.*

**For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.** 1 Corinthians 11:26

Christ's words of instruction to Paul have been completed and so he now states the word "for" to show that his words of explanation lie ahead. What Christ proclaimed has a purpose. As He said, "Do this in remembrance of me." Paul's "for" then is given to reiterate and fully explain this. Every time the Lord's Supper is held it is a memorial. And so "as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death."

It is an open proclamation that we believe that Christ died for us. As He is Lord, and as He died, then this is the only possible explanation. Being the Lord implies sinless perfection. As "the wages of sin is death," then His death must have come as a payment for sin, but not His own. In other words, He is our substitutionary atonement. Further, it implies that His righteousness (in that He has not sinned) is imputed to us. What would be the point of Him dying if this were not the case? There would be none.

Therefore, this is our proclamation. We are to participate in the Lord's Supper, acknowledging His work on our behalf "till He comes." Whether Christ's return was expected in a short time after His ascension, or whether it will be ten thousand years from today, we are to continue making this solemn proclamation until that time.

Of note is the fact that the Lord's Table doesn't explicitly include the resurrection. It doesn't say "you proclaim the Lord's death and resurrection till he comes." The death of Christ implies substitution. If He is coming again, it implies that He has risen and ascended. As this is true, it therefore implies that if His righteousness is imputed to us, and that we will, in fact, rise again. In other words, the Lord's Table is a table of faith.

We are placing our hope and trust in the promises of Scripture that they contain the truth concerning the work of the Lord and the return of the Lord. If Scripture isn't the word of God, then we are truly to be pitied. If it is, then nothing can separate us from the surety of the promises which the Lord's Table implies - Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again, and we will be like Him at that time. We will be given eternal life and all of the promises of the Word of God will be realized in us at that time!

Finally, and once again, in this verse we see the nonsensical nature of the Roman Catholic teaching of transubstantiation (the bread and wine literally becoming Christ's flesh). Paul said, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup..." He does not say, nor does he imply, that we are eating the Lord's body or drinking His blood. Instead, just as was seen in the words of Jesus, the bread and wine are symbolic of His work, nothing more.

Life application: Participating in the Table of the Lord implies that the words of Scripture concerning Christ are true, accurate, and complete. If you cannot accept the words of the Bible, then how can you accept the truth which the Lord's Supper promises? The very hope of heaven itself is tied up in the surety of God's word. Have faith that the Bible is absolute truth.

*Lord, what would be the point of believing in the hope of heaven and eternal life if the Bible isn't true? The only place that tells me of the life and work of Jesus is that precious book. Who am I then to choose which verses don't really apply? Rather, I believe Christ is Lord and that Your word confirms this. It is Your word, and therefore, it is truth. And so, I will read it, think on it, and do my very best to rightly divide it all the days of my life. Amen!*

**Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 11:27**

"Therefore" is given for a mental review of what Paul has already laid out concerning the Lord's Supper -

- The Lord Jesus shows that partaking in the bread is given as a symbolic remembrance of His broken body.
- He shows that partaking in the cup is given as a symbolic remembrance of His shed blood.
- In taking the elements, one is making a proclamation of the Lord's death till He comes.

Thus "therefore" has been given to reflect on this. Understanding this then, "whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." Some translations incorrectly say, "whoever eats *this* bread **and** drinks this cup." The conjunction is "or" not "and." During the Lord's Supper, partaking of either element demands the same respectful attitude when received. Also, note that Paul uses the term "bread" not "flesh." The continued use of the word bread, even at the point of consumption by an individual, shows that it was, is, and remains bread. It does not somehow transmute into the actual body of the Lord, even when received. The same is true with the cup. It does not become the Lord's literal blood. Were it so, Paul would have said so in this verse as an indication of it. This is of the highest importance to understand and remember because the Christian is not re-enacting a bloody sacrifice. Instead, he is remembering one, once for all time.

Next, the words "unworthy manner" are appropriate. The word in Greek is *anaxios* which is an adverb; unworthily. Those who don't partake of the Lord's Supper because they have done something wrong which makes them believe they are unworthy have misunderstood what is being conveyed and should be corrected. All people, even those who seem the epitome of piety and self-control, are inherently unworthy of this honor. Were "worthiness" a consideration in partaking of the Lord's Supper, there would be no Lord's Supper.

Rather, it is those who flippantly receive the elements, or who treat them in an unholy manner, who are being spoken of. The sacredness of the ritual, not the state of the individual, is what is being spoken of here. To come with arrogance, to mock the ritual, or to conduct oneself in an impious manner are reasons for guilt. And the guilt bears a penalty. The term for "guilty" is *enochos*. It essentially means "liable to penalty." They have committed a personal crime deserving of punishment.

Life application: The Lord's Table is a solemn remembrance of the death of Jesus Christ. It should be conducted with a sense of dignity and in a most pious manner. Likewise, it should be received with gratitude, a holy demeanor, and in a way which honors the greatest deed which has ever occurred in human existence.

*Lord God, when I come before You in solemn occasions or when I'm in a place dedicated to You, I try to do so with respect, care, and honor of You. But do I do this during the rest of my time? I am always in Your presence, and Your Spirit has sealed me for the day of redemption. I know this is true and so shouldn't I always act in a manner which reflects holiness? Help me in this Lord. May I never bring discredit upon You my Lord. Amen.*

**But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.**

1 Corinthians 11:28

In the preceding verse, and in the verse which follows as well, the notion of partaking of the bread and the cup in an "unworthy manner" is noted. This then is an insert into the discussion on that concept. Only after determining his motivations as he comes before the table should a person then partake.

The verb for "examine" is *dokimazo*, and it indicates that one should prove themselves concerning sincerity. If one is coming before the table with a feeling of meriting the elements, then they have a misunderstanding of their own state before the Lord. There is nothing in a person which merits what they symbolize. Rather, we are wholly dependent on the grace of Jesus Christ for His work which was accomplished on our behalf.

This concept of personal unworthiness, however, isn't what Paul is referring to (as was seen in the preceding verse). Rather, he is referring to the manner in which one approaches the table. Being unworthy in no way prohibits participation in the Lord's Supper. Rather, acting in an unworthy manner does. An unworthy manner then could actually be demonstrated in someone's belief that they were, in fact, worthy of what they were receiving! In this, true humility is set against feelings of self-righteousness or of "inherently deserving" what the elements signify.

Once one has evaluated himself and tested his motivations, he should then ensure that his actions as he partakes are in line with his proper motivations. If so, then "let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup." It is a process of internal evaluation combined with an external demonstration which Paul speaks of.

Life application: In receiving the elements of the Lord's Supper, be pleased that the Lord has accepted you by His grace despite your inherent unworthiness to come before Him. In gratitude to this, be sure to conduct yourself in a manner which is worthy of that.

*Glorious God! When I'm at the end of my rope and only the abyss lies beneath me, I still have the confidence that Your hand is there holding me. I know for sure that my true happiness isn't dependent on my actions, but rather it is secure in Your care of me. I have to live in these trials, and they are painful, but because of what lies ahead, they are merely temporary steps which I was ordained to take in order to strengthen my faith in You. And so, even though they aren't pleasing, I will praise You through the trials. Amen.*

**For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 1 Corinthians 11:29**

"For" builds upon the previous thought concerning the taking of the Lord's Supper. Paul has just noted that partaking in an unworthy manner makes one guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. Therefore, a self-examination should occur before one partakes. And the reason for this is given in what follows the opening word "for." It is because "he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself."

In this, a connection is being made between the judgment symbolized in the elements: that of the death of the Lord, and that of the judgment which one drinks to himself when partaking of those same elements in an unworthy manner. If what Jesus did is treated in an impious or flippant manner, then judgment is to be necessarily expected for that attitude.

The type of judgment is explained in the coming verses, 30-32. It is explicitly noted as temporal, or earthly judgment. And this is what should be expected. If a non-believer partakes of the elements, then there is no true meaning to that non-believer in what they are doing, therefore, no true judgment would work to correct their unbelief. However, if a believer (which is whom Paul is implying in his words) partakes in an unworthy manner, then a temporal judgment, resulting in temporal punishment should be the logically expected outcome. They are already saved by Christ. Therefore, what they need is correction in this life, not in the next.

And all of this is expected because of "not discerning the Lord's body." There was no distinction made between what is holy and what is profane. It implies eating and drinking as if the elements are common and it fails to make the necessary connection to the work of Christ on our behalf.

The King James Version has the most unfortunate and confused rendering of "eateth and drinketh damnation to himself." Some speculate that the term "damnation" which they use may have had less force at the time of the translation, but this is improbable. A

review of the other uses of the word "damnation" in the KJV point particularly to the punishments of hell. But the word translated here is *krima*. It is more properly rendered "judgment." As Vincent's Word Studies notes, *krima* "is a temporary judgment, and so is distinguished from *katakrima* - condemnation, from which this temporary judgment is intended to save the participant."

This mistranslation has caused many to fall into neuroses over the taking of the elements and it has led many to not take them at all. This then is exactly the opposite of what is actually commanded in that we are, as the Lord says, to participate as "often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me."

Life application: If you have been saved by the blood of Christ, you will never become "unsaved." However, your actions may have consequences in this life and they may lead to a loss of rewards in the eternal state. The way to avoid these pitfalls is to know your Bible and apply it to your life.

*Heavenly Father, it is so sad to see churches that once held fast to Your word but which now allow the most vile and despicable practices within their walls. What is sacred and holy is treated with contempt. Pagans are allowed to enter the sanctuary and pray to false gods and to trample over the exalted name of Jesus Christ. As long as You give me breath, I will proclaim Jesus and Jesus alone, holding fast to His words that He is the way, the truth, and the life, and that there is no other way to be reconciled to You but through Him. I stand on Christ my Lord. Amen.*

**For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep.**

1 Corinthians 11:30

Because of the "unworthy manner" in which the congregants at Corinth had taken the Lord's Supper, Paul says that "many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep." In other words, he directly equates their weakness, sickness, and deaths to their conduct at the meal. There are a couple things to note about this:

As he wrote this letter directly to those at Corinth, then his words about the sickness and death must be true, regardless of the reason for it.

As this letter specifically addresses their improper conduct at the Lord's Supper, this certainly happened.

Because he is tying their health to the improper observance of the Lord's Supper, he is fully convinced that this is the cause of the ill-health and death; it is a spiritual connection between two physical concepts.

Concerning the third point, scholars have attempted to equate the physical aspect of the meal (overindulgence) with the ill-health and death, but if that were the case then why would Paul only call them out for their overindulgence and improper attitude during the Lord's Supper? In fact, he rhetorically asked them, "Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?" If he was concerned about their portly appearance or their overindulgence in wine, he would have said, "You are living in an unhealthy way and you will keel over from it some day." But instead, he ties these things directly to the Lord's Supper.

Their weakness, sickness, and "sleep" (meaning death; it is an idiom for death to a follower of the Lord) is a direct result of improper conduct during the Lord's Supper. Although this may have been an occurrence unique to the Apostolic period of the church, there is nothing to suggest that. If there is ill health or even premature death in a congregation, the conduct of the Lord's Supper should be evaluated. What God chooses to use as a form of chastisement and judgment is up to Him. The fact that this is recorded in the Bible shows us that this may occur if the observance is improperly conducted.

Life application: How God judges is up to God. It is our duty to learn His word, adhere to it, and render to Him submission and obedience with a right and holy attitude.

*O God, when things go bad, how can I know if it is simply the course of life or Your judgment on me? At what point do I say, "This is unfair"? Lord, no matter what, I will trust that in anything that happens, there is nothing unfair in it and I will praise You through the storm. And I will also review my life and make sure that I'm following Your word as I should. If I am, then whatever happens must not be because of discipline. I will accept even the trials as grace if I am living as I should. How I love You, so be with me and strengthen me O God. Amen.*

**For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. 1 Corinthians 11:31**

In this verse, Paul makes a change to include himself in his words by saying "we." It is a way of identifying with the Corinthians in the struggle of life and the fight against sin. And how true his words ring in any situation! "For" ties the thought directly to his previous words that "many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep." It is a type

of disciplinary judgment which has been rendered upon the church at Corinth to get them to realize their state. In realization, they should then contemplate, and in contemplation, they should act.

The reason for having laws is more often than not a way of keeping people from harm. If we ignore the law, we are bound to get harmed. However, if we are caught in the act, we may receive whatever punishment the law mandates in order to get us to consider and correct our ways. The same is true with the precepts of the Bible. There is an expected standard, often explicit and often implicit. In the case of the Lord's Supper, the standard was and is explicit. We know this because of what Paul said earlier in verse 23,

"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you."

Therefore, in the verbal instruction of the Lord's Supper he would have given all that was necessary to avoid the judgments which had come upon them. If they had considered their ways, there would have been no weakness, sickness, or death that could be attributed to their improper conduct. However, at the same time, there would have been no instructions for the Lord's Supper in writing for future generations either. So even in the discipline of the Corinthians, a good result has arisen. With the inclusion of these written instructions, all churches have the same information with which to conduct this rite.

Because we have this specific instruction, how much more accountable to the Lord are we! Therefore, let us judge ourselves so that we will not be judged. With your proper knowledge, don't hesitate to note what needs correction in your own church.

Life application: Be sure to read, contemplate, and then apply the precepts of the Bible. In so doing, you will avoid many of the pitfalls which it is trying to keep you from.

*How I cherish my time with You O God!  
Each moment as I live, You are here with me  
Every single step that I take on the path which I trod  
You illuminate it so that I can see*

*Your word is a lamp to my feet, it is true  
It is a light to my path, wherever I go  
There is never a time that I am without You  
I have hidden Your word in my heart, I cherish it so*

*Yes Lord, thank You for the sound council and guidance in Your word. As I apply it to my life, I know that I can avoid many trials and pits which would otherwise come my way. And in the times of trials that do come, I have the perfect assurance that it is being used for a good end. I don't need to worry or fret, but to simply place those things in Your capable hands and rest in You! Thank You for this blessed assurance. Amen.*

**But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. 1 Corinthians 11:32**

This verse shows us that those who are noted in verse 30 as being "weak," "sick," or who even "sleep" (meaning have died) were still saved despite their incorrect actions which led to the judgment rendered by the Lord, termed here as being "chastened." It then shows that the term "damnation" used by the King James translation was in fact an immensely poor choice of words.

There is still salvation for believers who erred in this way because salvation is eternal. When someone believes, they are sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that they will never again come again under condemnation. Thus, Paul makes a distinction between believers and "the world" (meaning unregenerate people). For those in Christ, there is the surety of salvation; for those in the world, there is the surety of condemnation.

The chastening of believers is noted in a detailed way in Hebrews 12 and further explains Paul's thoughts in this verse -

<sup>6</sup>"For whom the LORD loves He chastens,  
And scourges every son whom He receives."

<sup>7</sup> If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? <sup>8</sup> But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. <sup>9</sup> Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup> For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. <sup>11</sup> Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:6-11

Life application: Chastening from the Lord has a purpose that is intended to mold us further to His image and to correctly align our lives with His intent for us. Let us look with gratitude to the Lord that His chastening proves that we are legitimate children.

*Lord God, it sure is painful to face Your corrective hand, but at the same time, it lets me know that I am truly Yours. When You discipline me as a son, it means that I am Your child. And so even in this, I will be sure to accept what comes my way with gratitude, knowing that You are molding me for Your glory. Thank You for this. Amen.*

**Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.**

1 Corinthians 11:33

"Therefore" is given to sum up all of Paul's thoughts starting in verse 17. In that verse, he noted that those in Corinth had "come together not for the better but for the worse." In explanation of that, in comments intended to correct the problem, and in justification of why his directions were so important, he laid out his points in an orderly fashion until verse 32. In an overall summary statement, he then gives them his curative recommendation by beginning with "my brethren."

The addressees, despite their mishandling of the matter thus far, were still considered among the fellowship. The loss of salvation because of their conduct is not even a consideration. And so, to these brethren he says, "when you come together to eat, wait for one another." Instead of hurriedly gobbling up the food that was brought to the meal, they should wait until all had arrived and would be willing to fellowship with others and share in what was available.

In this, the believers would truly be a united group and they would be more likely to focus on the Lord and His work rather than on their stomachs. A good way to consider how this is true would be to think of a prayer meeting. If people are continuously walking in and out, then the prayer will by its very nature be dysfunctional. Concentration will be lost, there will be a repetition of prayers already offered, and there may even be resentment by those who had been trying to concentrate because of the stream of interruptions.

Life application: A church which is not run in an orderly and pious fashion will inevitably fail to unite in mind and heart on the Lord. The worship will become less "He" centered and more "me" centered. In all things, let us remember that it is the Lord who is to be exalted during praise and worship.

*Heavenly Father, Glorious God - Forgive me for my often self-centered attitude in life. I seek prosperity and ease even though I know others have such difficult times. Is my time at church really focused on You, or is it about me and what I like? My times of prayer are inevitably distracted by a thousand things which fly through my mind. Lord, help me to conduct myself in a manner which honors You every moment and in all ways. Grant this that You will receive the glory You are due. Amen.*

**But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come. 1 Corinthians 11:34**

As is evidenced here, the gathering at Corinth was one which eventually evolved into something like a pot-luck supper. The term for it was an agape or "love" feast. But as the ceremony evolved, it quickly left behind the very purpose that the Lord's Supper was intended to convey. Instead of remembering the Lord and His work, it was a chance to eat and be merry. To avoid this, Paul's words of instruction are specific that "if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home."

A regular meal belongs in a regular place. The Lord's Supper belongs among the Lord's people. Paul wanted the two kept separate in order to maintain the dignity of the occasion. He had already noted the consequences of having not treated the ceremony in a dignified way (in that some were weak, sick, or even dead) and he didn't want that to continue lest they also "come together for judgment."

Again, Paul's words here imply that it is a temporal, not a spiritual judgment. Some translations incorrectly say "condemnation" here. It is a bad choice of words because as Paul says elsewhere, "*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...*" (Romans 8:1). Paul has the best intent for those in Corinth concerning both their continued earthly health and prosperity as well as their spiritual growth in Christ. And his words are recorded to help us in this same manner as well.

In closing out chapter 11 he finishes with, "And the rest I will set in order when I come." There were other instructions, probably unique to the situation at Corinth, that needed to be set in order. However, they either weren't pressing or maybe they were of a delicate nature that he didn't want included in a public letter. What is apparent is that he fully intended to go to Corinth to meet with them in person.

Life application: The directions for the Lord's Supper are given in 1 Corinthians 11 and are based on the words of the Lord as found in the gospels. There is specific instruction and yet there is much detail which is left open to individual choice for the arrangement

of the rite. Adhering to what is given and not trifling over things that are left unstated will lead to a sound and healthy memorial which will also be accommodating to time, place, culture, and personal choice.

*Lord, I'm so thankful for the freedom we have to arrange churches in a way which accommodates our style of worship, cultural preferences, and spiritual needs. And yet, there is also a given amount of order and structure in Your word to keep us from devolving into something not pleasing to You. Thank You for the freedom to worship You in a way which fits who we are as individuals. May our hearts be united in a worship of spirit and truth regardless of the externals. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 12

**Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:**

1 Corinthians 12:1

Paul will now begin a completely new segment of his epistle. After treating the issue of the Lord's Supper, he next moves into the area of "spiritual gifts." This is probably a response to the next item in the letter he referred to in 1 Corinthians 7:1 which said, "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me..." In this verse, the word "gifts" is not in the original. Rather, it is inserted by translators. In essence, the verse more accurately reads, "Now concerning (things) spiritual..."

"Spiritual gifts" are gifts which have been given by the Spirit for the building up of the church and for the edification of believers. Some of these gifts were certainly apostolic in nature (meaning that they occurred only during the apostolic age which ended with the word "Amen" in Revelation 22:21). Others are gifts which may be seen highlighted at certain special times during the church age when revival is needed. And others are gifts which are common and needed for the church at all times.

The gift of "tongues" is possibly one of the most abused of all of the supposedly received "gifts" within the church today. It is given extended treatment by Paul, particularly in chapter 14. This specific gift is so commonly misused in comparison with how it is defined in Scripture that nothing other than the term "embarrassing" can be applied to its use in churches, particularly in recent times. If the word of God was held in any regard at all, there wouldn't be such a humiliating display of its supposed use. But apparently, Paul went through the same behavior in his time and his words of instruction which were intended to correct the problem have been largely ignored.

There are several certainties concerning gifts which will be detailed now and then evaluated in the coming verses -

Non-Christians cannot claim their comparable abilities as gifts. They may have them as natural human abilities, but not as spiritual gifts. If it is a true gift, it is given by the Holy Spirit for the glory of God, and the Holy Spirit is only given to true believers in Christ. This is implied by the term "brethren" in this particular verse.

Regardless of what gift is given, they all have the same divine Source. Therefore, they are all intended to bring glory to God, not to the individual who receives the gift.

If a "gift" is used in a church and its use contradicts the words of the Bible (which has been given by the Spirit), then it cannot be a true exercising of that gift. Rather than exalting God, it therefore discredits the person who is misusing the supposed "gift."

Each gift is intended to work cohesively within the body and for the body, not independently of the body. Supposed "gifts" which are disruptive or self-highlighting are not gifts at all, but are unwarranted displays.

And so, in expectation of very important instruction from him concerning the issue of spiritual things he says, "I do not want you to be ignorant." It is the same thought he gave when beginning his discourse of chapter 10 which dealt in detail with sexual immorality and idolatry. Paul's words here contain the same weight and the same heartfelt desire to ensure the glory of the Lord is maintained.

Life application:

Question - How can you know if a certain type of conduct or supposed "gift" which is seen in a church is acceptable or not?

Answer - By reading and knowing your Bible, which is given for this very purpose, and then comparing that knowledge to how the "gift" or conduct is used.

Remedy for bad doctrine - Rightly divide and properly apply the words of the Bible to your church gatherings.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the freedom to worship You in a way which is comfortable for those I gather with. The one thing I would ask is that we would never do something contrary to Your word. For sure, we would desire Your glorification above all else. I know there is plenty of room to glorify You while remaining faithful to Your word. So, help us in this and we will be sure to praise You with all our soul! Amen.*

**You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. 1 Corinthians 12:2**

In this verse, Paul is showing a contrast between the "spiritual gifts" mentioned in verse 1 and that of dumb idols. As Gentiles and without the knowledge of the true God, they were "carried away to these dumb idols." As occurs even today, there are charlatans who pretend to speak for idols or even through idols - things made of stone, wood, metal, or even plastic. They have no true power and they cannot affect our lives in any way.

An example of this from the 115th Psalm provides clarity concerning the matter -

"But our God *is* in heaven;  
He does whatever He pleases.  
<sup>4</sup>Their idols *are* silver and gold,  
The work of men's hands.  
<sup>5</sup>They have mouths, but they do not speak;  
Eyes they have, but they do not see;  
<sup>6</sup>They have ears, but they do not hear;  
Noses they have, but they do not smell;  
<sup>7</sup>They have hands, but they do not handle;  
Feet they have, but they do not walk;  
Nor do they mutter through their throat.  
<sup>8</sup>Those who make them are like them;  
*So is everyone who trusts in them.*" Psalm 115:3-8

It is from such a state that these Gentiles in Corinth had been called. They once followed after dumb idols, having been "led" by them. The word "led" is from the Greek word *apagomenoi*. It carries the idea of being seduced or carried away. Thus, the Gentile world, either uninformed or misinformed about the true God, was carried away in deception by such idols. In contrast to this is the sealing of the Spirit in believers of Jesus Christ. They have been lovingly called out of darkness and into the light of the truth and have been endowed with spiritual gifts to confirm their new position.

Having stated this, Paul will now expand on the thought so that the believers will understand their own position and their own gifts within the body.

Life application: Things that we take for granted as harmless are often most destructive. Knocking on wood, Indian dream catchers, feng shui arrangements, and even idols within "Christian" circles, such as statues of Mary, crucifixes, etc., will all distract our attention from the truth of our relationship in Christ. Further, our participation in such things can only lead others away from the truth as well. Keep your Bible open, your eyes on Jesus, and your prayers to God through Him alone.

*Yes Lord God, I was once under the impression that horoscopes, Feng Shui, and little statues could somehow affect my life. But then I met Christ my Lord and I realized that there is no created thing which is due my attention or devotion. Rather, my heart belongs to Him, my eyes will be focused on Him, and my meditation will be on Your word*

*both day and night. In this, I know I will always be pleasing to You. Thank You for the freedom I have from dumb idols now to serve You, the Living God. Amen.*

**Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.**

1 Corinthians 12:3

This verse is commonly misunderstood because the context has been ignored. If this were a stand-alone verse, it would seem to say something completely different than is intended. But Paul begins with the word "therefore" to show us that the entire verse is dependent on what has already been said. He has been speaking of "spiritual gifts" as opposed to "dumb idols." A true spiritual gift is one which is given by the true Spirit of God. As the Spirit is a member of the Godhead, then what issues forth from the Spirit will never contradict what the Godhead has proclaimed or ordained.

The Godhead is in full agreement in all things and so any gift which has come from the Spirit will be in line with that precept. Knowing this with all surety, Paul says, "Therefore I make known to you..." His words are given so that the Corinthians will be able to absolutely discern whether a supposed "gift" is really from the Spirit or not. This then must be in response to a matter raised in the letter written to him. Someone must have claimed to prophesy "in the Spirit" and what he prophesied was seemingly contrary to what they thought was truthful. Hence, Paul is giving certain clarification concerning the matter.

In his words, he notes that "no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed." The term "no one" is the Greek *oideis*. It could be a man speaking out of his own head, whether rational or insane, or it could be speaking of a demon influencing a person or somehow (if possible) appearing in order to make a proclamation. In other words, any word spoken by anyone or anything who claims inspiration "by the Spirit of God" is to be considered in this. If that claim is made, it cannot be true if they call "Jesus accursed." The word for accursed is *anathema* which carries the idea of being banned or set apart for destruction. It is impossible that the Spirit would say such a thing through someone and therefore, if someone made that statement and claimed they were in the Spirit, they would be proven false.

Likewise, Paul says that "no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." Again, he is talking about someone who is claiming inspiration by the Spirit. Anyone can actually utter the words "Jesus is Lord" but if they are not truly under the influence of the Spirit, then the words have no meaning. However, if they are in the Spirit, then the

words are certainly true. The matter here isn't concerning human ability, but rather influence of the Spirit.

The reason why this is important is that there are all kinds of false teachers who stand in the pulpit claiming that Jesus is Lord, but don't truly believe it. Nor are they influenced by the Spirit. This verse cannot be used as a source for following someone simply because they make an oral pronouncement. Instead, it is given as a means of discerning whether a proclamation is truly of the Spirit or not.

Life application: As all Scripture is given by God, nothing that Scripture contains will ever contradict itself nor will it be aligned against the purposes of God. Further, any action within a church which is not in accord with Scripture cannot be of the Spirit. This will become immensely important to understand later when Paul gives the directions for speaking in tongues. If those directions aren't in line with Scripture, then they are not of the Spirit.

*Lord, today I would like to lift up those people I know who are facing troubles and trials in their lives. So many with hearts that truly love You are facing really difficult times. Let their faith not be shaken and let them know that You are with them even through their trials. Remind them of the promises of Your word and help them to keep their eyes and hearts steadfastly on those things. Be their Comforter and their Rock of refuge. Thank You Lord. Amen.*

### **There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:4**

Paul returns back to the thought of verse 1 in order to continue his discourse on "gifts." There he said, "Now concerning spiritual *gifts*..." after that, he made an explanation concerning the distinction between "dumb idols" and the Holy Spirit. Now, based on understanding the true workings of the Spirit, he notes that, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit."

The word "diversities" is used only three times in the New Testament and all three are found in verses 4, 5, and 6. Interestingly, the Spirit is noted in verse 4, Christ (the "Lord") is noted in verse 5, and the Father (called "the same God") in verse 6. Thus, this sequence of verses shows a purposeful expression of the doctrine of the Trinity. The "diversities" then are shown to be reflective of the different workings of the Trinity in the believer.

The process of salvation in the believer is always the same; it is by grace through faith. At the moment of salvation, the believer is sealed with the Spirit. However, from this point, different gifts are highlighted in individual believers, even though the Source of those gifts remains the same. When the sun shines on an individual, the result is the same as the light shining on another person; they both receive the same light. However, when light shines through a prism, the light goes off into a variety of colors. The same light is received, but it is diffused as God determined through the created order. Such is the nature of salvation in the believer followed by the expression of gifts given to and through the believer.

Life application: It is common to quote Jesus' words from Matthew 5:16 which say, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." The light that shines then should be a reflection of the person that you are as gifted by the Holy Spirit. Let the Light which has shone on you be displayed in a manner worthy of the gift which you have received.

*Lord, I know You didn't save me to continue on as I was before You saved me. And so, change me, mold me, and refine me to reflect Your glory, to seek Your honor, and to lead others to You. What a tragedy it is when I waste the precious time You have given me on my old life and my old ways. Help me in this Lord. Old clothes are often more comfortable, but they have rips, stains, and stinky smells. Clothe me with pure garments of Your righteousness each morning as I arise and I will wear them to Your glory. Amen.*

**There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.** 1 Corinthians 12:5

Just as there are "diversities of gifts" (v. 4) given by the Spirit, there are also "differences of ministries." The same word translates both "diversities" and "differences." In the sense of differing ministries, the word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament when referring to the divisions of the priests and Levites recorded in 1 Chronicles and Ezra.

In the church, there are elders, deacons, and etc. Each has a particular ministry to perform and yet, they all fall under "the same Lord" who is the Head of the church. The "Lord" here is certainly speaking of Jesus who commissioned the disciples in Matthew 10:1 and Luke 10:1 and who designated each apostle according to His choice, such as Peter's appointment in Matthew 16:18 when he was given "the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Peter exercised his use of those keys in Acts 2, 8, and 10 during the early establishment of the church.

If an appointment is a true appointment, it falls under the Lordship of Christ and there should be neither feelings of pride nor of lowliness. Rather, each person who is appointed under Christ in true ministry, regardless of its size or supposed importance, is fulfilling a job over which the Lord is in charge. For this reason, both boasting or feelings of lowliness are to be excluded.

Life application: Do you have a ministry within the church? If you clean the bathrooms as your task is that a shame to you? If you are a pastor of an extremely large and popular church, is that a point of boasting to you? Would the people come to a fancy church if the bathrooms were utterly disgusting? So, whose ministry makes that difference? The jobs we might feel as lowly are actually of great importance. All jobs should ultimately be directed to the honor of the Lord.

*Lord establish the work of my hands  
So that my tasks will bring glory to You  
May it be that everyone understands  
You are the reason for all that I do*

*Whether sharing Your good news, my Lord  
Or cleaning a bathroom on Thursday every week  
Or teaching others Your precious word  
In each task, only Your glory I seek*

*Lord, thank You for the people who are willing to do the different jobs within the church. Together each task unites to make a well-functioning ministry that is edifying to those who attend. Thank You for those who clean, those who bring food, those who make sure the lights all work, those who teach, those who invite, and a thousand other ministries that come together as a group to worship You. Thank You for each one of them. Amen.*

**And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.**

1 Corinthians 12:6

Paul moves to the third precept which governs our Christian life. The first was "gifts," the second was "ministries," and the third is that there are "diversities of activities." Some translations call these "operations" or "administrations." According to Vincent's Word Studies, they are the "Outward manifestations and results of spiritual gifts."

If someone has the gift of preaching, the manifestation of that is the weaving of words together to build up and edify others. If they have the gift of tongues, they will be able

to either speak or translate a language in order to build up others through the impartation of that language. If they have the gift of giving, their activity will be seen perhaps in what they give in order for the ministry to continue to grow and meet its needs.

It should be noted that for the most part, the gifts which are given to believers are not unique to the church. Non-Christians have oratory skills and speak to build up and edify others. People around the world are able to speak in a multitude of languages. And likewise, there are people who give to charities to help others in almost every culture and nation on earth. This is true with the vast majority of gifts and types of ministries and the activities derived from them.

The difference is that for the Christian, the gift moves from a world-centered perspective to a Christ-centered one. The true spiritual gift is one which is used to glorify God as opposed to self or something less than God. This is an important distinction that should not be missed because many claim that they have a certain gift of God and yet it is not used for His glory. The book of Acts shows this on several occasions.

For the Christian though, "there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all." When the activity is used appropriately, it will bring honor to Jesus Christ and thus honor God the Father. It is God "who works all in all" for that very purpose. This is confirmed by Jesus' words which say, "that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." John 5:23

Life application: You have been given a gift. As a Christian, it is intended to bring glory to God. And so, allow God to work through you and your gift to bring Him the glory that He is due.

*Heavenly Father, before I met Christ, I wasted all of the talents and gifts that You had given me. I worked for others to see me and pat me on the back, I worked to have things that were temporary and without any true importance, and even in the things I did that I thought were for good, they didn't include You. Now I understand that apart from You, it was all wasted effort. May all that I do for the rest of my days be used to glorify You my precious Lord. Amen.*

**But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:**

1 Corinthians 12:7

The word "but" which begins this sentence does not mean a contrast. It may be more properly thought of as "and" or "now" or some other word that various translations have chosen. Rather than a contrast, we are being given a further explanation of verses 4-6. Taken together they read -

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. <sup>7</sup> But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: ..."

These "diversities of gifts" are made manifest in individuals not for the self to revel in or to be unduly self-pleased with, but to profit everyone as they partake of what the Spirit has granted through that person. Paul will explain in the coming verses to the Corinthians that most of the gifts are gifts which are geared specifically for Christians. However, there are those people that possess these same talents and abilities who are not Christians. Paul isn't speaking about them. It is true that God formed all men, and who we are was given by God whether we acknowledge it or not, but until the gift or ability is directed towards Christ, it cannot be considered under this verse.

Paul is speaking of those gifts which benefit the church and the people of the church. As each of us bears abilities from God and as they were given by His wisdom, then we shouldn't feel elevated over others because we have a gift which is perceived as "better" than others. Nor should we feel depressed because we feel our gift is less than others. We should be thankful and satisfied in that which was given by God.

Life application: Our use of who we are as individuals is to be for the glory of the Lord. So let us use our gifts to His honor. No matter what gift we possess, if it was given by God, it must be an honorable gift because it is intended to bring Him honor.

*Heavenly Father, it sure makes me feel good to know that my abilities, whatever they are, are accepted by You because they came from You. If I use them for Your glory, no matter how insignificant they may seem to others, they are what You have graced me with. How can I not feel wonderful about my daily life, knowing that each step was ordained by You! And so, who I am and what I do will be used to bring honor to You. Amen!*

**...for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12:8**

This verse begins the list of gifts given by the Spirit and it builds upon the thought of the previous verse. The "for" which opens the verse shows this. Verse 7, with the added "for" of verse 8, will relay how Paul is directing us -

"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: For..."

This then intends for us to look at this list from that context. We can note the following:

- The gifts to be mentioned have an external Source (the Spirit).
- They are given to believers and thus boasting, or feelings of unworthiness over lacking a particular gift should be excluded.
- The gifts are intended to profit all, and are not merely intended for private gain.

And so, Paul begins the list with "to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit." Wisdom is more than mere knowledge concerning an issue. Wisdom involves the proper handling and application of knowledge. Miriam-Webster Dictionary defines wisdom as:

- Knowledge that is gained by having many experiences in life
- the natural ability to understand things that most other people cannot understand
- knowledge of what is proper or reasonable: good sense or judgment

The Bible speaks in great length about wisdom. It is a timeless, endless gift that finds its Source in the Creator itself. Therefore, for created man there must be a starting point to true wisdom. Discerning what that starting point is will lead to a right application of all knowledge. The Bible records this starting point on several occasions when it states,

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 110:10).

All knowledge which is possessed by man must be evaluated through "the fear of the Lord." For example, to evaluate life without this fear has led to the theory of evolution, a doctrine contrary to the Bible which was given by the Lord. To evaluate morality without a fear of the Lord will inevitably lead to faulted morals. This then is a high and noble gift which is granted to those in the body.

After noting the gift of wisdom, Paul next says that, "to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit." Knowledge logically precedes wisdom. It involves experiential awareness and then processing that awareness in a way which it is cataloged and retained. Again, Miriam-Webster Dictionary provides a definition of knowledge -

- information, understanding, or skill that you get from experience or education
- awareness of something: the state of being aware of something

Even though knowledge is required for wisdom, the Source is the same. There can be no experience without something to be experienced. Therefore, the gift of knowledge in created man must have a starting point as well. For right knowledge, the same Source is for that of wisdom just as the Bible tells us -

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,  
But fools despise wisdom and instruction." Proverbs 1:7

The word used by Solomon for knowledge, *daat*, is the same word used for the first time in Genesis 2:9 which concerned the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Man lacked proper knowledge until he ate of the fruit. The experience is what brought him to the state he was in, but it was knowledge which was acquired by failing to consider the Lord in the decision he made. He was deceived and man fell. The gaining of knowledge apart from the Lord will inevitably lead to pride followed by disaster. Paul speaks of this concept in 1 Corinthians 8:1-3.

Such gifts then, must be used in accord with the Giver or they will be harmful rather than helpful.

Life application: In proverbs, Solomon gives us a great life application -

"Wisdom *is* the principal thing;  
*Therefore* get wisdom.  
And in all your getting, get understanding." Proverbs 4:7

*Heavenly Father, I know that all of the knowledge in the world won't do me a bit of good unless I apply it properly. So, help me Lord to be wise in how I evaluate the world around me. Grant me knowledge that is based in knowing You and then endow me with wisdom to apply that knowledge in the fear of You. I know with this gift my walk in this world will be rightly directed and that You will be pleased with Your servant. And so this I pray.  
Amen.*

**...to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit.**  
1 Corinthians 12:9

Paul continues his list of gifts of the Spirit. Here in verse 9, he notes that "to another faith by the same Spirit" is given. This is obviously not speaking of saving faith because anyone who is in Christ has exercised faith in order to be saved. At that time, he was sealed with the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 1:13, 14). Therefore, this must be speaking of the great faith that carries individuals and even congregations through the difficult times; that builds them up in hopes of meeting and overcoming obstacles; that can "move mountains" in order to smooth the path ahead; and which says, "It will all be ok because the Lord is with us."

Such faith is seen at times where it is most needed and it is to such individuals that people turn for reassurance and edification.

In his next thought, Paul notes that "to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit" are passed out. It should be understood that the same preposition for "faith" is given for "healings." In the previous verse and in this verse, the prepositions are listed as follows:

- wisdom - *dia* (through)
- knowledge - *kata* (according to)
- faith - *en* (in, by)
- healings - *en* (in, by)

Where wisdom comes through the Spirit and knowledge is given according to the Spirit, faith and healings are both in or by the Spirit. Therefore, faith and healings come about in the same fashion according to Paul's description. This then must be healings which are beyond the normal "go to your doctor for a cure" healings. They are those healings which come by faith and through prayer.

Having said this, there is no reason to accept the overly ostentatious (and quite profitable!) displays of supposed healings which permeate the charismatic churches of today. Sickness and disability can be as much a gift or learning experience from God as being healthy is. To suppose that one can "claim" healing in Jesus' name is to usurp God's right to leave someone sick for His good purposes. A few sicknesses of note will verify this:

- In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Paul suffered with a "thorn in the flesh" which he begged the Lord to remove. Instead of doing so, he was told that the Lord's grace was sufficient for Him through his sickness. He was told by the Lord that His "strength is made perfect in weakness."

- In Philippians 2:25-30, Paul writes in detail about the sickness which almost resulted in the death of Epaphroditus; a sickness he had no control over.
- In 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul wrote to Timothy that he should, "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities."
- Paul wrote to Timothy that he left Trophimus sick in Miletus in 2 Timothy 4:20.

In these and other instances of infirmity found in the New Testament, there was no arrogant display of "claiming" healing. It was understood that the Lord had determined for these people to suffer through the sickness. Many verses are ripped out of context in order to justify that healing can and should be expected. Such misuse can only lead to dissatisfaction in one's walk with the Lord.

A good example of such a verse is from 1 Peter 2:24 which says, "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed." This verse has nothing to do with physical healing. The context in which Peter writes is healing from sin. Without proper doctrine and right dividing of the word of God, the supposed "gift" of healing used by many people only brings discredit, not honor, on the Lord.

Life application: Ensure context is always considered when quoting Scripture.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the times when we have sickness. They may not be fun, but without them we wouldn't know how great it is to simply feel good. Thank You for the gray and drizzly days. Without them, we wouldn't appreciate the sunny days. And Lord, thank You for the sandspurs which get stuck between our toes from time to time. When we lay in a soft field of grass, we wouldn't enjoy it nearly as much if we didn't know that laying in a bed of sandspurs was another possibility. Through all the tough times Lord, we thank You. Amen.*

**...to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.**  
1 Corinthians 12:10

Paul continues with his list of spiritual gifts in verse 10. The first is "the working of miracles." This is a separate category than "healings" which has already been mentioned. It could be a reference to Jesus' words in Mark 16:18 -

"...they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Whatever the miracles are, they are above and beyond what would normally be expected from a person; exceeding general capabilities. However, there are those who have unusual abilities and who will claim their "gift" is from the Spirit. People can do an astonishing array of unique things, but this doesn't mean that their ability is a true spiritual gift. It can only be considered as such if its intent is to bring glory to God.

Paul next says that "to another prophecy" is given. There are two types of prophecy in Scripture. The first is "foretelling." This is speaking of something future and which is otherwise unknowable. There are instances of this recorded in Acts. However, this is such an abused practice in modern times that the only word which can be used for such utterances is "false." People "prophesy" over others about prosperity, deliverance from sickness, marital issues, etc. These are not God-centered, but man-centered and have nothing to do with true prophecy. Foretelling ended with the word "Amen" at the end of the book of Revelation.

The other type of prophecy is "forth-telling." This is the speaking forth and explanation of Scripture. Pastors who rightly divide the word of God, speaking from the pulpit or in teaching classes, are forth-telling the word of God. It is an on-going gift which will last throughout the church age.

Paul next states that "to another discerning of spirits" is given. This is an immensely valuable gift. There are true preachers and there are false ones. There are people who can actually speak in tongues and there are those who utter nonsense. There are those who really have the gift of healing others through prayer and intercession, and then there are charlatans who stand on stage and mock the Lord through supposed healings.

To be able to recognize the difference between what is true and what is false takes discernment, and that discernment is only certain when based on a knowledge of Scripture. One cannot support a "feeling" of discernment without backing up that "feeling" with knowledge. Otherwise, there may be lacking of discernment about one's own feelings. John writes about the use of this gift in his first epistle -

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." 1 John 4:1

How can one "test the spirits" unless they know what is false? The answer is that they can only know what is false through knowing the word of God. The word was breathed out by the Spirit and therefore the word will provide right discernment concerning that which is false.

Paul's next item in the list is that "to another *different* kinds of tongues" have come. He will later show that this is a lesser-gift and a most abused one, even during his time. He will spend an immense amount of effort explaining it because of this. The word "tongues" is the Greek *glossa*. It literally means "tongue," such as the tongue in the mouth. It also is figuratively used to describe a tongue, such as "tongues of fire." The fire looks like a tongue and therefore it is called a tongue. And, it is used to describe that which a tongue is used for - to speak or make sound. Therefore, language and sound are called a "tongue."

There is no verse in Scripture that shows these to be anything more than known, spoken languages. In fact, in Acts 2, all of the "tongues" are explained as known languages -

"And how *is it that* we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? <sup>9</sup> Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup> Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." Acts 2:8-11

This is consistently the case throughout the rest of the New Testament. It is always referring to a known language and one must insert their own presupposition to come to the conclusion that these "tongues" are either ecstatic or incoherent. Paul, for example, says in 1 Corinthians 14 that he spoke in more tongues than all of those in Corinth. This doesn't mean in frequency, but rather in acquired languages. He knew Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and probably Latin, and his native dialect as well. He may have known other languages too.

And he finishes with "to another the interpretation of tongues" is given. Later, Paul will show that if someone speaks a tongue (a known language) in a congregation, there must be an interpreter. Therefore, if a person speaks a language and yet doesn't understand that language, they must have someone interpret what is spoken.

This is not at all unusual. Many people, for example, learn biblical Hebrew and Greek in college and yet they cannot speak it. Rather, they can only understand it in writing. On the other hand, there are people who can speak those languages, but who do not understand what they are speaking because they have never been trained in the language structure. Some speak languages in acting or sing them in songs and yet they have no idea what they are saying. Paul says that if someone speaks in a tongue, they must have an interpreter to explain the words that are uttered.

Life application: Paul's list today has been taken to such unhealthy extremes in churches that only self-aggrandizement and humiliation of the name of Christ is the result. A gift, if properly exercised, will have the purpose of edifying others, building up the church, and bringing glory to God. The showy use of supposed "gifts" which call attention to someone are to be shunned. A church is to be conducted in an orderly and harmonious way.

*O God, I'm heading in one direction in time. The past is there for my learning and the present is here to guide me - moment by moment - into the future. And the great thing about the process is that I am being led through each step to a known destination. The final book of Your word is written and what it details is glorious. Because I know the end, the process of getting there is bearable, even when it's difficult. Thank You for the surety of Your word which tells me of the surety of my future. Amen.*

**But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. 1 Corinthians 12:11**

From verses 5-10, a list of the different workings and gifts of the Spirit were provided. However, and despite this, they all have the same divine Source. Thus, Paul states "but" to show that regardless of the gift or ministry, they have a common value because of their common Source. It is noted that "one and the same Spirit works all these things." Logically, if one boasts in his particular gift over that of another, then they are boasting over what was determined by the Spirit of God; a tenuous position to say the least!

The same is true from the other angle. If a saved person possesses a particular gift and yet they are displeased with that gift, then their unhappiness is implicitly showing disdain for what God apportioned to them. There is nothing wrong with desiring the best gifts (as will be noted by Paul) but there is something wrong with not being satisfied with what one has at the same time. This is because it is the Spirit who is working out these things and "distributing to each one individually as He wills."

Who can charge God with wrongdoing? It is absurd to even contemplate it. The Spirit knows each person's abilities and capabilities and makes His distributions according to that superior knowledge.

In this there is an implicit confirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Spirit is described as possessing personal traits that only an individual could possess. Further, the omniscience of the Spirit is noted in the way His workings are depicted. And His sovereignty is also seen in His will to choose the appropriate distribution of gifts. As this

is so, the decisions made by the Spirit are decisions in accord with the will of God. Therefore, let us be thankful for our gifts and be pleased to strive for more or better gifts as we develop in Christ.

Life application: Whatever gift you possess, use it well and in a way which brings glory to the Lord. A gift given and yet unused is a wasted gift.

*I know Lord that You put me in this time in history and in the place I am specifically for Your purposes. I also know that You have given me certain abilities that can be used for Your glory or that I can squander away. So, help me Lord. Help me to use the time, place, and position I have been granted, and the abilities I possess for Your glory. This is my one chance to do my very best with the life You have given me. Let me use it wisely and in accord with Your will. Amen.*

**For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:12**

Paul now introduces a metaphor to help us grasp our position in the body and the gifts we have received from the Spirit. In doing this he will make a somewhat complicated issue more easily understood. God fashioned man as a soul/body unity. In our body, there are "many members." We have arms, legs, fingers, toes, eyes, ears, internal organs, a covering of skin, bones, and so on.

Despite each being an individual thing, together they comprise a single unit; as Paul says, they are "all the members of that one body." None are independent of the body, but are a part of the whole. As noted, they "being many, are one body." The finger on your right hand isn't independent of the hand and the hand isn't independent of the arm, etc. Each member is dependent on the whole. If a finger gets cut off, it is no longer a part of the body and it cannot continue to function. The same is true with any part of the body. If it is removed, it simply ceases to function.

In the human form then, there is a united existence where every part of the body has a particular function and without which the body will not be able to function properly. Understanding this, Paul says, "so also is Christ." The body of Christ, meaning the individual believers who have been given individual gifts, are not independent of the body. Instead, they are "all the members of that one body, being many" and yet they "are one body."

Life application: If someone is saved, they are a part of the body of Christ. In that body, they are assigned a particular gift which is intended to meet the needs of the body. This is why the Spirit gives gifts according to His wisdom. It is a specific gift to meet a specific need. If God fashioned man to be a marvelous organism which functions properly, how much more will He fashion the members of the body of Christ to function properly! Whatever your gift, use it with this in mind.

*Thank You God for the gifts and talents You have given each of us. And thank You for allowing us to use them in a way which will bring You glory and which will be of benefit to others within the church. Please continue to give us the strength needed to accomplish the things You have ordained for us to do. And help us to not boast about our accomplishments, but rather to pass the credit on to You, from where our strength comes from! Amen.*

**For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.**

1 Corinthians 12:13

The opening words of this verse, "For by one Spirit" continues on with the theme of the previous verses. From verse 4-11, we have been shown that the gifts and ministries all came from the same Spirit and therefore their use should be united for one ultimate goal. There should be no disharmony among the believers, no boasting about one's gift, and no feelings of being of less value within the body because of the gift or ministry we may possess.

To support this, we are told that by this "one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." Paul just explained that "the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body." As this is so, then each member is a part of a cohesive whole which should be working towards the accomplishment of the purposes of the whole body. To further bolster this point, he then gives two examples which demonstrate the greatest extremes possible.

The first concerns the identifier "whether Jews or Greeks." This is the Old Testament's greatest distinction. To be a Jew was to be of the chosen people of God. To be a Gentile was to be outside of the covenant promises. But now in Christ, that immense distinction is erased. Both Jew and Gentile have been baptized into one body.

Similarly, the same is also true with "slaves or free." A slave was one without rights and was under the authority and control of another. A free man had rights and could own

slaves, choosing to direct what the slaves did, when they did it, etc. However, the same Spirit baptized both slave and free into one body. In this body, each member has the same rights and privileges extended to him.

Together, regardless of the category they stood in from a cultural or societal aspect, they "have all been made to drink into one Spirit." Each received the same healing waters of regeneration.

A question which arises from this verse is whether the "baptism" mentioned is speaking of water baptism or the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The latter is certainly the case. Paul has been speaking of the work of the Spirit consistently. Water baptism is only an outward sign of an inward change in the believer. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is a one-time event which occurs upon belief, and it is granted to all who believe - Jew and Gentile, slave or free.

As a final point, it should be noted that a Gentile doesn't become a Jew when they believe, and a Jew doesn't lose his cultural status as a Jew. This is a point which some confuse, but throughout Paul's writings, he never equates one with the other. A slave who belongs to a human master doesn't stop being a slave to that human master when they come to Christ. Nor does a Jew stop being a Jew when they come to Christ. The very fact that Paul mentions the categories proves that those categories continue to exist after the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Life application: In Christ, you are no different than any other who is in Christ. You are a member of the body and have all the rights and privileges of that inclusion. Strive to be the best you can for the glory of the whole!

*How good it is to be a child of the Lord  
To know that I am one of His people  
I will live my life according to His word  
And will exalt Him with others under the church steeple*

*By His grace and love He saved me from sin  
And for eternity I will praise my Lord, Jesus!  
A great change has been made without and within  
What kind of love He has lavished on us!*

*Thank You Lord! I know that regardless of who I am to the world, as a member of Your body I am loved and cared for. To You, it doesn't matter if I'm poor or rich; the color of*

*my skin is irrelevant; the things I did in the past are washed away; and I share in the same Spirit as all others. No matter what the world thinks of me, I am Yours. That is what counts. I am Yours. Hallelujah and Amen!*

**For in fact the body is not one member but many.** 1 Corinthians 12:14

"For" in this verse serves two purposes. First, it reiterates what was said in verse 12, which was expanded on in verse 13. There it said, "For as the body is one and has many members." And secondly, it prepares for a continued expansion on the thought through actual examples of real body parts claiming they are not a part of the body and what the result of such a claim entails.

In the church, like the human body, there are various gifts, ministries, and activities which make up the whole. Even though the body is animated by one soul which is indivisible, the body itself is made up of an immense number of parts. Some of the parts, the head for example, are made up of smaller parts - the eyes, ears, mouth, hair, etc. But even these are made up of smaller parts. The mouth for example has lips, a tongue, taste buds, etc. And yet these are made up of smaller and smaller parts. Everything is interconnected and yet it is a functioning whole intended to work for the same purposes.

In this unity there is diversity, and yet in the diversity there is harmony. Such is how it should be within the church among its many members.

Life application: Are you a mouth? Don't boast over the tongue and taste buds because without them you wouldn't be a mouth. Work in harmony with others for the purpose of glorifying the Lord.

*Heavenly Father, the more I look at the structure of the church, the more perfectly I see that it all fits together as a whole. Each part is important, and every person has value. Help me to remember this when I look at those around me in the congregation. I don't ever want to lose sight that each is an individual, created in Your image and for Your glory. Help me to treat them with this thought in mind and to show them the respect that they deserve as You work to accomplish Your purposes through them. Amen.*

**If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?** 1 Corinthians 12:15

We were just told that "the body is not one member but many." In support of this, and yet to defend the unity of the body, Paul will use parts of the body as if they were in a sort of rebellion against one another. This then would be likened to individuals within the church who were warring over their individual gifts. And so, he begins with the hands and the feet.

A foot is a foot, but maybe it wants to be a hand. However, it is a foot, and so it rebels and says that it isn't a part of the body because it's not a hand. Does this change the fact that it is a member of the body? Not at all! It remains a foot and it will continue to serve as a foot to the body, regardless of whether it is happy about its "footiness."

And whether the hand feels exalted over this or not, there is a truth which it may find to be rather underhanded. The hand can't get the body to where it's going without the foot! If the body is hungry and the necessary food is down the road at the market, the hand is rather useless in getting the body to the market. In fact, the hand may think that a conspiracy is afoot against it! But this isn't the case. Rather, the foot is designed to perform its function and get the hand (and the rest of the body) to the market in a fairly fine fashion, thus out-footing the footlessly failing hand.

The body was constructed in a handy way to ensure that all its parts are interdependent so that none outfoots another, but instead each part will graciously accept the role which Divine Providence has handed it.

This very passage of Scripture may have been on the mind of Alexander Pope when he penned these words to consider -

“What if the foot, ordain'd the dust to tread,  
Or hand, to toil, aspired to be the head?  
What if the head, the eye, or ear declined  
To serve mere engines to the ruling mind?  
Just as absurd for any part to claim  
To be another in this general frame:  
Just as absurd to mourn the fate or pains  
The great directing MIND OF ALL ordains.  
All are but parts of one stupendous whole,  
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul.”  
Alexander Pope, The Essay on Man, 1734

Life application: If you're a foot, you are no less important than a hand. You are a part of the body which is indispensable to the whole. Be content with who you are; the body cannot work properly without you.

*Lord, I am so thankful to You for this life. I know You have placed me in the exact time in history, in the exact location that I am, and in the perfect position in life for me to seek You out and to be used by You. All the things that have happened to me along this journey have been a part of bringing me to where I am right now. Thank You for having selected every single thing, good and bad, to mold me for Your purposes. And help me to use it all so that the world can see You through me. Amen!*

**And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 1 Corinthians 12:16**

Paul just used the foot and the hand as comparative parts of the body. Now, using the same type of comparative analysis, he mentions the ear and the eye. Each has an important function for the body, and if either is lacking the whole body will suffer. But some might say one is more important than the other. Although not universal, it is common to hear people say that if they had to choose seeing or hearing, they would choose seeing. Because of this, the ear may hear and fear that should the choice be real it's time has drawn near.

But Paul asks, "If the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,'" does it change the fact that it is actually still a part of the body? Of course not! The ear doesn't stop being a part of the body just because its feelings are hurt that it's not an eye. And so the ear can cry (well, if it were an eye), and wonder why it's not an eye, but we should not fear that the ear will refuse to hear, even if it attempts to try.

The ear will continue to be a part of the body and it will continue to allow us to enjoy all the marvelous sounds for which it was intended. Both the ear and the eye were designed by God for special purposes which each beautifully performs when it is operating properly. And so, it is with those in the church. If the individual understands that their gift is truly needed and of value, they won't complain against those with other gifts, but will instead work in harmony with them for the building up of the whole body.

Life application. If you are an ear, be happy that you can hear. For faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Someone spoke the word to you, and you believed it was true. In that you were saved, when you rightly behaved, by believing not

by sight, but in your heart as God says is right. Be thankful for who you are and use your gift to His glory.

*Lord, when I think of the intricacy of the body, I stand amazed. Every part fits together so that we can hear, smell, feel, taste, and see. And then we can apply these senses to put together amazing meals, build ships that can fly to other planets, and make timepieces that are so intricately constructed that they can count the moments with the most astounding precision. If the creature can do this, how much more glorious is the Creator. Lord, I stand amazed at You. Amen.*

**If the whole body were an eye, where *would be* the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where *would be* the smelling? 1 Corinthians 12:17**

This verse is evident in and of itself. After discussing various body parts and how they relate to the whole, he turns the concept around. For example, what if there were just an eye and nothing else? He asks the obvious - "Where *would be* the hearing?" There would be none.

But further, if an organism were only an eye, it would , serve no purpose at all. Without a brain, there would be no processing of the signal which passes through the eye. Without feet, there would be nothing to allow the eye to move to see in various directions. Likewise, there would be nothing to move the eye when a predator came along. The list could go on forever at the huge lack there would be in the existence of any eye with nothing attached to it.

And the same is true with any other body part. Paul asks about the ear (hearing). If the whole body was an ear, "where *would be* the smelling?" There would be none. His comments here are known as *Reductio ad absurdum*, or the "reduction to absurdity." This is an argument where the use of the assertion would have a ridiculous or untenable result. He is not attempting to be silly in his words, but rather to get those in Corinth (and thus us!) to consider the importance of each person, and the use of that person's gift, for the benefit of the whole body.

If a pastor (say, an eye) has no one to accomplish the multitudes of other tasks within the church, then he would have no purpose at all. A pastor without a church of people (ears, noses, feet, hands, etc.) is not a church.

Life application: Nobody's gift is so important that it can stand alone. Without a body to receive and compliment the gift, the gift is wasted.

*Lord God, thank You for all the people I worship and serve with. I know that without each of us helping one another and receiving the fruit of one another's labors, there would be nothing to enjoy. Certainly, a hand without a body is a worthless body part. An eye without a head sees nothing. And a heart without a body to pump blood to and through is a heart lacking any purpose at all. But together, we make a wonderfully lovely body. Thank You Lord God for all the people I worship and serve with. Amen.*

**But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.**

1 Corinthians 12:18

"But now" is stated to contrast the examples given in the previous three verses. The many body parts don't fight against one another, but rather they complement each other. And no part of the body reflects the whole. Instead, each is designed to act in a particular way to benefit the whole, which is comprised of many. Therefore, "God has set the members." The word for "set" is *tithemi*. It shows an intentional arrangement has taken place. Each member has been fashioned by God and then has been set in a particular place to benefit the whole.

This same word is used in John 15:16 as Jesus spoke to the apostles about His intentional choice and appointment of the apostles. There, translated as "appointed," it says -

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you." John 15:16

The idea is the same here. God has done this for "the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased." The wisdom of God is on display in the selection of each person for their appointed gift, ministry, and activity. It would make no sense to place an ear where a foot belongs, and to have a knee in the middle of the forehead would show a significant lack of judgment and right thinking. As God is the Creator and the Giver of gifts to His creatures, He knows the very best placement for them within the body. There are no errors, and all things work in the body exactly as He determines.

Life application: As you evaluate your own position within the church family, know that you are exactly where the Lord wants you. He has a good plan and a purpose for you. So, trust that His placement is perfect. Then, use your placement to the fullest extent you can in order to give glory to God.

*Heavenly Father, I am absolutely certain that Your wisdom is infinite, and that because of Christ, I am Your child. With this in mind, and knowing that You only intend the very best for me, I am confident that You have me exactly where You want me and that You have a good plan and a purpose for me. And so, I will trust this, follow You, and cling to You with all my heart and soul. I know that my life and destiny are secure in You. Thank You for this assurance. Amen.*

**And if they were all one member, where *would* the body *be*? 1 Corinthians 12:19**

A point that must have been on Paul's mind when he wrote out this verse is that no one member's interests, gifts, or ministry can be allowed to take overall precedence within the church. If the heart were to claim that it was somehow equal to the sum total of all the other members because of its unique makeup, then there would be no need for a body. If there was no need for a body, then there would be no body because that which is superfluous is unneeded and would eventually be cast off (like the shedding of unnecessary skin).

If this were the case, the heart would find out very quickly how lonely being heart without a body would actually be. The things that make us feel unique and indispensable are actually those things around us which we rely on, and which rely on us, in a harmonious and mutually-benefiting way.

Life application: No matter how much you do for the church, and no matter how important you feel your position in the body is, you cannot survive in that capacity without others. If the pastor of a church did every single thing in the church and yet there was no one to sit in the pews, then he wouldn't be a pastor of a church. Paul says in Romans 12:3 that we should not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. Let us ponder that as our life application for the day!

*Lord, You have used me in certain ways to help others. You have allowed me to be ministered to as well. In both of these tasks, I feel unworthy of the honor. When I see someone's path get straightened out by something I say, it reminds me of the wayward path I once walked. But You straightened it out. And when someone helps me out with a difficult issue of life, it reminds me how far I still need to go in my faith and in my growth. In both, I see just how great You are. Thank You for the interactions I have with others that show me this. Amen.*

**But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body. 1 Corinthians 12:20**

This verse condenses and reiterates what Paul had previously said in verse 12 which was,

"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ."

Now speaking specifically of the body of Christ, he notes the similarity of it to the natural body. And in the natural body he made his argument, even to the point of absurdity, that the parts were interdependent upon one another. As this is true, the same is true with the spiritual body. He will continue to demonstrate this in the verses ahead.

The reason for all of this detail is probably because there were individuals in the church at Corinth that felt that their greater spiritual gift meant that they didn't need to rely on those with lesser gifts. But as Paul has shown this to be false with the human body, he will also show it to be false with the spiritual body.

Life application: Too often, Christians will put a figure on a pedestal. Pastors and preachers are elevated to unhealthy levels of esteem when they are simply fulfilling a particular role within the body as it was appointed by the Spirit. They are completely dependent on the other members for their continued success; they are not independent of the body. While giving them due honor, we still need to make sure they aren't turned into idols.

*Oh Lord, there are those days where I get up and don't feel like doing anything but crawling back into bed. The Bible sits there in front of me, waiting to be opened and yet I resist picking it up. But then I think, "This is when I need it most." Obedience and discipline are easy when everything is going right, but when tough times hem me in, that's when I need to double down and show that I will be obedient and disciplined through them. And so, strengthen me for the battle and I will pursue You through the storm. Thank You for Your encouraging hand. Amen.*

**The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 1 Corinthians 12:21**

The eye is an important part of the body. It receives the light and discerns between various objects and what the distance between those objects is. It allows the body to know where it is going, where the food is, who different people are, etc. Some might say that without the eye, the body would be in a bad way. But if the eye decided it was the

most important part of the body, even to the point of the exclusion of other parts, it would be overreaching its importance.

The eye might say to the hand, "I don't need you!" However, the hand is the member that can grasp the food that feeds the body. The eye can't do that. The hand is the one that defends against attacks against the body. The eye can't do that either. If the hand wasn't there, the eye would quickly perish.

Likewise, the head may say to the feet, "I don't need you!" Yes, the head is important. Without the head, we would be dead. But without the feet, the body wouldn't be complete. The feet take us where we need to go. Without them, the head would be left stuck in one place, unable to get to the pool of water to drink. It wouldn't be able to climb the mountain or enjoy a day by the beach. The head would be silly to think it could do without the feet.

And the same is true with the members within the church. Each has a purpose, and each provides a necessary function which complements the whole. Just because one member thinks it is pretty great stuff doesn't mean that it is more important than any other.

Life application: It is certain that you need the other members of the body, so try to recognize their importance. Don't be fooled into believing that they are without value. If the Lord has saved them and the Spirit has given them a gift, they are valued by the Creator Himself!

*Wondrous God! How wise You are in all that You do. Everything has a purpose and even the things which seem out of place for a moment always fit into a perfectly executed plan. When I see trials and troubles in my life, I just need to remember this. What may seem evil is certainly being used by You for good. Help me to trust that this is true. I know You have it all under control! Amen.*

**No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.**  
1 Corinthians 12:22

Paul is continuing on with his thoughts concerning the importance of all parts of the body. In this verse he notes something which is obvious but possibly not commonly thought of. There are a multitude of body parts, and we often think about the ones that we use a lot, and which have strength. Our hands, arms, biceps, tongue, legs, etc. are things that we think about because we voluntarily use them, and we also work hard to strengthen them for tasks.

On the other hand, we have body parts that are hidden away and very fragile. The inner body parts like the liver, heart, lungs, and so on aren't things we normally think about as being "strong" or capable of doing great tasks. They are in there and they do their job, but we may consider them "weaker" in regard to our normal functioning. We don't spend time exercising our liver, do we? And yet, how necessary it is!

We can't function properly at all without them and when they fail, the body will die. However, if a leg fails, we can chop it off and continue to live. If we lose a hand, it may be a terrible loss, but we can make up for it by using the other hand or even the feet to accomplish necessary tasks.

If we think of these parts as different members of the church, we can see the importance of them. The pastor (maybe he is a right hand) gets lots of attention and he is often sent to schools or seminars for strengthening and learning, but the person who cleans the bathrooms (maybe he is a liver) is neglected. But what happens if the bathroom doesn't get cleaned for a while? The body will suffer, and people will stop coming to that church. Without congregants, the body dies. The pastor's job can be filled by another pastor in the church and the church will continue, but if no one is there to replace the cleaner, then the church may actually suffer more than the loss of the pastor!

Life application: Be sure to thank the person who cleans the church. Let them know that they are appreciated.

*Yes Lord! I am so happy to be in Your presence that nothing else really matters. The world is a great place and there are lots of fun things to do, but all of them came from Your hand. If these things are fantastic, then how much more are You who created them! The sweetest smell, the most beautiful sunrise, or a walk under a billion stars... these are but a mere reflection of Your beauty. Yes Lord! I am so happy to be in Your presence! Amen.*

**And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable *parts* have greater modesty,**  
1 Corinthians 12:23

Continuing with how we handle the parts of the body and the interaction between those parts, Paul now mentions an observable truth. "Those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor." There are parts of the body which may seem less honorable than others. The ear for example may not

seem to be worth as much attention as the eyes. And yet the ear may be given a beautiful gold earring to highlight it. The fourth finger on the hand may seem like an afterthought compared to the thumb, the pinky, or the middle finger. However, we tend to adorn this one with a ring of gold more often than the others.

The feet don't shout out for much attention; they're just feet. And yet, we may spend an inordinate amount of money on a variety of shoes to call attention to who we are. The shoes direct the eyes of others to the feet despite their otherwise plain appearance. And so, it is true with members within the church. There are those who attend church, never missing a sermon. But they may be quiet and not flaunt their faithful attendance. They also may not strive to be noticed in any other way. And yet if the pastor is wise, he will call attention to such faithful attendees during a sermon, using them as examples for the others to emulate. Likewise, he may call them up for a special gift, noting their faithfulness to the church.

Paul continues with the thought that "our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty." There are those parts which distinguish us as male or female. These are covered for modesty's sake. There are also blemishes that some carry because of sickness, wounds, or birth defects. We will often cover these from sight. In essence, we are showing honor to these unpresentable parts through their covering. Thus we are highlighting them through concealment. Paul will explain the result of this in the coming verse.

Life application: There is no person who is without value within the body. It is our duty to seek out the special points of each of these people and to recognize them for the value they possess. By doing so, they will know that they are of importance to us.

*Lord, help me to treat each person with the importance that they possess in Your eyes. You are the Creator and You don't make mistakes. And so, every person has dignity and value in some way. Give me discerning eyes to see this and to highlight it. Help me to recognize them as the beautiful souls that they are and to emphasize their good points to others too. This I ask so that You will be glorified through their realization that You have given them this value because of Your love for them. Amen!*

**...but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, 1 Corinthians 12:24**

In the previous verse, Paul spoke of the "unpresentable parts" of the body and how we cover them because they have "greater modesty." He now notes that this is completely unnecessary for "our presentable *parts*." Parts of the body which show no offense to

others, which are not considered immoral when displayed openly, or those which we are not shy about presenting because they are somehow weaker or defective, are openly displayed.

And so, there is a contrast in how we exhibit these parts. Likewise, there is a contrast in how our gifts are displayed. All of them are given by God. It is He who has "composed the body." And in this, there is great wisdom because He has essentially "given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it." As noted yesterday, we are showing honor to these unpresentable parts through their covering. Thus we are highlighting them through concealment.

Think of this on an individual basis. Suppose there is someone who has electrical skills in the church. He is quiet and doesn't want his gift noted for everyone to see and compliment. When something electrical needs to be done, he will do it. The church may have a fantastic display of Christmas lights, innovative lighting of signs or areas of the building, or a truly unique layout of certain display units, etc. All of these have brought honor both to the body and to God, and yet at the same time, this part of the body was essentially covered from the view of others. Those who need to know the use of this gift will appreciate and acknowledge it directly while others will acknowledge it from afar.

Life application: Your gift has been given for the benefit of the whole. Use it for that purpose and to the honor of God who gave it.

*Lord God, so many people have done marvelous things to keep the church running properly, looking good, and meeting the many needs which arise. Some of them are known to the church as a whole and some of them have been done quietly, without anyone seeing it. But You see it all. Please reward those who diligently use their gifts for the benefit of the whole body. Let them know what they have done is appreciated by all. Amen.*

**...that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. 1 Corinthians 12:25**

Paul has been speaking of the body parts and their importance, even if there are some that are seemingly unimportant. But he informed us that "God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it." It is with this thought in mind that he now gives the reason God has done these things. It is "that there should be no schism in the body."

This word, schism, is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 1:10 as he was opening the letter. It indicates a "division." This is exactly what precipitated the writing of the letter in the first place. There in 1:10 he said -

"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

His use of the body parts to show the importance of each of them, regardless of how they are perceived at first, is to show that they are all "perfectly joined together." He is returning the body of this entire section back to the original thought of Chapter 1. Understanding this, we can see the heart of Paul (and God who inspired his writings) for unity within the congregation and felicity between the various members. And this is so that "the members should have the same care for one another."

As the epistle is given for this very purpose, then it is immensely important that the body of believers holds fast to what God has intended. Within the congregation, let no self-exalting occur and let no deprecation of others be found. Rather, let there be care for one another.

Life application: It won't hurt you a bit to treat the seemingly lowest person in the church with kindness and respect. And it won't hurt one iota to humble yourself before those you worship with. In fact, doing both will increase your esteem in the eyes of the Lord.

*Heavenly Father, give me a humble heart to look at others with the same eyes that You do. Help me to be kind and respectful, even to those who may seem unlovable. Whoever walks through the door of the church is there to be in the church. Let me not exalt myself over them, but instead remind me to treat them in a manner worthy of the Lord Jesus who washed the feet of His disciples whom He created and gave life to. In this, I know You will be pleased. Amen.*

**And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*.** 1 Corinthians 12:26

In this verse, Paul completes his thoughts concerning the natural body and how each part interacts with the other parts. His words are a universally understood maxim. He says that "if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it." If a person is walking along in great shape and he suddenly stubs his toe on a rock (ouch!), the entire body will

feel the pain, the entire body will be stopped in its motion, and the entire body will work in a harmonious fashion to effect healing.

Blood will be pumped, brain chemicals will be released, tears may be shed, lungs will fill with healing oxygen, etc. The left arm doesn't continue on the journey, leaving the rest of the body behind. The fingernails don't leave the body and decide to head back home. Rather, every part stays and each part accomplishes what is necessary to make things right. If the accident was a thorn instead of a rock, the fingernails will participate in the removal of the thorn. The left hand may hold the foot while the right hand does the pulling. Everything is joined in the effort of one hurting big toe.

Plato understood this when he wrote these words - "As in the body, when but a finger is hurt, the whole frame, drawn towards the soul and forming one realm under the ruling power therein, feels the hurt and sympathizes all together with the part affected" ("Republic," v., 462).

In the same way, when honor is bestowed upon a part of the body, something different occurs. Paul says that "if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*." If the back is treated to a massage (oooooh, ahhhh!), the rest of the body shares in the sensation. The mind relaxes, the lungs quiet down to a slow pace, the arms stop worrying about the loads they normally carry. The eyes get heavy and close in delight. It is a harmonious interaction of enormous satisfaction.

Life application: When someone in your church is negatively affected by life's trials, do you share in their miseries? When someone in your church is honored for their efforts along life's path, do you revel in their glory as well? This is what should occur. If we truly are a united body, then we should truly be united in that regard.

*Lord God, grant me empathy towards those I am united to in this life. Help me to feel compassion for their trials, hurts, anxieties, and times of sadness. Let me not overlook their sad state with a careless heart. And Lord, for those who have received honor in some way, help me to glory with them, rejoicing in their times of happiness and exultation. I know that many people act this way towards me, and I wish to be responsive in the same way towards them. Soften my heart to be a person of empathy. Amen.*

**Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.** 1 Corinthians 12:27

After having discussed the natural body and how each part functions in connection with the other parts, Paul now equates the church with the body. What was true with the natural body is certainly true with the spiritual body; there is an overall body which is comprised of individual members.

As he says, "Now you are the body of Christ." This doesn't mean that the church in Corinth comprises the whole body. Rather, as a church, they are "the body" just as the church in Ephesus is "the body," and the Superior Word in (ever) sunny Sarasota, Florida is "the body." The church-universal, which is comprised of the church-individual, is what forms the body. In each church, there are individual members which then comprise the "members individually."

And of course, above all of these individual members is Christ as the Head of the church. This is the way the organization works. For far too long, individual denominations have claimed that they are the body and anyone outside of their denomination is not a part of the "true" church. Nonsense! The church is comprised of faithful believers in Christ. Never let the individual parts dictate the truth about the whole. This is exactly what Paul has argued against for so many verses.

Life application: If you are in a church body that claims it is the only true church body, then you should probably find another place to worship. Christ Jesus is the unifying factor within the church, not man-made edicts and suppositions.

*Gloriously splendid Lord Jesus, today I ask for a closer walk with You. Amen.*

**And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.** 1 Corinthians 12:28

After having described the properties of individual members, Paul now turns to the gifts possessed by those members. He gives similar lists elsewhere, but they may differ a bit and they may be in slightly different orders as well. However, for this list he notes that "God has appointed these in the church." The intent of this wording is to show that certain individuals have been granted certain gifts for the sake of the body.

He begins the list by stating "first apostles." These are the "sent ones" who were commissioned directly by the Lord for the purpose of witnessing to His work. They have been granted the highest position within the church and their era lasted until the completion of the Bible. The apostolic period of the church ended with the death of the

last apostle. However, the writings of the apostolic period actually ends with the word "Amen" penned by John at the end of the book of Revelation. There are no apostles now, despite some claiming the term.

Paul shows that after the apostles come "prophets." The office of prophet holds two significations. The first is "foretelling." This is an utterance from the Lord about something future. It is a proclamation of something previously unknown. Although there may have been people with this gift at the time of the letter to Corinth, there is no need for this type of office now because the Bible is recorded.

Therefore, people who claim this as a gift do so from a very tenuous position, claiming "extra-biblical" revelation. The second type of prophet is "forth-telling." It is the interpretation and explanation of what has been recorded in the Bible. It is the job of faithful men of God who preach from the pulpit, or on the streets, or wherever else to the people. Where the word is proclaimed, the forth-telling of the word is being accomplished.

After prophets come "teachers." This is similar to the forth-telling prophet (preacher), but it may involve less formal oration. It is similar to any type of classroom study. Questions may be asked and answers may be provided. The teaching gift is instrumental in the discipleship of others.

Paul then says "after that miracles" are next. A miracle is above and beyond what would normally be expected from a person; exceeding general capabilities. It is an active display of the power of God for the building up of the church.

However, there are those who have unusual abilities and who will claim their "gift" is from the Spirit. People can do an astonishing array of unique things, but this doesn't mean that their ability is a true spiritual gift. It can only be considered as such if its intent is to bring glory to God.

Next are "gifts of healings." These would be truly miraculous healings which come by faith through prayer. There is no reason to not believe in this gift today, but there is every reason to question it as it is presented. Charlatans fill the halls of Christianity, claiming this gift when they don't possess it. The best policy is to believe in "faith healing" but not in "faith healers." There are those who truly have faith that their prayers will be answered, and God truly hears their prayers and responds through effectual healing of the sick.

From there, Paul notes "helps." The Greek word is found only here in the New Testament. It is speaking of various types of aid, help, or assistance. Some may give money to help others; some may donate their particular skill (such as being an electrician) to help out; some may have an abundance of time to help with various needs. Whatever the help needed is, the need is met in this type of gift.

Next is "administrations." Again, this Greek word is only found here in the New Testament. It is derived from the word "steer." People with this gift have the ability to steer the church just as a shipmaster can steer the ship. They are able to make sound choices concerning what should be done, when it should be done, and what direction should be taken for the benefit of the overall body.

Lastly, Paul notes that "varieties of tongues" are available as gifts. Tongues are known languages, not made-up gurgling. Some possess the ability to speak other languages which may be needed as visitors come or as missionaries are sent. It is considered the least of gifts because it is a gift which can be acquired by most through study or immersion. It is also an ability that many have that aren't in the church. If all the members of the church speak the same language, there is no need for tongues to be spoken except perhaps to teach others the biblical languages or to teach others a language needed for mission work or the like.

It should be noted that there is often an overlap in the gifts individuals possess. Paul was an apostle, but he is also shown to have possessed other gifts listed here. An example is "healings." At times Paul healed others as is recorded in the book of Acts. However, there are times when Paul couldn't heal others. Therefore, it is obvious that this gift is something given by God for specific occasions and not for all times. In other words, "faith healers" are claiming an on-going gift where the Bible shows that it is not an on-going gift.

In the end, all gifts that are truly "gifts" are given by God for His purposes. Whatever our gift is, we should be thankful to the Lord for it and use it for His glory.

Life application: There is no true believer in Christ who doesn't possess an ability which can be described as a "gift." We can and should use our gift to the utmost of our ability for the purpose of bringing glory to God.

*Heavenly Father, sometimes I feel like a rudderless ship, tossed about on a sea of difficulty and uncertainty. And yet, despite how I feel, I know that You really are there with me and that You have not abandoned me. If Your eye is on the little birds of the air,*

*then I know for certain that Your attention is on me as well. And so, despite the storms which often come, I will keep my faith and trust in You. I know that all these temporary troubles will someday be behind me, and I will be in Your presence forever. Thank You for this certain knowledge. Amen.*

**Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?**

1 Corinthians 12:29

Paul will close out this chapter with obvious questions concerning the structure and makeup of the body and then redirect those questions with a final thought before moving into chapter 13. These four questions follow directly in line with the appointments he noted in the previous verse which said, "And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles." In the Greek, each of these first four was an individual appointment which was followed by an adverb which demonstrated a sort of hierarchical structure.

The obvious answer to each question was, "No." If all were apostles, then where would be the prophet, teacher, or worker of miracles? If all were prophets, then where would be the apostles for establishing church doctrine in accord with Christ's commands? Where would be the teachers to train up disciples? And where would be those who validated the word through miracles?

The same is true with each appointment. All are necessary, but none is sufficient to handle all of the needs and issues within the church.

Life application: What is your appointment within the church? You certainly have one and you should be carrying it out to the very best of your ability. If it seems like a lesser appointment than what another possesses, remember that they cannot do without you. Be satisfied that the Lord has you exactly where He wants you for His good purposes.

*Lord, I come to church each week and what do I do? I walk in and find a place in the pew. I give what I can, but it isn't much. And I wonder then how many lives do I touch? Others seem to have so much more to give. Should I be jealous of the pastor here in this life that I live? I think not, because without someone in the pew, there would be no need for a pastor, this is true. And so, I know I fill an important role in the plan. I thank You I have use and worth in doing what I can. Praise You for placing me where I am needed. Amen.*

**Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?**

1 Corinthians 12:30

Here, Paul finishes his list of gifts that have been disbursed among the body. In this, he lists two of the gifts that were lumped together without an adverb separating them during his previous list. They are "healings" and "tongues." He also leaves out "helps" and "administrations" which were on that same combined list, and he adds it the gift of interpreting.

These three should all be considered lesser gifts because of how they were kept separate from the previously noted gifts. Further, Paul will particularly speak about tongues and their interpretation as he continues later in chapter 14. There we will see that even at the time of the early church the gift of tongues was not being handled in an appropriate manner by the Corinthians. Because of this, he will give explicit instructions concerning this gift; instructions which have been completely ignored by most charismatic churches since the beginning of the charismatic movement.

Likewise, the abuse of the gift of "healings" has reached such an absurd level that churches often seem more like a comedy show than a true church in any real sense. In the abuse of these two gifts, there has been a complete lack of holiness, order, and honor for the exalted name of Jesus. If someone truly possesses the gift of healing, they will use it in a manner which highlights the Lord, not the possessor of the supposed gift. And if someone has the ability to speak in another language, they are to follow the explicit instructions for tongues given in chapter 14. If these aren't followed, then what is presented is not a gift, but rather an ostentatious show designed to call attention to oneself, not the Lord.

Life application: Paul's words are doctrine for the church. They were given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and therefore any conduct in a church which contradicts or ignores his instructions cannot be of God.

*Lord, as the year ends, I know that I need to look back on the year behind me and evaluate who I am and how I have conducted myself. Please help bring to mind the things that need correction and then give me the resolve to make the needed changes so that I continue to grow in You and bring honor to You in the year ahead. I pray that the coming year will be one where my walk with You will be close and sweet. And Lord, as always I pray for Your return. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.**

1 Corinthians 12:31

Paul closes this chapter with a verse that looks back on what he has said and forward to what he will say. Chapter 12 has spoken of gifts of the Spirit, their distribution, their use, their interdependence on one another, and their state and position within the body. Here he shows that there is nothing wrong and everything right with earnestly desiring the best gifts. As we grow in Christ and mature in our theology, it is right to strive for better gifts in order to benefit the church as a whole.

However, there are points that should be considered as we strive for the greater gifts.

We were accepted by Christ and may have possessed a "lesser" gift when accepted by Him.

The gift we possessed and the gift(s) we strive for are still gifts. They are available to us from an external source. Even if we spend our time perfecting a gift (teaching for example), it is God who gave us the time and the desire to do so. In the end, the gift must be credited to God.

Our greater gift(s) still require the gifts and the presence of all the other members in the church. Paul explained this in detail in the preceding verses.

If we possess a greater gift, it may actually receive less honor from the body than one who possesses a lesser gift. Again, Paul explained this before.

For these and certainly a host of other reasons, it is inexcusable to argue over the gifts we have been given; to lord them over others for any reason; or to feel that what we have is not as valuable as what others possess. The body is a single unit of many members which should have one ultimate goal and aim.

Because of this, Paul will enter Chapter 13 with one of the greatest discourses on the subject of love ever penned. The entire chapter will be devoted to this subject and it will be based on the material he has presented in Chapter 12 concerning gifts. To introduce this new thought, he simply states, "And yet I show you a more excellent way." The "more excellent way" is love.

Life application: You have a gift, it is appropriate to your station in life and in Christ, and it can and does bring honor to the Lord as you use it to His glory.

*Lord God, help me to remember the principle of love as I interact with my fellow believers. Let it not be a love which is merely a show for others to see but change my*

*heart so that it is a love which can be felt. Help me in this because You know my heart. You know the bitterness that arises in it at times. Take that away and soften my heart so that I am truly devoted to loving those around me. For sure, I know You will be pleased with this. And so, I ask it to Your glory. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 13

**Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 1 Corinthians 13:1**

After a short note of something special coming in the preceding verse, Paul seems to suddenly interrupt the flow of the letter concerning controversial issues and begins a discourse on the necessity and power of love to overcome all obstacles. There is nothing out of place with this insertion, but rather it is a necessary component which is given to remind his audience that there is an overarching point upon which all other matters of doctrine should be subjected.

That this is a certain truth is confirmed by the words of the Lord Himself when He said this to an inquisitive lawyer concerning matters of the law -

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' <sup>38</sup> This is *the* first and great commandment. <sup>39</sup> And *the* second *is* like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22:37-40

Love is the central tenet of true worship, and it is the heart of true fellowship between God and man and between man and man. Paul will describe what it means to be lacking this most important principle by beginning with, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels."

There are literally thousands of known languages in the world. These are "the tongues of men." Understanding and speaking more than one or two of them is a rare and valuable commodity. In some cultures, knowing several languages is more common than others because of interaction between other cultures, but there is always a limit to that interaction. The more languages a person knows, the more important they become as an asset to others as they speak words of trade, help, and even diplomacy.

"The tongues of angels" is not speaking of some unknown language that is beyond the reach of human knowledge. Nor is it speaking of unintelligible gurglings which people then claim are a divine spark of inspiration which then proves they have some special connection with the Holy Spirit. Rather, Hebrews tells us that angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"

Therefore, the tongues of angels is tied to their interaction with humans. They speak with authority because they are the messengers of God. They speak with care because they are ministering spirits for God's people. They speak with eloquence because they speak the words which are given through them by the Creator. The tongues of angels are known languages which carry the power and authority of God.

Paul notes that even if he speaks with these tongues which are powerful in and of themselves for effecting various purposes, "but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal." The utter futility of possessing the power of the tongue is evident in the lack of love in the use of that tongue. Paul equates it to "a sounding brass." When a horn is blown, it makes a sound. It can even make a sound which is musical and pleasing to the ear. However, it is still an unintelligible sound. It is simply a tone of noise.

To speak without love is such a tone. In modern terms, we would call such noise "paying lip service." If there is a spoken word to the Lord, but there is no love behind the word, there is no true devotion to the Lord. If a person says he cares about a matter, but he doesn't follow up with actions which complement the words, then there is no true substance behind the words. In essence, he is like breath on a cold morning which simply fades out of sight.

Paul also calls this type of speech "a clanging cymbal." A cymbal clangs by being struck to make sound resonate off of it. Without there being harmony between the one striking the cymbal and the cymbal being struck, the noise will be offensive, not melodious. If a child bangs on a cymbal, it is annoying. However, if one who is mature and understands the structure of music and how to obtain the proper sound for the brass to make that music, it is both pleasing to the ears and effective in its purpose, either by itself or in unison with others playing other instruments.

Without love, there is only noise without purpose. Without love, there is only disharmony and an unsettling din of noise. But with love, there is effective communication, edification, and peace between those who are communicating.

Life application: As Christians, we would do well to pay close attention to the words of 1 Corinthians chapter 13 and apply them to our lives. May God be pleased with hearts which act in love in agreement with the words spoken which profess that love.

*Heavenly Father, time and again Your word shows that religion without a heartfelt love for You is ineffective and useless. Those who go to church, do good things, and give*

*money for various causes cannot be pleasing to You without love for You and obedience to Your word. And so I would pray that You would humble my heart and soften it to a true and right relationship with You. I know then that my deeds of charity will be acceptable to Your eyes. This I pray that we will have true and right fellowship. Amen.*

**And though I have *the gift of prophecy*, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.** 1 Corinthians 13:2

In continuance of the previous thought concerning tongues, Paul now moves to the gift of prophecy. This was esteemed as a higher gift than tongues by him in 1 Corinthians 12:27. He notes here that if he possessed this gift which would allow him to "understand all mysteries and all knowledge" there would still be a lack without love.

The term "mysteries" refers to that which was once unknown, but which has been revealed by God at the right time to continue to make known His plan of redemption. It is not specifically referring to predictions of things which will occur in the future, but rather to the revealing of anything that has or may occur and how that information fits into redemptive history. This idea is found in Deuteronomy 29:29 –

*"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."*

Possessing such knowledge or being able to discern such knowledge from His word, is not an end in and of itself. It is simply a gift like any other which needs to be accompanied by love. An example of this might be a very scholarly seminary professor. He understands the biblical languages and has great insights into the many patterns of Scripture which point to God's revealed plans. But if he doesn't truly love God or his word, all his knowledge is ultimately futile. In the end, his temporary knowledge will be consumed by the march of time.

Paul continues with the thought that "though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." This isn't speaking of "saving faith" but rather the faith that "I can do all things." This is evidenced by the words "so that I could remove mountains."

As an example, a person may have great confidence that he can start a church, build it to a very successful ministry, work through all the bureaucracy of building a large

sanctuary, organize worship teams, pastoral teams, etc., so that he has the biggest ministry in town. Such a person is self-confident of his abilities and can "remove mountains." However, if he is doing it for self-aggrandizement or to simply get wealthy, all his efforts are in vain. In the end, he will be no closer to true life than a pagan who worships in an idol's temple.

Life application: Great human achievement or possessing great wealth is not a sound indication of a great person. True greatness comes from a love for God, a love for the church of God's people, a heart for God's word, and a desire to glorify God in every aspect of life.

*Lord God, if my life is one of great success and immense wealth, what good will it do me when my days are finished? I will return to the same dust that the poor beggar returns to. The only thing that will matter on that day is what I did for You? Was I obedient to Your word, did I receive the Gift of Your Son, and did I honor and glorify You with this life by my actions towards others? I know that at my life's end, these are the things which will be remembered. Help me to keep my life in the proper perspective so that when I stand before You, I will receive Your welcome call, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Amen.*

**And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.** 1 Corinthians 13:3

As Paul continues with his words concerning self-denial without accompanied love, he notes that "though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*" is something that others may find notable. In Greek, the term "bestow...to feed *the poor*" is one Greek word, *psomiso*. It indicates "to portion out" or "to give away by mouthfuls." The use of this word is to show that if someone were to take every scrap of their existence and parcel it out as a way of obtaining the favor of God, or being elevated in the sight of men, it all means nothing without love.

In this, we can think of people who live as monks who own nothing and act piously. As they receive, they hand it out to others. On the surface, this may seem noble and worthy of commendation, but this is a worthless existence that ends in futility unless it is done in love. If God isn't in their hearts and if there is no true sense of charity in their deeds, then they are simply wasting their lives. If one is exalted through deeds of piety in the eyes of others, it means that they have received their reward in full.

Paul goes on to say that "though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing." In the book of Daniel, the three children of Israel went to the flames rather than bow to a false god. Others throughout history have done the same. The burning of Christians in the early years of the faith was a common occurrence. Later, the Roman Catholic Church burned faithful believers at will. People such as John Hus gave themselves to the flames rather than bow to the church's wicked practices. These people gave their lives for the sake of Christ, standing on love for Him rather than love for this world.

However, Paul shows us that there is nothing intrinsically worthwhile in dying in this manner. Buddhist monks self-immolate from time to time in protest of certain events. However, this is a pointless death unless it is done with true love as its purpose. One can nobly die for another, preserving the other's life in exchange for their own, or one can die for their faith in Christ and their properly directed love of God. In this, there is a valid reason for going to the flames. But to simply die for the sake of dying, consigning oneself to the flames without a loving reason in mind, has no merit at all.

Life application: The greatest supposed acts of charity are completely worthless unless they are motivated by love. Without love, it is wasted effort.

*My Lord, what is it that is pleasing to You? Money? Shall I give money to charity to buy Your love? Would it be pleasing if I spent all my time, day and night, sitting in a pew for others to see my piety? Would I gain points for heaven by going to the flames in protest of a moral issue? Would these things buy me access to Your eternal home? Lord, I know that none of these will do me an iota of good unless they are accompanied with a heartfelt love for You. Let my deeds be deeds of faith, not for others to see, but for You to rejoice over. Be pleased with my heart, love, and actions as I do them for You. Amen.*

**Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;** 1 Corinthians 13:4

Starting in this verse, Paul will provide a host of the characteristics of love. Some will be passive; some will be active. Some will be positive, while others will be negative. They will provide contrasts, and they will provide parallel thoughts. By understanding love from these various angles, the perfections of love will be all the more evident, and those things which detract from love will be highlighted as well.

He is providing this list for the benefit of those in Corinth (and thus of us) particularly because several of these aspects have already been noted among the believers in this

epistle. There has been jealousy, in-fighting, divisions, and a puffed-up attitude which he has had to correct. By defining true love, he will highlight what does and doesn't meet the description.

And so, his list begins with "Love suffers long *and* is kind." Suffering is a passive action; being kind is an active one. Suffering long is something that requires perseverance, while being kind requires continued attention. He next says that "love does not envy." If someone achieves something great, those who exhibit love will not be jealous of their accomplishment, even if it is something they themselves had strived for. Rather than envy, rejoicing will be demonstrated.

Paul next says that "love does not parade itself, is not puffed up." Parading is showing off. If one truly loves, there is no need to put that love into the spotlight of life. Rather, the very nature of love is evident without ostentation. Being puffed up indicates pride and boasting. If we do something for another person in a true spirit of love, there is no need to sound out the deed for others to see. There will also be no desire to hold that deed over the person, reminding them of what was accomplished for them. Rather, the deed is rendered, and it is not brought up again by the doer.

Life application: A life which is truly loving will demonstrate that state in a volitional manner. Even when tensions exist, they will continue to willingly place the perfections of love before those things which would be a hindrance to them. Occasionally coming to 1 Corinthians 13 and contemplating its words is a good way to always keep these precepts at the forefront of one's mind.

*Heavenly Father, Your word describes love in detail and how to be loving toward others. But it also shows us this by example, especially in how You deal with Your creatures. Your pure love is on display from the first moments of man's walk on earth, right through to the promises which are given for all eternity yet to come. And all of it is centered on the giving of Your Son to show us Your very heart. Help me to be like Christ in my love towards others - firm in hating sin, compassionate towards the repentant, and willing to forgive when forgiveness is due. Thank You for hearing my prayer. Amen.*

**...does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;**  
1 Corinthians 13:5

Four more traits of the nature of true love are given from the pen of Paul in this verse. The first is that it "does not behave rudely." If someone is truly loving toward another, there will be no improper conduct towards that person. There will be due respect for

the individual regardless of societal class. There will be an attitude of care regardless of nationality. The amount of money or the type of home a person has won't be a consideration in how that person is treated. There will always be a tone of decency and propriety in one's conduct towards others. If these are lacking, then the true heart of love is also lacking.

Love also doesn't "seek its own." Instead of self-gratification, there will be a desire to look out for the benefit of others. How often do we attempt to ingratiate ourselves with someone who is well-known or who possesses a certain talent so that we can seem more esteemed in the eyes of another! This isn't true love, but rather it is identification with someone for personal benefit. To seek the well-being of others for the sake of their well-being, without any regard for self, shows that the heart is properly directed in that relationship.

Love is also "not provoked." Some translations say "easily provoked" but this statement is in the absolute sense and so adding the adverb gives a false sense of Paul's intent. True love overlooks faults, mistakes, misunderstandings, and the like. Rather than being offended or exasperated, love will stand firm and remain strong through the offenses which come from time to time. Love will not allow itself to be provoked.

Finally, Paul tells us that love "thinks no evil." Instead of looking for others' actions as suspect, and rather than finding "evil intent" in how people present themselves, love will accept the approaches of others in the best possible light unless there is a sound reason to consider them differently. This is not a naive attitude towards others, but it is giving them the benefit of the doubt in their conduct and actions.

Life application: There are times when we are to carefully consider the actions of others as being suspect. The Lord Jesus told us to be as "wise as serpents" in our interactions. And yet, we need to balance these considerations with a loving attitude. Because we cannot read the hearts and minds of others, we should give them the opportunity to demonstrate their faithfulness without being rude or curt in the process.

*Lord, it's hard to know the motives of others and misunderstandings can often arise which may cause unnecessary friction. Help me to be wise in my dealings with others, giving them the benefit of the doubt while at the same time not being naive in blindly accepting people who may have evil intent. It's a tough path to walk, but I know that with Your wisdom I will be ready to meet each person with the tools necessary to evaluate them in a loving way. So be with me in this I pray. Amen.*

**...does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 1 Corinthians 13:6**

In this verse a contrasting thought is given. This is similar to how many of the proverbs are structured. For example -

"Fools mock at sin,  
But among the upright *there is* favor." Proverbs 14:9

This is a way of showing both a negative and a positive side of the same thing. In the case of love, it "does not rejoice in iniquity." In other words, love doesn't revel in that which is wicked. When someone does something perverse, harmful, or deceitful, a person who is truly loving won't stand back and applaud what they have seen. By doing so, they will only bolster the wicked intent of the wrongdoer and propel them on to more wickedness. The only possible result of this is a bad end.

Love also doesn't rejoice in the consequences of wickedness. When a person is punished for their wickedness, (a possible outcome of the previous scenario), there should be no reveling in their downfall, but rather mourning and a desire for their restoration. Such is the nature of a loving attitude, even towards those who have acted in iniquity.

In contrast to this is that love "rejoices" in the truth. Where there is truth, love will rejoice in it, even if it is a tough pill to swallow. If someone's child has committed iniquity, a truly loving parent will be more satisfied in their conviction and punishment than that they "got away" with their wrongdoing. This doesn't mean there is a pleased demeanor in their punishment (which would belie what Paul just said in the previous point), but that it is better to see iniquity punished than for it to continue.

Also in this thought, Paul's words are more correctly stated that love "rejoices with truth." In other words, love and truth are being personified. This is a common biblical way of demonstrating to us the very character of these traits in a way that we can then apply to ourselves. A good example of such personification is found in the 85th Psalm -

"Mercy and truth have met together;  
Righteousness and peace have kissed." Psalm 85:10

Life application: Paul's words today, if properly applied to our lives, will often ask us to act in a nature contrary to what our initial emotions may hint at. We wish to protect those we love, even if it means keeping them from some type of correction that they deserve. But in this, we are only harming them, not truly helping them. It is better to

have the consequences of one's actions meted out than to find them in an even worse position later because they didn't learn their lesson the first time.

*Lord, the loving path to take is often the most difficult one. When someone we love needs correction, we often want to protect them from it. But in the end they will fail to learn the necessary lesson and they will be sure to repeat the same mistake again. If this happens, things may turn out even worse than before. So, Lord, help us to always act in true love, even when it is painful or heartbreaking. We ask this that Your people will stand approved before You, mature and properly instructed in life. Amen.*

**...bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

1 Corinthians 13:7

Continuing on with the attributes of love from the previous verses, Paul now mentions four more of them. First, it "bears all things." This is the Greek word *stegó*. It means "to cover closely." It is used in the idea of keeping water out. A well made rain-suit is designed to keep the contents within it dry. A ship's hull is made in a way which keeps water out in order to keep it from sinking. We may wear a mask, or even a full-body suit, to cover ourselves if there are germs present. The idea here then is to not disclose the faults or troubles of others, but instead to cover them and protect them. To act in a loving manner means to bear the burdens of others willingly, keeping them tightly sealed in the process.

Love also "believes all things." This small portion of the verse could be misread in a way which would lead an individual to a state of naiveté which is unintended. The best way to interpret Paul's words here is that Christians should "give the benefit of the doubt" to others. When questioned about forgiveness, Jesus responded in the most gracious manner. The exchange is found in Matthew 18 -

Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Matthew 18:21, 22

However, Jesus always ties forgiveness in with repentance. Without repentance, one cannot truly forgive another anyway. And so there is a balance needed in such actions. In the case of love, there is to be an extra effort made to believe others in order to keep the bond of love alive.

Paul proceeds with the notion that love "hopes all things." Rather than being gloomy and pessimistic about the future, about relationships, about finances, or any other issue, a truly loving person will demonstrate hope. God has made sure promises to His people and therefore we are to demonstrate hope in those promises, even when things seem to be falling apart around us. The reason for this is that a truly loving soul will, by their hopeful attitude, keep others afloat in the sea of hope as well. Without such an attitude, others will fall into their own gloom and depression.

Finally, Paul says that love "endures all things." If the preceding attributes in this list last only a temporary time, then they have ultimately failed the test of love. Endurance is an ongoing and essential attribute for any display of love. To endure in love is, in and of itself, an aspect of true love. In enduring all things, complaints are avoided, help is provided, hope springs eternal, and comfort is given.

Life application: The essential thing about the love that Paul speaks of is that its attributes are volitional. They require more than just a temporary emotion, but rather they demonstrate a mental attitude which is of the will. It is as if a race is set before us and we prepare ourselves for it, start off with the right attitude, and persevere through the challenge as it unfolds before us. Such is the nature of love.

*O Lord! How often love is thought of as an emotion which is separate from action. But in reading Your word, I see that it is a race, a challenge, and often a difficult sail on a stormy sea. Love requires me to be steadfast in my attitude, faithful in my relationships, and long-suffering in my demeanor. Help me to be the person that the Bible describes as truly loving. Help me to be a lamp of true love to those around me who need such a friend. Amen.*

**Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away.**

1 Corinthians 13:8

Paul now takes a new direction in his great discourse on love. He has been giving both positive and negative descriptions of love. There have been descriptions which define love and which are forever unchanging in the truth they convey. He will now contrast this with the nature of "gifts" which have been given to the individual members.

It must be remembered that this discourse on love is given based upon the previous discourse on gifts. He is specifically connecting the two issues to show the supremacy of love over that of gifts. Properly used gifts are dependent on love and will be based on

love, but love is not dependent on gifts. As he closed out Chapter 12, he said, "And yet I show you a more excellent way." The "more excellent way" is love.

And why is this true? It is true because love (which he has just been defining) "never fails." The use of a gift is perfected in love, and when love is displayed in the use of a gift, it will always be used for the benefit of the entire body. "But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail." Prophecies, both foretelling and forth-telling, have their limits. There is a time when the gift of prophecy will end. There will be no more need for future prophetic utterances and there will be no need for searching the mysteries of the Bible and explaining them to others. When this time comes, love will still exist, for God is love.

Paul next tells us that, "whether *there are* tongues, they will cease." Tongues are a way of conveying information. At one time, there was but one language on earth. However, to effect His purposes for man in redemptive history, God divided the tongues of the people. There are now many languages and there is a need for tongues to be used to teach others the word of God, to build up those who speak a different language, and to unite churches into a cohesive body. However, some day, there will again be but one spoken language. The book of Zephaniah says that will occur among the Hebrew people during the millennium -

"For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language,  
That they all may call on the name of the LORD,  
To serve Him with one accord." Zephaniah 3:9

Eventually, all humanity will speak in one tongue again. When this occurs, there will be no need for instructing others. Tongues will cease.

Finally in this verse, Paul tells us that "whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away." He speaks here of earthly knowledge. It is the knowledge possessed by the teacher who must then instruct his pupil. Again, let us remember that he is contrasting love with the possession of gifts. Teachers, scholars, pastors, etc., all possess certain knowledge which must then be shared with others in order for that knowledge to be assimilated by them. This type of knowledge will pass away. In its place will be the pure knowledge which was from before the creation of the world. There shall be no need for the "gift" of knowledge because we will be in the presence of the One in whom is all knowledge. We shall learn, for all eternity, the workings of God. Thus, the gift of knowledge "will vanish away," but love will remain.

Life application: When all of our "gifts," which are given by the Spirit for this earthly dispensation, are brought into the presence of the Lord, they will no longer be needed. In their place will come the perfection of all of those gifts, directly from the One who bestowed them. The wonders of heaven are beyond our ability to grasp, so let us cling to this now and share our temporary gifts in love and in harmony with those we fellowship with.

*O God, because You are the Source of all things, then whatever thing I desire now originally came from You. These things are temporary, but You are eternal. And so, I wait in expectation for that day when I shall see You. No greater desire can be fulfilled in my heart than that wondrous moment; a moment which will then last for all eternity. Thank You that this is possible because of the work of Jesus. All hail to You, O God, for this sure promise and this eternal hope. Amen.*

**For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 1 Corinthians 13:9**

It is good to remember that Paul's words here were given based on divisions within the church because of the possession of various gifts of the Spirit. In verse 12:28, Paul listed "prophets" as second in ranking only behind apostles. This then is an indication that the appointment as an apostle was limited only to a select few in the early church who were designated as such by Christ. And so, instead of showing the limitations of the position of an apostle, he shows the limitations of the next highest ranking appointment, the prophet, one which would continue on throughout the age.

Prophecy in this case is being tied to "knowledge" and therefore it is speaking of the gift of "forth-telling," not "foretelling." Foretelling is communicating the words of God when directly influenced by the Spirit. On the other hand, forth-telling is a gift which is based on knowledge of what God has spoken. Truly no one can fully comprehend the depths of the word of God. Even when studied day and night for a lifetime, there will always be more that can be learned from it.

Because of this, Paul says that "we know in part and we prophesy in part." This doesn't mean there is a certain defect in prophesying, but that it is never fully complete. Two thousand years of preaching has not used up the well of knowledge or fully plumbed the depths of what can be preached. God's word is always a useful tool, in all languages, and for any circumstance in any culture. It is wisdom, it is direction, and it is the power of God for salvation for all who believe.

However, there are aspects of God which are not recorded in the Bible. There are events in human history which pertain to biblical prophecy and yet they can only be determined to fit the prophetic scenario once they have happened. Others will become evident as they prepare to happen. But no matter what, our knowledge of the events is limited because the future is not fully known to us. For these, and for a host of other reasons, our knowledge is limited, and our prophesying is incomplete.

So why did Paul include this statement? It is because the gift of prophesying is an incomplete gift. The prophet cannot claim all-knowledge or all-ability. He is dependent on others who possess other gifts. He is one part of the body and not the Head. Again, when taken in context of Paul's discussion about various gifts, the reason for this discourse on love becomes evident. The one who prophesies without love is truly just a clanging cymbal who is puffed up in and of himself. To prophesy with great knowledge but without love is to be ineffective at prophesying.

Life application: The preacher who possesses great knowledge in the word of God should be even more humble than when he knew little. With greater understanding of the word of God should come a greater understanding of how little one really knows about the word of God.

*Lord, I have come to realize that the more I understand in Your word, the less I know in comparison to what I don't know. Every time I think I've got it all figured out, I read a commentary or see a chart concerning something I had completely missed. Truly Your word is beyond amazing. I will read it, study it, and cherish it all the days of my life because I know that I could never exhaust the supply of wisdom and knowledge it provides. Thank You for this treasure! Amen.*

**But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.**  
1 Corinthians 13:10

Paul here speaks in an overall way concerning that which is imperfect in comparison to that which is perfect. As long as there is imperfection, that is all that is truly perceived. But when something perfect comes, it completely overshadows imperfection. This is even true in gradations of perfection. As an example, we can think of the development of the internet.

It first began with a single connection between two computers. The language was slow and very limited. Eventually, a larger network was developed, and the less perfect system was overshadowed by the better. In due time, the internet grew into something

that anyone could access, but it was limited to dial-up modems using the land-line phone system.

Along came higher speed land-line systems and they swallowed up the slower ones. Then came DSL and people forgot about land-lines. Then came cable, and after that fiber optics. Each step replaced that which was less perfect. The old systems were done away with.

Such is true with the gifts of the Spirit which we now employ. The Giver of the gift is perfect, but we are imperfect. Our prophecies may miss the mark; our tongues may mispronounce words as we translate languages; and our knowledge is riddled with misunderstanding and misevaluations of spiritual matters.

However, someday, there will be a perfect unity between the Giver of the gifts and the glorified saints. There will no longer be a need for that which is lesser because that which is perfect will swallow up the imperfection in its perfection, just as dial-up modems have been dispensed with and forgotten.

All "that which is in part will be done away" with at that time. This is the hope of the saints; it is the anticipation of the redeemed; and it is the joy which is set before us because of the work of Christ. His perfection will be realized in us. We ourselves will not be God, but we will have a direct and unstained access to that which is perfect. We shall walk in His presence and see His glory illuminating our path for all eternity.

Life application: At this point in time, we perceive all things from a faulty perspective. This is because we are fallen and thus, we often misperceive spiritual matters. However, this doesn't mean that we should sit on our hands and wait for our glorification before seeking out perfection. We should always strive to learn more from God's word. We should attempt to always commune more closely with God. And, we should fix our eyes on Jesus who is our model for perfect living as we walk in this fallen world.

*Glorious Heavenly Father, Your word shows that there is a time coming when all that is imperfect will be done away with. You have prepared a place for Your glorified saints which will swallow up imperfection and only Your radiant purity will be seen for all eternity. I know that this is available only through the work of Christ and I know that I want a part of that. I bow my knee to the Lord, and I receive His work done on my behalf to make this possible. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 1 Corinthians 13:11**

In this verse, Paul is making an analogy between spiritual immaturity and spiritual adulthood through the use of the natural growth of an individual. He has been discussing spiritual gifts and the need to use them in connection with love for them to have any true value. In the previous two verses, he showed that eventually those gifts will be done away with altogether.

In his analogy then, he says, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child." Babies have their own sounds which develop into short sentences and then into the talk of teens. Each is discernable and shows a lack of development. Eventually though, most people learn to speak as adults. Sentences are more complex and they convey the higher thoughts necessary to accomplish the challenges of adulthood.

In a similar fashion, Paul says that "I understood as a child." Children look at the world in a completely different way than adults. Adults have had experiences which allow them to hopefully make wise decisions. Children don't have such experiences. They may touch hot surfaces, they may get swindled out of their school lunch, or they may step on sandspurs because they didn't know that sandspurs existed. Their understanding of the world around them has limited their ability to think in more developed ways.

And this leads to the next thought of Paul which says, "I thought as a child." Without experience, thoughts will be naive about the world around us. Without a developed language, our tongues will only speak either unintelligible or rather simple sentences. And without experience, we cannot make rational choices about our future, how to care for our present needs, or how to empathize with others when they suffer.

In contrast to this, Paul tells us that "when I became a man, I put away childish things." This state is analogous to what he said in verses 8-10. The connection is obvious when one looks at how Paul has cited his examples. "I spoke" relates to the gift of tongues, "I understood" relates to the gift of prophecy, and "I thought" relates to the gift of knowledge. Paul showed us in those previous verses that each of these gifts were temporary and would be done away with. Thus, he has equated that time of spiritual maturity to being a man. In adulthood, we have put away the ways of childhood; and in our glorification, we will have put away these lesser gifts.

Isaac Newton, one of the greatest intellectual minds in all of human history, understood this to be true when he wrote these words -

"I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself by now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

Life application: Those gifts which we cherish now, and which we too often use to the harm of others rather than to their edification, will someday be done away with. Keeping this in mind, let us use our gifts for building others up, not attempting to tear them down.

*Lord, I know that all the knowledge I possess, all the supposedly great things that I have done, and the wealth that I have obtained in this life are like grains of sand on an infinite shore in comparison to the true wealth of heaven. What I seek after in this life has no comparison to what You offer to those whom You have redeemed. Because this is true, help me not to focus on these temporary things, but to think on and strive for that which is true wealth. Help me to use my time wisely in the pursuit of You. I know You will be pleased with the life I live in this way. Amen.*

**For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. 1 Corinthians 13:12**

Paul has been contrasting the imperfect world in which we live with the purity of the world to come. He has been doing this by comparing that which is temporary and physical with that which is eternal and spiritual. With that thought in mind, he now gives a description of what our knowledge is like at this time in comparison to what it will be like in the future. To do this, he uses words concerning a mirror which would have been perfectly understood by anyone in the church at that time.

However, in his words, he is certainly using an example from the Old Testament as the basis for his thoughts. In Numbers chapter 12, the Lord spoke these words to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam -

“Hear now My words:

If there is a prophet among you,

I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision;

I speak to him in a dream.

<sup>7</sup> Not so with My servant Moses;

He *is* faithful in all My house.

<sup>8</sup> I speak with him face to face,

Even plainly, and not in dark sayings;  
And he sees the form of the LORD.  
Why then were you not afraid  
To speak against My servant Moses?" Numbers 12:6-8

Knowing that this is Paul's point of reference will help to explain his words to the Corinthians. He begins with the word "for" as a conjunction to the previous statement. What is earthly will be explained first. In this earthly existence (now) he says that "we see in a mirror, dimly." The mirrors of Paul's time were made of highly polished metal. They reflected an image, but it was far less perfect than our modern glass mirrors. When looking at such a mirror, just as when looking at a mirror of today, it appears that the image is standing on the other side of the mirror.

But the reflection in those ancient metal mirrors would have had imperfections which skewed what a person actually looked like. They could get a general sense of how they looked, but it wasn't perfect. Hairs which were out of place may have gone unseen, lipstick might have been off a wee bit, and the teeth might not have been as clean as one hoped for. Such a mirror wasn't capable of giving a perfect reflection and so imperfection in actual appearance was to be expected.

Paul shows that this is comparable to what is spiritual. We now see God's plan only partially. We now study the Bible with preconceptions and using faulty logic. Our minds are dull in understanding many aspects of Scripture and we are incapable of seeing some things which would otherwise be obvious. But in this earthly existence, they are hidden.

In contrast to this, someday we shall see "face to face." In Numbers 12:8 (above), the term the Lord used when speaking to Moses is *peh el peh*, or literally "mouth to mouth." There was direct and intimate dialogue between the two. The Lord hid nothing from Moses when He spoke to him. This is the way it shall be for us when we are glorified. Until then, we still see dimly, and our understanding is therefore obscured.

This word, "dimly," is from the Greek *en ainigmati*. It means "in an enigma." Everything is somewhat obscured in some way or another. Again, this is comparable to what was said to Moses with the words "in dark sayings." When God spoke to the prophets of old His word was given in such a way that they often had no idea what God was speaking about. It was as if a dark shadow were cast over the eyes of their minds to keep them from fully realizing what was intended by the words they uttered or wrote down.

This is no different even today. Although we have clarity that the prophets didn't, particularly about the work of the Lord Jesus, there are still aspects of the Bible that are completely hidden from us. We can understand the surface meaning of the words, but the true depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God which is found in the Bible is beyond our ability to fully comprehend. This is confirmed in Paul's words which continue on by saying, "Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."

We have the Bible, and with it we can know how to be saved through the work of Jesus. It also tells us about the sure return of Jesus for us someday. But it doesn't tell us when that will happen. Nor does it tell us an infinite number of details that we might like to know. Instead, with it we can only know in part. However, when we stand in the presence of the Lord in our glorified state, we will have a much more perfect understanding of the Lord and of His work, just as He at this time fully knows all about us.

Life application: Just because we cannot fully know all the mysteries of the Lord in this life, it is no excuse to not do our very, very best to study the Bible and seek out the mysteries which are hidden there. What a shame to spend our time learning an infinite number of sports statistics while knowing almost nothing about the riches contained in Scripture! Study your Bible.

*Lord, from time to time, I have to stop and ask myself questions about where I stand with You. Will You be more pleased with me for knowing all the statistics of my favorite football team, or will You be more pleased with me reading and understanding the book of Romans? Are You going to say, "Well done" to me for having the shiniest car in town, or will You be more pleased that I went to church and there worshipped You on Sunday morning? Is increasing the size of my bank account more important than attending Bible Study? Priorities Lord... help me with my priorities. If this is my one chance to get it right, help me to get it right. Amen.*

**And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.**

1 Corinthians 13:13

Paul concludes his discourse on love in this verse by beginning with "And now..." Among scholars, there is division over what this means. Some take it as a temporal sequence which would place it in opposition to the "then" of the previous verse. What that would mean is that "now" isn't speaking of our present existence in comparison to the future, such as - "And at this time abide faith, hope, and love, but someday only love will abide." Instead, it is speaking of the logical nature of the summary thought; it is the

conclusion of everything he has said. "And now when every other gift is done away with, faith, hope, and love will remain."

Other scholars will argue the opposite by stating that only love will remain in the future. Faith will no longer be needed because it will be swallowed up in sight, and hope will no longer be needed because we will have possession of our hope in the joy of the Lord. Thus, only love will remain.

The first argument is correct; all three will remain. They are all permanent and they are all essential, even in the eternal state. What Paul is telling us here is that the "gifts" which the believers at Corinth had been arguing over were temporary and that they would pass away, even gifts such as prophecy. On the other hand, the three individual components of faith, hope, and love will continue on forever.

If eternity is set before us and yet our eternity is based on God's willingness to maintain His created order, then our faith will remain in God who continues to sustain our existence. Tied into this is hope which will always remain as an anchor for the soul of the redeemed. It will never find its completion but will always exist. Because God is infinite, we will infinitely hope to see more of His infinite goodness as He ceaselessly reveals Himself to us.

Despite these being eternal though, the facet of love is greater than they are. It is not greater in duration (which is impossible because all are eternal), but in logical order. The Pulpit Commentary explains why love is greater than faith and hope in four ways -

1. "Love is the greatest, because it is the root of the other two; 'we believe only in that which we love; we hope only for that which we love.'
2. And love is the greatest because love is for our neighbours; faith and hope mainly for ourselves.
3. And love is the greatest because faith and hope are human, but God is love.
4. And love is the greatest because faith and hope can only work by love, and only show themselves by love. Thus love is as the undivided perfection of sevenfold light. Faith and hope are precious stones of one colour, as a ruby and a sapphire; but love, as he has been showing us throughout the chapter, is a diamond of many facets."

Life application: Paul has shown a "more excellent way" in 1 Corinthians 13. Rather than arguing over who has the better gift, and rather than having feelings of either jealousy or contempt towards others because of their gift, we should express gratitude to God

for His provision and demonstrate love towards God and others as we await our final call to eternal glory.

*O God, I cannot express to You the thanks in my heart and soul for the people I worship with, work with, walk with, and who I share in life with even on the internet each day. There is always someone to lift me up in prayer or someone that I can return that favor to. When I have something exciting to share, folks are there to share in those moments. And when they have good times, I get to revel in their happiness as well. Thank You for all the people who I have had the pleasure and honor of coming to know in this life. Thank You, O God! Amen.*

## CHAPTER 14

**Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.**

1 Corinthians 14:1

Paul now returns to the subject of "gifts" which he left off with in Chapter 12. However, even in Chapter 13, he never really left the issue behind. Rather, he had used his discourse on love to show the believers at Corinth that their use of gifts, and particularly tongues, wasn't in line with that precept. This will be seen in his coming words.

To set up his logic concerning tongues in the coming verses, he will first introduce a thought concerning obtaining a different gift. Why would he do this? The answer becomes evident when we see how Paul viewed the gift of tongues and its use within the church at Corinth.

Chapter 14 will explain these things in detail and understanding his instruction on tongues, in proper context, should be mandatory for every charismatic Bible college, seminary, and church. Almost every verse in chapter 14, a chapter which is 40 verses long, is given to properly instruct us on the completely abused gift of tongues.

And so, to begin the chapter, he says to "pursue love." This asks us to reflect on his words of chapter 13. Everything that is done should have this as its main consideration. In pursuing love, the use of our spiritual gifts will be proper.

Secondly, he says to also pursue "spiritual *gifts*." True gifts of the spirit are necessary for the instruction and edification of the church. In that then, we are to pursue obtaining them. In fact, in 12:31, just before his parenthetical thought concerning love of Chapter 13, he said, "But earnestly desire the best gifts." So, it is right to seek after spiritual gifts and it is right to seek after the best of those gifts.

Having said that, and understanding the context of his words, he now finishes this verse with, "but especially that you may prophesy." Why has he said this? To understand fully, consider again what he was speaking about in Chapter 12 - all the gifts of the spirit. To him, the best of the gifts was that of prophesying. This does not mean specifically "foretelling" but "forth-telling." Forth-telling is the right interpretation and then explanation of Scripture to build up and edify the church; it is "preaching."

The value of preaching the word is the highest gift to Paul because "faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). The means of hearing about

the salvation which God has chosen for the people of the world is preaching. Without people exercising this gift, the word won't be heard, and people won't be saved.

Therefore, Paul says that men of God should pursue this gift above all else. With that now understood, he will contrast this with "tongues" in the coming verses. In other words, the intelligible, thoughtful, and proper preaching of God's word will be used as the standard to compare to the gift of "tongues."

Thus, he will demonstrate that the use of tongues at Corinth (and which continues to this day in unstable churches) is unintelligible, thoughtless, and even improper. Instead of edifying the body, it often divides and confuses it. For this reason, Paul will set very strict limits on the use of tongues; limits which are all but ignored in many churches. In ignoring Paul's words, they ignore the One who inspired his words.

Life application: Pay attention to the coming 39 verses of 1 Corinthians 14. Be prepared to rightly explain the use of tongues in a church - why they are to be spoken, who should speak them, and when they are to be allowed.

*Heavenly Father, we often claim that we love You, but then we don't do what You have instructed us. Sometimes it's willful disobedience and sometimes it's just our human weakness. Help us to know Your word and then to live by it. How can I say I love You and then willingly ignore what Your instruction manual says? Would my boss be pleased with me if I did this? Would the government allow me to ignore their laws? Help me in this. Surely obedience to You is a demonstration of love for You. And loving You is what I truly desire. Amen.*

**For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him*; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. 1 Corinthians 14:2**

Paul will now contrast the speaking of a "tongue" to "prophesying" which he mentioned in the previous verse. Before analyzing this contrast, it needs to be noted that the word translated here as "tongue" signifies a human language in Acts 2:11, 10:46\*, 19:6\*; Romans 3:13; 1 Corinthians 13:1, 14:4\*; and Revelation 5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6; 17:15. The other times that "tongue" is used, it refers to the literal tongue in the mouth or something which resembles a tongue (such as "tongues" of fire). In three of these verses marked with an asterisk (\*) it is implicitly understood to be a language because the people around them understood what was said.

There is no instance recorded in the Bible where the word "tongue" signifies anything other than a known language. The text must be forced to have this word imply some type of ecstatic utterance or a "shoo bop be loo bop" type of sound which is so commonly used by Charismatics and others in an attempt to draw attention to themselves.

Understanding that this is speaking of known languages, Paul's words imply that the language is not known to all. It would be comparable to saying, "A French guy stood up and spoke French in a German church meeting." In grasping this, we can properly interpret Paul's intent. When a person "speaks in a tongue" (meaning a known language which is not understood by those in the congregation), he "does not speak to men but to God."

When Charlie Garrett preaches at the Superior Word in Sarasota, Florida, he often preaches words and sentences directly from the Hebrew. When he blesses the elements of communion, he often gives the blessing in Hebrew. In this, none of the congregants understand what he is saying. If he throws in a German or Japanese phrase, the same will probably be true. Either few or none of those present will understand. Thus, he speaks not "to men but to God" (who created and understands all languages). However, holding to the tenets of Scripture, (as will be seen later in this chapter), he always translates what he says in a foreign tongue for the benefit of those in attendance.

The reason that when he speaks in a tongue, he "does not speak to men but to God" is explained by Paul as he continues with verse 2. It is because "no one understands *him*." Without training in a language, nobody suddenly grasps that language. Instead, they sit listening without comprehending. This is no different than the recipients of the tongues spoken in Acts 2. People heard the gospel preached in their own languages. If the languages were unknown to them, there would have only been confusion in their minds. But the Holy Spirit, acting as a "universal translator," converted the words of the believers into a language that they could understand; a known language.

If this didn't occur, a different outcome would have resulted. As Paul says, "However, in the spirit he speaks mysteries." The term "in the spirit" is *pneumati*. It can mean "wind," "spirit," or "breath." Only the context of the surrounding verses can properly interpret the exact meaning of *pneumati*. As this is speaking of oral utterances, the word *pneumati* is certainly referring to "breath." His "breath" speaks mysteries.

But even if it is to be translated "spirit," it is certain that the breath of the man indicates the utterance of his spirit. There is no reason to assume that this is referring to the work

of the Holy Spirit. From the later verses, it will be seen that speaking in "tongues" which do not fit certain guidelines cannot be of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this here is certainly not speaking of Holy Spirit inspiration either.

In Paul's words, we see that anyone who speaks in a different language will not be comprehended by those who hear it. Instead, they will find the words to be a mystery. A mystery is simply something unknown and which cannot be grasped without an explanation of the matter. Thus, Paul will give very strict guidelines in the verses ahead for the speaking of tongues.

Too often, readers of the Bible insert presuppositions into the text as they read. When this is done, anything can mean anything. Along with presuppositions, sensationalism is also introduced to heighten the experience of reading. The reason why this is often the case is because Bible study takes effort and contemplation. But that is hard work. And so rather than enjoy the Bible for the depth of wisdom it contains, a lighter and more sensational approach is taken to find satisfaction from the words which seem difficult and even confusing.

Life application: Be diligent in the study of the Bible. As believers, we get just one brief life to glean from it all we can before we will stand before our Creator for rewards and losses. Let us be approved on that day.

*Lord God, life is such a brief vapor. In my mind, I'm still young and full of energy, doing the things that I did as a youth. But in my body, I am slowing down and finding a few new pains with each passing day. Lord, help me to use my time rightly before my days are done. Give me the wisdom, the intelligence, and the desire to pick up Your word, read it, study it, and cherish it during this brief moment of my existence. Why should I stand before You and say, "I was busy watching TV"? Instead, let me say, "Your word carried me through each wonderful day." Amen.*

**But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.**

1 Corinthians 14:3

Paul contrasts verse 2 with these words by beginning with "but." As he noted, people who speak in other languages while in the congregation (tongues) don't "speak to men but to God." In contrast to this, is the one who prophesies to the congregation. Rather than simply having a sole conversation with God (which the speaker can do anytime and at any place), the one prophesying does more. Not only does God hear his words, but he also "speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men."

Edification is spoken to build up the members of the congregation, to instruct them, to give them sound guidance, and to make them knowledgeable in the things of God. Exhortation is spoken to take away their feelings of insecurity, sluggishness, or timidity, thus making them bold. And words of comfort take away sadness, hopelessness, and despair.

Understanding the contrast between the two, which one is preferable to be spoken in the congregation? The answer is plain and obvious. Paul will say this later in this chapter-

"I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue." (vs 19)

Again, following through the logic of Paul's argument in this epistle, he demonstrates conclusively that tongues, though having been needed at the establishment of the church, are all but unneeded in the workings of the regularly operating and established church; thus, the comparison "five" to "ten thousand." The inordinate focus on tongues by supposed "tongue speaking" churches shows a lack of scholarship and a complete misunderstanding of the purpose and meaning of "tongues" in the now-established church.

Life application: When one is in the church for growth and learning, and in order to be edified, he should either be explaining the word of God or listening to the word of God being explained in a competent and relevant way.

*Lord God, I pray that my time will be used wisely in the pursuit of that which is right, honoring of You, and for the building up of others. Help me not to continue to squander my few precious moments of life on this earth in the pursuit of wind. I have tried to grasp it and it never fills my hand. I have tried to capture it and it simply disappears. And so, Lord, help me to stop pursuing worthless things and instead give me right thinking to pursue that which is fixed, permanent, and enduring. To Your glory I pray this. Amen.*

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

1 Corinthians 14:4

In Acts 2, this is recorded -

"And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language."

-Acts 2:5, 6

The followers of Jesus were heard speaking in various tongues according to the people groups who were assembled. Those who heard their words in their own language were edified. They heard a message they could understand. However, anyone who spoke a different language was only edified in the language they understood, not in the ones directed to others. This is exactly the type of thing Paul is talking about.

The only people who are edified by the speaking of a language are those who understand that language. And so, if someone comes into a church in Walla Walla, Washington where one language is spoken, that being English, and the individual begins speaking in Thai, only the speaker will be edified. Why will he be edified? Because he understands the language he is speaking. We process our thoughts through the construction of speech. This is done in our heads as we speak. When we put words together which we understand, we receive edification of our thoughts in the compilation of those words.

\*\*It should be noted that Paul says that, "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself." By virtue of the fact that the speaker is edified, it implies and proves that he is speaking of a known language, not an ecstatic, incoherent tongue (as is so often displayed in supposed "tongue speaking" churches). If the speaker were to be edified by "oola wahla bango wapo shoosh and shim" then everyone else who heard would be equally edified by it as well, because the incoherence of the words would equally apply to all. Instead, this is a known language which the speaker is edifying himself with. Were it not so, there would be no edification for anyone, including the speaker. Again, as every verse of Scripture concerning tongues has and will show, known languages are being referred to.

In contrast to this thought of "tongues" which edify only the speaker of the tongues, Paul continues with, "but he who prophesies edifies the church." A word of instruction which is conveyed in a known language by the hearers of that instruction will be edified in that instruction.

And so, which makes more sense for the building up of the church - listening to someone speak Thai which nobody else understands, or hearing a preacher speak in the native language of the congregation for everyone to understand? The answer is obvious.

Life application: Speak the word of God, speak it coherently, speak it so others will understand, and therefore edify those who hear the word. For the saying is true - "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

*Lord, may the words of my lips be ever praising You. May my heart be directed to You always, and may others be built up by my words and actions, directing them to You so that You will be glorified in them. Make me a tool of Your using and not a person who is simply here to please myself for the few years You have ordained for me in this temporary walk of life. Be pleased with how I live in Your presence O God. Amen.*

**I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification. 1 Corinthians 14:5**

Having shown the lesser nature of the gift of tongues, and then demonstrated that it does nothing to edify the congregation when tongues are spoken if nobody understands them, Paul tells the congregation that he wishes "you all spoke with tongues." Speaking in foreign languages is always a valuable asset when encountering others who only speak in another language. If there is a Hispanic community in one's town and nobody in the church spoke Spanish, then there would be no way of reaching out to them with the message of Christ.

However, tongues are a gift which is available to all people. With effort, anyone can pick up another language and can then effectively communicate with others in that language. But to speak that language in the church without anyone understanding it would be absolutely pointless, except for the person speaking and for God who knows all tongues. Because of this, Paul continues by saying to the Corinthians that even more than tongues, he wished "that you prophesied." He then follows up with an immediate explanation for this - "For he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues."

The explanation was given in verse 3 which said that "he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men." Tongues are of no value to others in the congregation if nobody understands them. However, preaching the word of God is of benefit to all who listen. It is the wisdom of God and a proper explanation of it will always build up the body.

However, to not over-diminish the gift of tongues, Paul adds in a qualifying statement concerning them. Yes, the person who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with

tongues, "unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification." The goal of any gift is to build up the body and to bring honor to the Lord. If someone speaks in a tongue, and that tongue is then translated, it becomes a message which is then understood by all others within the congregation. Thus, it has become a point of exhortation and edification of the body.

There is nothing in the verse to restrict the one speaking in the foreign language to also be the one who translates it. However, he should be competent in the translation. Just because someone can speak a foreign language, it does not mean that they are acceptable to translate that language. So, whether by the speaker or by another, it is right for the words to be translated into the common language of the congregation for their edification. Otherwise, the words are merely an unedifying show of ostentation.

Life application: The goals of using one's gift in the church are to build up the others in the church and to bring glory to the Lord. Let us remember this in all we do in and for the church.

*With the world spinning out of control all around us; with the forces of evil, wickedness, and perversion on the march; and with the overbearing weight of intrusive governments seizing freedom from the people, sometimes it feels like You have forgotten us, O God. But in our hearts we know this isn't so. You are there and You are attending to all these things. The world will be made right, the wicked will be destroyed, and the benevolent monarchy of Messiah will rule in righteousness. We wait for that day with anticipation! Until then, we will continue to praise You through the storms. Amen.*

**But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? 1 Corinthians 14:6**

Continuing to explain why speaking in foreign languages (tongues) is considered a lesser gift and a gift which only serves the individual, not the whole body, Paul contrasts the words of the preceding verse with "but now." His words were, "he who prophesies *is* greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification." From this, he gives his "but now." And as a sign of warmth and fellowship, as well as instruction, he adds in the word "brethren."

He is speaking to the whole body and wants the whole body to grasp his meaning, which is "if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?" The answer to his

question is obvious - "There will be no profit to them." When someone speaks in a foreign language which is unknown to its hearers, there is no profit at all to them. They are not edified in any way, and they have simply sat through a word of unintelligible sounds which have no meaning to the hearers.

Rather than such a self-centered display, Paul recommends that the greater gifts of revelation, knowledge, prophesying, and teaching be used to build up the congregants. It is a much better use of the precious time we have been given because we can assimilate the instruction and grow in our knowledge of spiritual matters. Paul doesn't say that there is no place for speaking in tongues, but that there is a much better use of time and gifts than following this avenue. For those who do speak in tongues, Paul will eventually give very specific guidelines to follow.

Life application: If there are two teams playing football and one of the teams has a player who is determined to play baseball during the game, there will be dysfunction on the field. Be a team player and work with your team, using the gifts you have for the benefit of the whole.

*Lord, there are books piled high which write about the various disciplines within the Bible. There are commentaries, charts, graphs, and maps of biblical events which fill our time as we read them and study them. There are sermons and studies that we can watch about the Bible. But how often do we allow these things to keep us away from actually reading the Bible? Have I put as much effort into reading Your word as I have reading ABOUT Your word? If not, then I have certainly failed to set my priorities right. Forgive me for this and give me a heart to simply pick up and read this beautiful treasure from You. Amen.*

**Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played?**

1 Corinthians 14:7

In the previous verse, Paul intimated that there is no profit in speaking in a tongue if it contains nothing to edify those who hear the tongue spoken. To bolster this, he now shows that "even things without life" have the same effect on us. If this is so, then how much more living beings who need to be articulate in their utterances to benefit others!

And so, he says, "whether flute or harp, when they make a sound..." The flute and the harp are inanimate objects. They need something external to produce sounds. If there is

nothing external applied to them, then no sound will be made. Such is the case with the vocal cords too. They need to have the body initiate an action for them to resonate.

Continuing on he says, "unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played?" Again, the image he is creating is obvious. When one plays a flute, they vary the amount of wind entering it. They also cover or uncover various holes to obtain differing notes, etc. The harp requires fingers or a hand utensil to be applied to it in varying amounts of pressure and at varying intervals. Different strings on the harp are also employed for differing sounds.

There must be a "distinction in the sounds" for there to be any type of music to be produced. In the Greek, three different words are used to describe the process - *phóné*, *diastolé*, *phthoggos*, or literally "voice," "distinction," and "sound." And so we see that there is the "sound" which is like the voice. There are distinctions in that voice which provide proper modulation. And then there are the resulting sounds as they are modulated.

All of these combine to form that which is coherent, and which results in something useful, be it a sweet song, a request for dinner, or a cry for help. Whatever the intent of the sounds is, they must go through a certain process which includes all three steps for others to hopefully comprehend what is being relayed.

Understanding these different words which Paul uses to describe what he intends will lead us to a simple revelation concerning the false tongues which are so often used in churches. To assume that God would make a secret "prayer language" that we didn't understand, or to assume that He would give an incoherent "tongue" that wasn't a known language, is utterly ridiculous. God can't produce a language which is unknown to Him, and He would not have us produce a language which is unknown to us that we would speak to Him for His benefit. That makes no sense at all. There would simply be no purpose in it.

Life application: If you have the ability to speak, why would you waste that ability on a showy demonstration of meaningless words rather than words which edify and build others up? Be wise; speak with purpose and sense!

*Lord God, You have designed me with a brain that should engage when preparing to speak. You have given me vocal cords which can then make sounds. And You have given me experiences which I can relate to others. Having these things available still needs something else to make them work in a good way. Give me a heart, O Lord, which will*

*use these things to help others and to build them up. Please assist me in keeping this heart from evil intent. Instead, let it be soft and receptive to those around me so that my other body parts will be used in a pleasing and helpful way. Thank You for this Lord. Amen.*

### **For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?**

1 Corinthians 14:8

The words today continue with the thought of the previous verse. There, Paul noted the flute and the harp which need to be played properly to make a distinction in the sounds. Likewise, the same is true with the trumpet. The word for "trumpet" here is *salpigx*, which is properly denoted as a war-trumpet. It was comparable to another Hebrew trumpet which was played before battle, and which jubilantly would announce the Lord's victory over His enemies.

In the Old Testament, which is where Paul's mind would be referring to, there were different trumpets which were used for different occasions. The trumpet that he was most probably thinking about would be the *chatsotserah* or "battle trumpet" which is first referred to in Numbers 10:1-10. In that description, this is found -

"When you go to war in your land against the enemy who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be remembered before the LORD your God, and you will be saved from your enemies." Numbers 10:9

In the surrounding instructions for this trumpet, the Lord noted it would be used for various purposes and when it was used, different signals would be given to distinguish what was occurring. Without varying the tunes, one wouldn't know whether the congregation was being gathered for a meeting or for going to war. As Paul says, "if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?"

The same is true with military units throughout history. There have always been different signals for different purposes. Those signals have been used to call the troops to battle, engage in various types of maneuvers, to sound retreat, or even to surrender. If the trumpeter blew the same note all the time, only chaos would result.

The first time that the battle trumpet was used in the Bible came later in the book of Numbers when Israel took vengeance on the Midianites. Here is that record -

"Then Moses sent them to the war, one thousand from *each* tribe; he sent them to the war with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, with the holy articles and the signal trumpets in his hand. <sup>7</sup> And they warred against the Midianites, just as the LORD commanded Moses, and they killed all the males." Numbers 31:6, 7

In the Psalms, this same trumpet is mentioned, not for going into battle, but for a joyous praise to the Lord at His victory -

"Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth;  
Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises.  
<sup>5</sup> Sing to the LORD with the harp,  
With the harp and the sound of a psalm,  
<sup>6</sup> With trumpets and the sound of a horn;  
Shout joyfully before the LORD, the King." Psalm 98:4-6

Someday, the final battle trumpet will be sounded when the Lord's victory is complete, and all His enemies have been made His footstool. The sounding of that trumpet is seen in Revelation 11:15 -

"Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'"

Paul's use of the trumpet is given to again demonstrate the need for coherence and understanding within the congregation. He is doing his best to ensure that the Corinthians (and thus us!) see the importance of using words that can be comprehended by all when speaking in church. As he progresses through this chapter, this needs to be kept in mind. There should never be anything spoken within the church that is not perfectly clear and understood by all, unless it is properly translated.

To ensure this will be the case, he will give definite instructions which are expected to be adhered to. How sad it is that they are all but neglected by so many in the church today. There is flash at the expense of edification. There is an attempt to draw attention to self rather than a desire for exhortation. May we take to heed Paul's words and sound out notes of clarity and purpose!

Life application: When in the congregation, let the voice which proceeds from your mouth always be a voice of clarity for instruction or edification.

*Lord, I would rather speak 10 words of edification to others than one hundred long-winded speeches that tickle the ears of those who hear, but which fail to teach them anything useful about Your word. My life is nothing but a breath in the passing of time, and I pray that each thing that I impart to others will be for them to understand You better. A sermon without instruction is a wasted sermon. A note of counsel which doesn't return to Your word is a note which has failed to direct the reader to You. Help me to keep You and Your word as the center of my focus always. Amen.*

**So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. 1 Corinthians 14:9**

Paul continues to argue against the use of tongues in church, and instead for the use of a logical, sensible set of utterances which will edify others. With this entire chapter almost exclusively being devoted to the issue of tongues, it is appropriate to contemplate *why* it is so. It is apparent that the use of tongues was abused in the church at Corinth, this is certain. But if we can put ourselves into that church, it may help us to understand why such meticulous care is being given to this subject.

Corinth was a large and notable city and there were certainly a variety of languages spoken there. The more languages a person spoke, the more valuable they would be in trading, marketing, and maybe even in politics. Such power is normally an intoxicant and so to speak in other languages in front of others would be like flashing a wallet full of money or pulling up in a new Corvette.

With the church now established, knowing Hebrew would be an even greater source of pride. If one could read the Scriptures in Hebrew as well as Greek, he would have a leg up on others. It is no different today. Pastors and teachers who know the biblical languages are always held in a sort of special esteem, even if they are really crummy at proper biblical interpretation. The flash of knowing the language immediately places them in the spotlights, whether they are handling the use of that language properly or not. Understanding this, we can continue with the evaluation of this chapter from a reasonable perspective of what Paul is trying to tell the Corinthians (and thus us!) about the gift of tongues.

In the past couple of verses, he has shown that instruments are only effective if they are played properly. If they aren't, then only noise will result. Further, actual harm can come about from an improperly played instrument. The war-trumpet can cause chaos on the battlefield if the wrong signal is played. Because of this, there must be intelligible sounds which emanate from those instruments or there will only be worthless noise. In

comparison to that is the use of tongues. In this verse, Paul begins with, "So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken?"

If someone comes into a church and starts speaking in a language that nobody else understands, the result will be chaos. The air will be filled with nonsensical noise, even if it is a known language (which the term "words easy to understand" implies; a known but not understood language). Why would anyone walk into a Greek-speaking church and start speaking in French? It makes no sense. This is what Paul is trying to tell them.

The congregants probably thought they were being impressive, maybe even cool, by speaking in other languages. But in reality, they were only making unintelligible noises. Remember from the fifth verse of this chapter Paul said, "he who prophesies *is* greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification."

Paul is trying to get the Corinthians to wake up and be mature in their conduct. For those who thought they were doing something nifty by speaking in another language, they weren't. He next tells them that by doing so, they were merely "speaking into the air." Sounds were floating around the church, but they were only unintelligible noises.

Life application: Don't speak meaningless words into the air just to look cool.

*Lord, I wish every day was a day filled with fun and prosperity, but then I wouldn't learn from such days, would I? After a while I'd take them for granted and it would all seem mundane. But when I wake up with a really bad cold, I can know that I want my health once again. And when I get over that cold, I can say, "Gee, it sure is swell to feel well." If I must struggle to pay my bills, then I will certainly be more satisfied when the bills are paid. Thank you for the trials and the down-times. They help keep the good times in proper perspective. And they also make me realize how wonderful it will be when I spend eternity in Your presence. Thank You. Amen.*

**There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them *is* without significance. 1 Corinthians 14:10**

Paul continues with his dialogue concerning the speaking of tongues with a thought that looks back on what he has said and forward to a continued discussion about tongues in the church. In verses 7 and 8, he mentioned instruments and the sounds they make - literally, "their voice." Then he compared those things to tongues, or languages by

saying, "So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air."

Just as a trumpet that isn't given a specific tune will fail to assemble the army, so a language spoken that no one understands will fail to edify the people. But this is the purpose of languages. They are given to instruct, warn, comfort, etc. All languages have purpose and no word in a language can be without meaning. Rather, there must be a thought connected to it or it is a useless sound; not a part of the language. In other words, thoughts are connected to words which are invented to convey those thoughts.

Understanding this, Paul says, "There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world." The word translated here as "languages" is literally "voice." It is the same word used to describe the sounds of the instruments in the previous verses. It is used to describe the words of the prophets (the voice of the prophets) in Acts 13:27; the outcry of an assembled crowd (the voice of the crowd) in Acts 19:34; the voice of the Lord in Acts 22:9 (which was only understandable to Paul and not those around him; it being the Hebrew language); the blast of the trumpet (the voice of the trumpet) in Revelation 8:1; and even the sound of the wings of the locusts (the voice of the wings) in Revelation 9:9. All of these, and many other examples, show that translating the word here as "language" is a general idea, not what was specifically on Paul's mind.

He has shown that there are many "voices" in the world such as trumpets, flutes, languages, etc. And so, he is tying this word "voice" to all of those things. The intent of his words is "anything that makes an understandable sound." This is certain because he finishes the verse with, "and none of them *is* without significance." Whether it is the voice of the trumpet, or whether it is the spoken Hebrew language, the voice is what conveys the meaning. This is why earlier he used a variety of words to describe sounds (see the analysis of verse 7).

The idea is conveyed by the voice. If there is no understanding of the voice, then there is no grasping of the intent behind the voice. His words in this verse almost make a playful sound. Vincent's Word Studies translates the idea as, "So many kinds of voices, and no kind is voiceless." There is intent in Paul's words and there is a "voice" behind the intent of them. They are specific and they are calling out for a reason.

Why then the minute parsing of his thoughts? Because his thoughts are what drive proper theology, and they are what are intended to drive proper conduct in the church. Unfortunately, it has become the standard to ignore such exacting analysis and to make

stuff up which is completely unbiblical. Thus, congregations and church meetings devolve into anything but sound theology and proper conduct.

Life application: Paul expects every word uttered in a church to be a word which is understandable, and which will edify the congregation. If they don't meet these requirements, then they are not in accord with the Bible which was given by the Spirit of God, and thus they are not of the Spirit of God.

*Heavenly Father, help me to guide my conduct in the church in accord with Your word. If Your word was given by the Spirit, and my conduct isn't in harmony with Your word, then my conduct isn't in agreement with Your Spirit. I can see that it is all or nothing, and so I pray that pleasing You will be my sole aim and goal. Yes Lord, help me to glorify You in the congregation by having me apply Your word to my actions. Thank You for hearing my prayer. Amen.*

**Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks *will be* a foreigner to me.** 1 Corinthians 14:11

"Therefore" is given for us to look back and consider what was said to understand what will now be conveyed. Paul has written about different instruments, each of which conveys its own distinct sound. He then discussed the individual tunes which an instrument can make. He also noted that there are many languages in the world. Each has its own voice which is unique and which can be comprehended by anyone who understands that voice. Chinese is not Russian; Navaho is not Spanish; English is not Vietnamese; etc. Unless one understands the voice of the language, it is simply unintelligible noise without meaning or cohesion.

However, to a person who understands the language, each word identifies something which can be described by the word - nouns, verbs, conjunctions, etc., all begin to form a cohesive thought which conveys a reasonable, understandable message to those who know that language. Based on this, Paul gives his "therefore" by saying, "If I do not know the meaning of the language..." The word "voice" is used here. It literally says, "the power of the voice." The "power" is its meaning, and the "voice" is what is being relayed. If one doesn't know the meaning behind what is being relayed (think of the battle trumpet that sounds out a tune you have never heard), then "I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks."

This term "foreigner" is the Greek word *barbaros* (barbarian, hence a foreigner). Here it is not intended as a deprecatory phrase as it often is, but rather it is indicating

unintelligible words. The Greeks viewed any foreign language as harsh or rude in comparison to their language. Thus, they applied the term "*bar bar*" to them. It indicated any language that wasn't Greek; known languages which to them seemed like unintelligible sounds. This is what Paul is conveying here. He is saying that even though the language is a real language with an actual "voice," it is simply a confused sound if it isn't understood by the hearer.

Paul is *not speaking* of made up, incoherent sounds without meaning behind them. He is speaking about the *perception* of those sounds by the hearer who doesn't understand them. Thus, he is not speaking of a personal "prayer language" or a supposedly "Spirit-inspired" language that only God knows. He is speaking of a real language spoken by another group which is not understood by the hearer. To confirm this, he completes his sentence with, "and he who speaks *will be* a foreigner to me." Just as the sounds of the speaker are unintelligible to the hearer, even though the speaker obviously understands them (because they are the "voice" of the speaker; meaning an understandable concept put into real words), the hearer will interpret the speaker as a *barbaros* (foreigner) for failing to understand the words.

This occurs around the world about 10 jillion times a day. People get frustrated at others who don't speak their own language, and hearers get frustrated at those they don't understand. For particular emphasis, go to France and test this concept there. They have a special knack for treating foreign speakers, particularly English speakers, in a most frustrating way.

Again, as has been noted, Paul has consistently spoken of real languages that are spoken by real people groups and which have real meaning. Nobody in their right mind would speak unintelligible garble at the office among their coworkers. Nor would they do it while at a city council meeting. They would be both humiliating and humiliated. As this is so, why would you act in such a manner in the holy congregation of the saints?

Life application: When you are in church, speak words which have meaning, and which edify the congregation or don't speak at all.

*Lord, it isn't easy to see the trials my friends face. I often wish I could help more than I do, or that I could take their place in those difficult times. But You have given each of us our own course and direction. At the same time, You have given us one another to at least share in the burdens. We can say a kind word, help with the bills, or gather in prayer to show our unity with them. Help me to be such a person, Lord. Give me a heart to know when to step forward and offer myself to them. I pray for such wisdom. Amen.*

**Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual *gifts*, *let it be* for the edification of the church *that* you seek to excel. 1 Corinthians 14:12**

"Even so" relies on what he just said and leads into the rest of this verse. Taken as a whole, it thus reads:

"Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks *will be* a foreigner to me. Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual *gifts*, *let it be* for the edification of the church *that* you seek to excel."

Again and again in Chapter 14, Paul has attempted to wake up the believers in Corinth (and thus us!) to pursue that which is useful and edifying rather than that which is self-centered and merely for show. The abuse of speaking in tongues was such that it had become a complete distraction to what would otherwise be a normally functioning church.

If speaking in a tongue which no one understands means that we remain a foreigner to those around us, then we should pursue a gift other than speaking in tongues. Paul is trying to be diplomatic about the issue without directly bringing insult upon those who continued to speak in tongues. The purpose of tongues was to demonstrate to the Jewish believers that God was working through the name of Jesus (Acts 2), and to convince them that He is the fulfillment of their Scriptures, their worship, and their hopes.

A further demonstration of tongues was again given to show them (through Peter's visitation to the house of Cornelius in Acts 10) that the Gentiles had been accepted by the Lord as they were. It was to show that they were brought into the same New Covenant as the Jews without converting to being Jews or observing the Law of Moses.

The only other time that tongues were mentioned in Acts (the account of the establishment of the church) is in Acts 19. Certain believers had been baptized into John's baptism, but not into Jesus' baptism. When they were baptized into Jesus, they received the gift of tongues. This was done to show them the difference between the two baptisms. This was in Ephesus that it occurred and the congregation at Corinth would probably have heard this exciting news.

Because of the grand nature of what transpired, the now-established church continued to force the use of tongues where it was no longer needed. Thus Paul is spending an

inordinate amount of time on the issue to get them to grow up and stop acting like children (verse 20). Nowhere else in the New Testament are tongues mentioned in this type of context, and the word "tongues" is only used again in Revelation under a completely different context.

And so, without trying to humiliate these immature believers, he is attempting to get them to stop with unneeded tongues and to pursue greater gifts. Tongues were a gift given as a sign at the establishment of the church. They were never intended to be used in the church age in the manner that they are being used by the Pentecostal movement of today. If believers would simply read the Bible, study the words of Paul, and apply these studies to their lives, they would see that the use of tongues was a specific gift with limited purpose. Other than for times when translation between languages is needed, tongues are something Paul argues against in the now-established church.

This is seen with perfect clarity by his words that, "since you are zealous for spiritual *gifts, let it be* for the edification of the church *that* you seek to excel." Rather than making a self-centered show which edifies no one, he asks them to seek gifts which edify the members of the church. The word "gifts" is inserted by the translators. Literally it reads "since zealous you are (for) spirits..." As Vincent's Word Studies notes -

"Paul treats the different spiritual manifestations as if they represented a variety of spirits. To an observer of the unseemly rivalries it would appear as if not one spirit, but different spirits, were the object of their zeal."

In other words, instead of looking at the gifts of the Spirit as having one intent and purpose, which is the edifying of the church, they were looking at the "gift" of tongues as a case of "I have the Spirit because I can speak in a foreign language." Add in a "ne ne ni boo boo" and you can see the attitude of these immature believers. It is an attitude which continues to permeate immature believers and churches in an ever-increasing manner since the establishment of the Pentecostal movement. It demonstrates a departing from sound doctrine intended for edification and a return to the immature behavior of the dysfunctional church of Corinth.

Life application: Conduct in the church should be "Edify!" not "Look! How spiritual am I!"

*Lord God, I pray that one person today who is praying with me will make a commitment to read their Bible every day for the rest of the year. I pray that as they fulfill this commitment, that You will bless them both in their walk with You and in their personal*

*lives as well. I pray that You demonstrate to them that pursuing You through Your word is worthy of abundant blessing. And Lord, may this desire then spread like wildfire among all people. Even to much-needed revival. Amen.*

**Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.**

1 Corinthians 14:13

It needs to be remembered the context of who Paul is writing to and under what circumstances. He is writing to the church of the Corinthians at a very early date in church history. In that congregation, there were Jews and Gentiles alike who had come to know Christ. It is certain that the majority of the Jews felt the prayers to God should be in their language.

Learning to speak Hebrew is not an overly difficult task. Even today, many Jewish people can read and speak the language, but they have no comprehension of the words. They often participate in the reading of Scripture at certain special times during the year, but they are only spoken words without meaning to their minds; the sounds are unintelligible.

Today, we have the same thing come up in churches from time to time. Lutheran churches may have a prayer written by Martin Luther read aloud. It will be in the original German and almost any competent English speaker can read the words in German because they are the same letters. Maybe the person even took a year of German in High School. If so, their pronunciation will be even better. But there is no understanding at all of what the words mean. This is what Paul is speaking about - real languages being spoken during the church service. The only problem is that they are unknown tongues to the people's ears.

Understanding this context helps us to grasp what Paul is saying. "Therefore" rests upon his words concerning the understanding of the "voice" of a thing, or even a language which is heard. For the benefit of the person who is listening to a Hebrew prayer, passage, or other communication, the speaker should pray for the ability to interpret the words he is speaking. If not, then the people who are listening will never come to understand the meaning of what has been said. They will remain un-edified in their thinking and the words will have been wasted breath.

The gift of interpreting what is spoken will come as the speaker learns the language. This should be his prayer. In essence, "Lord, give me the understanding of these words

so that I can properly interpret them for the benefit of the others who hear them." In this, all will be edified through those spoken words.

Life application: Let it be the goal of all Christians to speak edifying words to those in the congregation. If we are given something to speak which is written in Spanish, German, or Japanese, we should pray that we can not only read it, but interpret it as well. Otherwise, the words have no substance behind them for those who hear.

*How I cherish my moments with You, O God. I love to feel Your presence as I work, as I drive, and as I walk along the path to wherever I am going. What a difference when I do these things when You aren't on my mind! The time is dull and meaningless. But when I have You in my thoughts, the sky is bluer, the leaves are greener, and the time passes with a simple ease that fills me with joy. Give me the mind and the presence to remember that You are always with me and that I can always have this state of peace. Amen.*

**For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.**

1 Corinthians 14:14

Some translations insert the word "unknown" before "tongue" to provide a sense of clarity. Paul just spoke in the previous verse saying, "let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret." This, as noted, refers to someone praying in a known language. Paul, now using the first person, says that if he prays in a known language that he doesn't understand, then "my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful."

As seen in the analysis of the previous verse, this is not an uncommon thing. People read prayers in other languages often in churches. If they don't know the meaning of the words, then there is no comprehension of what is being said. His words in the coming verse will continue to explain the need for understanding, both in prayer and in song. Songs, maybe even more than prayers, are often sung in other languages. It is nice to hear them and they may be great melodies, but unless the words are known, there is no comprehension of what is being sung.

If there is no understanding, then there is no fruit for the mind. There is no growth, no development, and no edification. Paul is continuously bringing his words back to development and growth in Christ. His instruction shows a desire for Christian maturity, not immaturity. If the congregation continuously focuses on tongues, there will be no growth. Instead, there will be a weak and ineffective group that is bent on self-centeredness and division, which is exactly what was to be found in Corinth.

Life application: There are several purposes for gathering in a church setting. We are there to praise and worship the Lord, we go to fellowship with others, and we also go in order to receive instruction and grow in our walk with the Lord. By clinging to childish habits in the church, we will continue on in immaturity. Let us endeavor to grow and develop in Christ each time we assemble as a body.

*Lord, today I need Your hand of peace upon me. The world I live in is filled with an ever-increasing hatred of what is right and moral. Your word is ignored, it is twisted by those with evil intent in order to say what You never meant, and our leaders honor You with their lips, but their hearts are far from You. I mourn in my spirit, looking for a life that is in close fellowship with You, but these things steal my joy. Return me to a contented place in You. Help me to fix my eyes on You once again. Amen.*

**What is *the conclusion* then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.**  
1 Corinthians 14:15

The previous verse said, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful." Anytime someone prays in a foreign language, they have no change in their mental state concerning the prayer. If a person doesn't understand Latin, but knows prayers in Latin (a very common occurrence), there is no edification in uttering the prayer. They are just meaningless words which come off the tongue but which serve no actual purpose for the one praying. Nor do they serve any purpose for the one hearing if that person doesn't speak Latin.

This was the case in the Roman Catholic Church for eons. Until 1965, the Catholic Mass was completely in Latin and nobody was edified. It was a useless gesture to go to Mass in order to learn about Christ because there was nothing to learn. There were just incoherent words coming from the priest. This is still true with portions of many services and it actually serves no valid purpose according to Paul. In response to such ostentation, he asks an obvious question. "What is the *conclusion* then?"

He is asking those at Corinth (and thus us!) to think this issue through. What good at all is such a display other than to have the one making it feel good about speaking in a tongue no one understands? Or even worse, to withhold vital information from the hearer. This was the case in the Roman Catholic Church. The liturgy was intentionally kept in Latin to keep congregants in the dark as to their spiritual needs. Instead of learning about Christ, they were kept dependent on the church. It became a dark and sinister practice of bondage.

In response to such unfruitfulness, Paul proclaims, "I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding." There needs to be a uniting of the spirit (the breath, meaning the words issued off the tongue) and the mind, or understanding. If not, then there has been only wasted effort on the part of the one praying. But continuing further, and in a point that we should not miss, he says, "I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding."

Paul, speaking in the first person, but using it as a tool to mean all people individually, includes singing along with speaking. It is an important thing he has said here to refute the doctrine of speaking in incoherent tongues, such as are heard in Charismatic churches. His words demonstrate conclusively that the "tongues" Paul is speaking about are known languages. As he combines prayer and singing in one verse which is discussing the same subject, it shows that the sounds that he has been, is, and will continue to be speaking of are known languages, not made up sounds.

Songs are written in known languages. They may not be known to the hearers, but they always have a known message by the one composing them. This was addressed by Paul earlier when speaking of the three aspects of sound - voice, distinction, and sound. Together, these are combined with words which then produce a song. It is more than unreasonable to assume that Paul means anything other than a real song which uses known words. To claim otherwise would be done so based on a presupposition which is not supported at all by his commentary in this chapter.

Life application: 才能薰陶，一個人需要說話連貫和指令的接收者可理解的語言。Paul 要求我們用陶冶和與別人建立良好的詞。讓我們努力永遠這樣做。Oh, I'm sorry. What I said is, "In order to be edified, one needs to speak coherently and in a language that the receiver of the instruction understands. Paul asks us to use words which edify and build others up. Let us endeavor to always do so."

*My precious Lord, the words "Just a closer walk with Thee" can't even begin to explain how much I want You near. I don't just want to walk with You, but to be filled with You. And I don't want this in a given measure, but in an ever-increasing measure. Fill me even to overflowing with Your goodness and Your grace. Cover me in Your perfect righteousness, and surround me in Your infinite glory. May the beauty of Your majesty envelop me so that You are all that the world sees. This is my heart's desire, O God. Amen.*

**Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? 1 Corinthians 14:16**

Paul now changes to the second person for this verse and the one following. He is not writing about his practice, but the practice of the congregants at Corinth. He is showing what he desires for those in Corinth in the surrounding verses and contrasting that with what they are actually doing.

He just made a conclusion which he desired the Corinthians to emulate. "I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding." Based on that conclusion, he shows that what they are doing in the church is contrary to it. If they do as he said, there will be understanding. Should they not follow his instruction, the result will be (otherwise) "if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?"

The "spirit" is the breath of the man; the utterance he makes. If a person prays, sings, or blesses in a language which is unknown to another, the uninformed, there will be nothing to edify him. The uninformed is a person who knows neither the language nor the meaning of the words. In other words, if the gospel is spoken in a language foreign to a person, it certainly has meaning, but not to the hearer of the words. If a prayer for relief is spoken in a foreign language, it does have meaning, but not to the hearers of the words. For the hearer, then, there is no gospel message; for the hearer, then, there is no prayer of relief; and for the hearer, then, there is no change in the mind.

But this is the purpose of words; to have an effect on the hearer. Therefore, if the person speaking, or if the person hearing, or if both the speaker and the hearer (whichever combination) cannot understand the words, there is no point in the words being spoken.

Paul's logic here perfectly demonstrates that unknown "ecstatic" or "prayer language" tongues uttered by Charismatics are false. As was noted in the commentary on verse 7, there is no language which can be unknown to God, because there is nothing that God doesn't know. There can be no words uttered with the intent of edifying Him because He knows all. But, Paul says that the words uttered by a person are to be uttered for the edification of himself or others. If the speaker utters a supposed "ecstatic" tongue which means nothing to anyone else, then it has no meaning at all; God doesn't need

edification. Without understanding, there can be no "Amen." This would be contrary to the purpose of communication within the church.

Life application: Thinking through difficult issues, particularly when they have been so often misrepresented by others, is difficult. But this is what we are called to do. Think!

*Heavenly Father, I rejoice in You. Amen.*

**For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.** 1 Corinthians 14:17

This verse really should be taken in conjunction with the previous one in order to understand what he is saying -

"Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? <sup>17</sup> For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified."

Sure enough, if someone says the Eucharist in another language, Hebrew perhaps, he is indeed giving thanks in a good and appropriate way. God hears the words, understands them, and receives them as intended. This is a good thing in some sense. However, those who are in the congregation and don't understand Hebrew are not edified.

At the Superior Word in Sarasota, the Lord's Supper is taken every Sunday. The words of Paul, which provide the instruction for the Lord's Supper, are read aloud from 1 Corinthians 11. However, a blessing in Hebrew is pronounced over them as well. If this were all that occurred, God would have received His praise and thanks, but none in the congregation would be edified. And so, the words are repeated in English for the edification of the congregation -

*Baruch atah Adonai eloheynu, melekh ha'olam, ha'motzi lekhem min ha'aretz*

Blessed are You O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

&

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pree ha'gafen*

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Without the translation, there is no edification. With it, the congregation will, week by week, begin to understand these Hebrew words. They may even develop a desire to learn the language as well. Thus, the tongue serves a valid purpose.

Life application: In the church everything should be done with the thought of bringing edification to others.

*Lord, help me to overlook the small offenses that come my way from family, friends, and close associates. People have stress, people have misunderstandings, and people are people. Some things aren't worth carrying a grudge over or being difficult about. If I can put the petty differences which arise into proper perspective, I know that they are insignificant. When I think of my offenses against You from moment to moment, I can see where true offense should lie. And yet, because of Your great mercy, I am forgiven through Christ. Thank You for reminding me of this. Amen.*

**I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; 1 Corinthians 14:18**

For most of the past seventeen verses, Paul has been speaking of coherent sounds which form understandable languages, not gobbledygook. There is no chance then that he now departs from that to say something pertaining to unintelligible noises which would ecstatically roll off his tongue. To Paul, edification is the main intent of any words spoken in the church.

Understanding this, we can know that he is not referring to anything similar to the nonsense which is uttered in Charismatic churches today - ecstatic tongues, prayer languages, etc. Nor is he referring to the number of times that he speaks in foreign languages in a church. Rather, he is speaking of known languages that he has acquired, most of which the other congregants would not understand.

Paul would have known Hebrew. He would have learned it in his rabbinical training and used it in synagogues. He would have known Aramaic, the lingua franca of the land of Israel at his time. He would have known Greek, the standard language of the Roman Empire at his time. He also probably knew Latin, a language which was growing in ascendancy during his time. He was raised in Tarsus of Cilicia, and there was probably a regional dialect in that area that he grew up with. In addition to this, he was a tent maker and moved around as he shared the gospel. He probably learned many local dialects as he traveled. In all, his words in this verse are certainly true. He was a man of many languages, and for this he thanked his God. It made him a useful tool in the spreading of the most important message ever entrusted to man.

Life application: Tongues are known languages. When speaking in the church, use a tongue which is known to all.

*Lord, I need a vacation, some time away. And so, Lord, I will be visiting with You today. I need to have some time alone; and so, Lord, I am coming to Your throne. I have to clear my mind of every impure thought; and so, Lord, I will come to You as I ought. And in Your presence, I will find rest for my soul. There to You my troubles I will roll. And when I get back to my regular pace, I know I will have energy available to run this race. Thank You for allowing me a vacation in Your presence, O God. I will cherish that time now while I continue my daily trod. Amen.*

**...yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. 1 Corinthians 14:19**

Oh, that people would simply read the Bible! How does the church wander into such strange and unbiblical doctrines? If we would but open the word of God and, without presuppositions, read and apply it to our lives, we wouldn't prohibit certain foods, we wouldn't mandate certain days for "Sabbath observance," and we wouldn't act childish as we applied our tongues to the wind in an incoherent manner! Paul's words in this verse are so obvious that they appear to need no commentary at all, and yet they have been so utterly ignored that commentary is needed.

He begins with "yet." This is the Greek word *alla* which indicates a contrast - "but." The contrast is in relation to what he just said - "I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet..." Paul spoke many languages, but at Corinth it would be pointless for him to speak some of them. Most Corinthians probably didn't speak Aramaic. His home dialect of Tarsus would be unknown to them as well. Other than any learned Jews present, none would know Hebrew.

Despite knowing such languages, it would make no sense for him to come in and start speaking in any of them. Their "voice" would have no meaning to the people in Corinth. Without meaning, he would simply be wasting his time by speaking them. And so, he tells them that "in the church," meaning whatever location the group gathered to meet - not a building, but a gathering; he says that he "would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue."

The words "five" and "ten thousand" are used in a superlative sense. It would be like the modern phrase "one in a million." In other words, he is telling them of the utter absurdity of speaking in a language that no one else understood; it is a completely pointless waste of breath. If there is no edification; the words would only be a distraction. This is the force and intent of Paul's words. How is it that churches have so far departed from what is plain, clear, and obvious? It is because the word of God, which

is given for our instruction, is either completely ignored or it is selectively taken apart and divided up to meet the agenda of the reader.

What a shame! What sad consequences there will be for those who so abuse this precious gift of God. Let us not be found in such an unhappy position when we stand before Him for our rewards and losses.

Life application: There are many issues in the Bible which are difficult to understand and which result in various opinions concerning doctrine. These require a much deeper analysis to grasp. However there are issues which are clear and precise and which should be obvious to anyone who simply takes them at face value. The way to do this is to reject presuppositions and to allow the Lord's word to fill them with their plainly understood message. In such cases, drop all presuppositions and be a vessel prepared for pure doctrine.

*Lord, Your word tells us that it is preferable to speak five words with understanding, than ten thousand words in a tongue. May I apply this to my heart and mind. Help me to never conduct myself in the congregation in any way which would diminish the little time I share with others by uttering unintelligible sounds. Rather, help me always to speak words which edify, words which have meaning to others, and words which glorify You. Help me to be responsible with my tongue and adult in my spiritual thinking. Amen.*

**Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. 1 Corinthians 14:20**

In the previous verse, Paul told the Corinthians that he would rather speak five intelligible words for edification than ten thousand in a tongue. Based on this, he tells those at Corinth (and thus us!) to "not be children in understanding." In other words, their use of tongues was self-centered, attention-seeking, and childish. There was no edification of others; there was only an immature display of "look at me." Instead of hoping for growth in others, there was only hope for fame and applause. Thus, their actions are to be considered childish.

The word translated as "understanding" is different than the word found in 1 Corinthians 14:15. Here it is the Greek word *phrén*. It is used twice in this verse and nowhere else in the New Testament. It indicates the inner parts of a person, specifically the midriff. It is where our English word for "diaphragm" comes from. As the diaphragm regulates breathing, it is an exceptional choice of wording for this particular issue of tongues. As the diaphragm regulates breath, and it is the breath which then goes on to

produce sounds, Paul must have decided on *phren* as a sort of play on words, tying "understanding" in with "tongues." It denotes "reasoning power on the reflective side" rather than on the intellectual side.

In contrast to thinking like children concerning tongues when they should be thinking like adults, he says that they should have such an attitude in the area of malice. In malice, they should be as "babes." Because he is using malice in contradistinction to their attitude concerning tongues, it indicates that he viewed their reasoning behind the use of tongues as malicious. If edification wasn't the intent of the tongues, then there was something darker behind their use; division and one-upmanship. Paul viewed this as malicious and he is asking them to consider their ways.

To do this, he finishes this thought with, "but in understanding be mature." There are three categories in this verse: babes (infants), children, and the fully grown. In malice (because of their inappropriate use of tongues), Paul desires them to be as mere infants; and concerning tongues as a gift, he desires them to grow up from infancy into mature adults by seeking higher gifts. In so doing, they will be grown-up in their understanding (their *phren*). In using their diaphragms for edification rather than ostentation, they will become adult believers who are useful to the body.

Life application: Even the inner parts of our bodies should be used in a mature manner, bringing edification to others and glory to God.

*Lord, You have given me Today to live. I will never have another Today, even if I have a ten thousand more days. Because Today is unique, help me to use it wisely. I know the paths I cross may never be crossed again, and some of the people I meet may be only Today and not on any other day that I live. Help me to use this precious period of 24 hours wisely, redeeming the time for Your glory. I pray that You will be satisfied with my conduct at the end of Today. Amen.*

**In the law it is written:**

**"With *men of other tongues and other lips*  
I will speak to this people;  
And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,"  
says the Lord. 1 Corinthians 14:21**

Paul now turns to Scripture itself to support his words concerning the use of tongues. He says here, "In the law it is written:" Generally, the books of the law are considered the five books of Moses, from Genesis to Deuteronomy. But in a broader sense, even

though Isaiah is a part of the writings known as "the Prophets" he notes that it is a part of "the law." The reason for this is that the entire time, from the giving of the law until the establishment of the New Covenant in Christ's blood, is considered the time of the law. Thus, Isaiah's writings are considered as "the law" in this wider sense.

His quote is from Isaiah 28. However, his citation is not an exact quote, but rather the imparting of the general sense of the words. Isaiah says -

"For with stammering lips and another tongue  
He will speak to this people,  
<sup>12</sup> To whom He said, 'This *is* the rest *with which*  
You may cause the weary to rest,'  
And, 'This *is* the refreshing';  
Yet they would not hear." Isaiah 28:11, 12

Both Isaiah and Paul clearly indicate real languages spoken by real people. Further, Isaiah is specifically speaking of the coming of the Assyrians. These people were not of the covenant line and would not be speaking the tongue as a gift of the Spirit, but rather as their normal language. In other words, Paul is once again referring to a known language which is not understood by its hearers. He is not referring to an ecstatic tongue or some type of "prayer language." Further, the Bible never speaks of, or even hints at, such concepts.

A couple other examples of what Paul is referring to can be found in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah as follows:

"The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, *as swift* as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand..."  
Deuteronomy 28:49

"Behold, I will bring a nation against you from afar,  
O house of Israel,' says the LORD.  
'It *is* a mighty nation,  
It *is* an ancient nation,  
A nation whose language you do not know,  
Nor can you understand what they say.'" Jeremiah 5:15

Paul's quoting of Isaiah, as well as the other OT references, show us that because the people wouldn't listen to the loving words of the Lord, which they understood, He

would speak to them in harsh words by people whom they didn't understand. Paul will explain the purpose of this in the next verse.

Life application: The words of Scripture are given to the world for our edification and instruction. We have them translated into our language for this purpose and we are to apply them to our lives, not ignore them. Let us therefore cherish these precious words and let them guide our steps at all times.

*Lord, You have taken portions of human history and condensed them into a book which is intended to show us our miserable state in relation to You and what You have done to correct that. You have ensured that this word was carefully maintained and faithfully translated into languages all around the world. It stands as a wonderful letter of love and hope... and yet we ignore it. How can it be that we are so unwilling to acknowledge and receive such a gift. Forgive us! Turn our hearts towards You! Help us to pursue Your word and apply it to our lives. Amen.*

**Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. 1 Corinthians 14:22**

"Therefore" comes as a result of everything Paul has said to this point concerning tongues. His final note thus far, which is included in this, but to which "therefore" is not limited, was a quote from Isaiah concerning the speaking of a foreign language to the Jewish people who had refused to hear and pay heed to the word of the Lord in the language that they knew. Such a tongue (a known, but foreign language) is "for a sign."

As Paul says elsewhere -

"For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom." 1 Corinthians 1:22

The Jews needed a sign and they were given that sign. It came at Pentecost and it was spoken in all the languages of those present at the time. This display was for the benefit "not to those who believe but to unbelievers." Only God could cause the words of a group of men who didn't speak the language of the hearers present to have their voices speak in a tongue they understood. It was a validation of the religion which the disciples already professed that was based on the Person and work of Jesus; the gospel that He proclaimed and which they continued to proclaim.

Therefore, churches (and there are many of them) that claim that tongues are an "initial evidence of Holy Spirit Baptism" have fundamentally misunderstood both the purpose

of tongues and the sealing of the Holy Spirit. If a person is already a believer, they are sealed with the Spirit and saved. As tongues are a sign not to believers, but to unbelievers, it is obvious that the false tongues they speak are simply an ostentatious display bordering on that which is ludicrous.

Understanding the purpose of tongues, Paul next contrasts that to prophesying. He notes that as tongues are a sign to unbelievers, "prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe." To prophesy is to take the word of God and explain it and declare it in a coherent, reasonable manner. If someone doesn't believe that the Bible is the word of God, then all the explanation of Scripture in the world will have no effect on the person.

Only after they have accepted that it is what it claims to be does it make any sense to proclaim it to that person. But once a person comes to believe in Christ, then they have a basis for hearing the word explained to them. They will have the desire to know Him, to learn what He commands, and to be obedient to those commands.

A sign then is a validation for something which is as yet unknown; in this case "belief." Prophesying is an edification of something which is known. If tongues are a sign in hopes of belief, then why would they be spoken in a church which is intended as a place of edification? It makes no sense. Paul will explain this in the next two verses.

Life application: The gathering together of the saints is for the edification of those saints. If unbelievers come in among them, they need to see order, not disorder. They need to see people being edified, not stupefied. Let us consider this as we gather.

*I am so abundantly grateful to You Lord. Though I have had many trials in my life, for the most part they have been self-inflicted wounds. But when I stay close to Your word, I find that my life is just where it should be and that things are just as they need to be. The reason for the trials that do come is much clearer and nothing is really out of control. This is why I'm so grateful to You. Your word is a light to my path and a lamp to my feet. It makes the dark turn to light and the trials are merely stepping stones leading me to Your door. Thank You Lord. Amen.*

**Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those who are* uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 1 Corinthians 14:23**

"Therefore" explains what Paul just said, that tongues are a sign to unbelievers. If an unbeliever hears of an unusual set of occurrences happening in a church, they will naturally be curious as to what is going on. This continues to this day as people hear of great preachers, wonderful singers, etc. who are found in any given church. A church's hope should rightly be to draw in unbelievers with the anticipation that they will hear the message of Christ and be converted.

And so, as the body is gathered, if all they are doing is speaking in foreign languages that have no meaning for the others in the church, there will only be pandemonium. If "uninformed or unbelievers" come into such a gathering, their perception will be exactly what one would expect - the people are out of their minds.

All one needs to do is think of a college calling a debate on evolution. During the debate, one person starts debating why the college should have a new wing dedicated to global warming. Another debates why minorities should be given preferential treatment in hiring. And a third person speaks in Chinese about the superiority of communism. Anyone attending such a gathering would feel he had entered the Twilight Zone.

The church has a purpose and that purpose is Christ. If there isn't instruction about Him, from His word, then it isn't meeting that purpose. And not only this, the instruction needs to be in an intelligible form which will edify those in attendance. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came and caused the gospel to be heard in the various languages (known languages) of those gathered. It was a sign to them of the truth of the message.

However, some misperceived what was occurring. Rather than hearing the message, all they heard was the chaotic sound of many languages being uttered. The result was that they accused the apostles of being drunk (full of new wine). Unless the message of the sign is understood, the sign has no meaning. And so, it is with tongues. Unless they are understood, they have no meaning. If they have no meaning, they should not be uttered.

Life application: Speaking in tongues that no one understands and which do not edify the body is contrary to the intent of tongues. Therefore, the one speaking such tongues cannot be "Spirit-filled." The Holy Spirit will never work in a manner contrary to His nature.

*Lord, when I see a couple walking down the road and each is talking to someone else on their cell phone, I think that they have wasted their time walking together. It is a lesson to me each time I see it because everywhere I am, and in everything I do, You are there*

*with me. And yet, how often do I miss the opportunity to share such moments with You. I pray that every moment I take to heart the truth that in You I live and move and have my being. Let me not squander such a valuable treasure. Amen.*

**But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. 1 Corinthians 14:24**

Paul has spent 22 verses arguing the point that he made in 1 Corinthians 14:1 -

"Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy."

As soon as he said that, he began to explain why "tongues" are a lesser gift. He has clearly demonstrated that they are often more of a hindrance than a help when spoken in the congregation. It is rather astonishing to think that with all of his time dedicated to this instruction, his words have been so utterly dismissed by many churches.

As he desires that believers prophesy rather than speak tongues, he now provides the reason for it. He notes that "if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all." This is the reason for sharing the gospel! This is the reason for being a mature and informed Christian! And thus, this is the reason for learning Scripture and then explaining it to others in an articulate manner!

When a member of the body properly speaks the truth of God's word, it is an argument intended for conviction. Where there is conviction, there is a change in heart. And where there is a change in heart, there is conversion. In conversion, there is belief. In belief, there is the sealing of the Holy Spirit. This is the work we are called to do - to preach, convince, and then make disciples. As Paul says in Romans 10:17 -

"So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

When speaking in tongues that are unknown to the hearer, the hearer is not edified. But when a person speaks the words of Scripture, faith becomes possible. And through faith comes salvation.

Life application: Learn the Bible and share what you learn. It can have heavenly rewards.

*Lord, I am so grateful to be a part of Your beautiful plan. You have given Your people a Great Commission and I am honored to participate in it. Help me to always be prepared*

*to give a defense to everyone who asks for a reason why I have this great hope in me. Help me to give it in a loving, intelligent, and effective way so that they too can participate in this greatest story of all - the Gospel of Jesus. Amen.*

**And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. 1 Corinthians 14:25**

Paul, noting the difference between people speaking unknown languages and people preaching the word of God (prophesying) shows the contrast in this verse. If everyone is speaking in a foreign tongue, a visitor to the church will think they are mad. However, if everyone speaks coherent words which proclaim Scripture, "the secrets of his heart are revealed."

The Bible has the power to convict because it reveals the fallen state of man. Among other reasons, God has given us this word to show our fallen state and how the breach between us can be repaired. As the author of Hebrews notes -

"For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Hebrews 4:12

As the Bible is properly explained, those who hear it will be edified concerning whatever subject matter is being treated. In response to this, there will be a reaction to the words by the hearer of them. In the case of the uninformed, He may be convicted of his need for Christ. Thus, "falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you."

This "falling down on his face" is the way that someone in the Middle East would show deep emotion and humility. It is found numerous times in Scripture and would be comparable to a westerner breaking down in tears and covering his face with his hands. There is nothing in this verse which would support being "slain in the Spirit" as charismatic churches do. The intent is a humble response and a deep-felt conviction at hearing the word of God, not an ostentatious display at hearing a bunch of nonsense issue from the lips of men who would turn a church meeting into a carnival display.

The intent of church is to teach people about God. A church can only teach people about God if they proclaim Christ, who reveals God the Father. And a church can only teach people about Christ if they do so from His word, which is our source for knowing Him. It is from hearing the word properly preached that faith arises, and from properly

directed faith will come salvation. When a person comes to this point in the congregation, he will rightly utter "God is truly among you."

"Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,  
And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray." Goldsmith

Life application: It may not be sensational by today's standards to hear the Bible properly preached, but in the context of eternity for the human soul, it is the most sensational message possible. Be sure to find a church where the Bible is held in high regard and properly explained.

*God, You are not fickle. If You are perfect in Your very being, then when You speak to Your creatures, Your word will be perfectly coherent and it will reflect who You are perfectly. Despite there being many religions on earth, only one can logically be correct. Surely it is my duty to sort through them and determine which it is. I know and am convinced that the Bible alone is Your word and that salvation is found in none other than the Messiah -Yeshua. I receive Your word and I bow to Jesus. I have found peace with You through His shed blood! Hallelujah and Amen.*

**How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 1 Corinthians 14:26**

Paul's words in this verse are for proper order in the church and they are based on what he has said in the preceding verses concerning tongues. When the whole congregation is speaking in tongues and an uninformed visitor comes in, he will think everyone is crazy. This is certainly not how a church should be conducted and so he asks, "How is it then, brethren?" In essence, "What is the proper way of conducting oneself in the church?"

In response to his own question, he provides the answer. "Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation." The Spirit has given various gifts to the body and He has distributed those gifts according to His will. But each gift needs to be brought out at the proper time. In just a few verses, he is going to note that God is the author of peace, not confusion. As this is so, then blurting out nonsense or cutting others off with a "tongue" or a "revelation" cannot be of God.

The Holy Spirit will never inspire anyone to do anything which is contrary to His nature; therefore, the conduct of those in Corinth could not be Spirit-led. Instead, their actions were merely for self-aggrandizement. Because of this, Paul will give very explicit instructions concerning the use of tongues. These instructions will confirm for all future church gatherings that those who do not follow them are not Spirit-led in their actions.

One mark of a church that is properly adhering to God's word, and to the leading of the Spirit, is that they will, "let all things be done for edification."

Life application: Edification of the body is a necessary component of the gathering together of the saints. If this is not occurring, then the gathering is a wasted effort. Remember this and be a person who edifies others.

*Lord God, I so very much look forward to the day ahead. To me, it is the great unknown. Each step is heading down a path I have never been. To me, what others might find disturbing is exciting. And the reason is that You are in my life. No matter what lies ahead, be it good or be it ill, I know that You are with me through it. With this great assurance, I am at peace and I am confident of a good outcome in the end. Thank You for Your steadfast presence in my life. Amen.*

**If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.*** 1 Corinthians 14:27

Paul now gives explicit instructions concerning tongues. This is a prescriptive verse for the church at Corinth (and thus to us because the letter is included in Scripture). To not adhere to this verse is to then violate a command found in the book which establishes faith and doctrine for the church. Logically, we can consider the following:

- 1) The words of the Bible are inspired by the Spirit of God.
- 2) The Spirit of God will never violate a precept which is found in the Bible, which He has inspired. Therefore,
- 3) Any practice or occurrence which is seen in a church and which violates the prescriptions of the Bible cannot be inspired by the Spirit.

Let's remember this as we continue. Paul says that "if anyone speaks in a tongue" (which has been shown clearly in this chapter to be a known language), "*let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.*" The Spirit-inspired words of Paul note that speaking in a tongue (a known language) is acceptable within the church, but there are rules which must be followed -

- No more than two or three may speak in a tongue during any one service. This can only be interpreted this way. It doesn't mean "two or three at once" based on his continued words in this verse.
- Each person speaking in tongues must do so in turn, not at the same time. The idea and design for speaking in tongues is that it is a tool to convince unbelievers; they are a sign to them. Therefore, in order to edify the church, there should be order and harmony rather than disorder in the speaking of tongues.
- If a tongue is spoken within the church, it must be interpreted. If a tongue is spoken in a church and there is no interpreter, then there will be no edification. As edification is the intent of such speech, then the words should not even be uttered aloud.

These rules are given in the Bible. They are not exhortations, nor are they mere suggestions. They are instead prescriptive elements which are expected to be adhered to. Understanding this, then we can very easily root out any false tongues. Again, if the Spirit inspired the Bible and there is a practice which occurs within a church which does not conform to the Bible, then the source of that practice *cannot* be Spirit led.

Any "tongue" spoken in a church which is not interpreted *cannot* be a Spirit-led tongue. Any congregation where more than three people speak in a tongue *cannot* claim to be led by the Spirit. And any gathering where more than one tongue is spoken at a time *cannot* be speaking by the Spirit.

Life application: The Spirit of God isn't confused.

*Heavenly Father, even if every person on earth were to come against Your word and claim that it wasn't necessary; even if every church on earth departed from the guidelines You have given for us to follow; and even if I were faced with death unless I turned my back on the Lord who is revealed to me in Your word, I would still ask for the strength and wisdom to stand on Your word and the truths it contains. Your word, O God, is more to be treasured than all the riches of this world because it tells me of My Lord Jesus. I stand on Your word, O God. Amen.*

**But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. 1 Corinthians 14:28**

This verse continues on with the prescriptions of the previous verse. They are commands, given by the Lord as the Holy Spirit guided Paul's pen. Taken together they say -

"If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.* <sup>28</sup> But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God."

How is it that such plain and simple sentences can be so utterly neglected by churches? The answer is that the Bible is held in little esteem by them. The word of God is useful to them only when it tickles the ear. And this is what the supposed "tongues" of most churches do, ear-tickle. However, Paul has spent an inordinate amount of time on this subject to get those in Corinth (and thus us!) to be reasonable in our conduct in the church. Like his words in the previous verse, what he says now also commands just that.

"But" is given in contrast to verse 27. "If there is no interpreter" is obvious. If someone wants to speak in a foreign language, maybe Latin or Hebrew, they may do so if they meet the requirements of verse 27. However, if they don't understand the language, they must have an interpreter present who can. Suppose there is a prayer to be read in Hebrew. Unless there is a competent translation of that prayer, or someone who can translate the words which are being read, then "let him keep silent in church."

This means that they are not to openly speak or read the thing they had intended to impart. Why? Because no one understands it. Thus, it is both a waste of valuable time, and the words have no value for edification. If there is no edification, then it is merely an ostentatious display meant to attract attention to the individual and not bring any sort of glory to God. Because of this, Paul instructs that he should remain quiet and "speak to himself and to God."

If the individual with the tongue to be spoken cannot translate the words, and if there is no one else who can translate them, then if they want to go ahead and speak them, they are to do so to God alone, who alone understands the words.

Paul's words are precise and the same logic of the previous verse applies to this one:

- The words of the Bible, as given by Paul's hand, are inspired by the Spirit of God.
- The Spirit of God will never violate a precept which is found in the Bible, which He has inspired. Therefore,
- Any practice or occurrence which is seen in a church and which violates the prescriptions of the Bible cannot be inspired by the Spirit.

Therefore, any tongue which is spoken in a church which is not translated cannot have been inspired by the Spirit of God; its prompting is not of divine origin. If supposed

"tongue speaking" charismatic churches followed the prescriptions found in these two verses from the hand of Paul, there wouldn't be the embarrassing displays of ostentation found in them.

Life application: The word of God is not confused, nor does it promote confusion. However, neglecting the word of God will inevitably do so. Stick to the word of God and let your doctrine be pure and undefiled.

*Lord, it's so exciting to live in this time. Despite the immense wickedness which seems to be engulfing the world around us, we are seeing biblical prophecy come to pass before our very eyes. Israel is once again in the land, the church is falling away from adherence to Your word and to right doctrine, and the nations are lining themselves up for financial ruin and military strife. Lord God, open many eyes to the truth of Your Son now before You call Your church home, and before the terrible times to come descend on a world ripe for judgment. Amen.*

**Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.** 1 Corinthians 14:29

In contrast to "tongues" which Paul has been dealing with in immense detail, and upon which he has placed great restrictions, he now turns to prophesying. His admonition is "Let two or three prophets speak." Notice that he does not add in "at the most" as he did with tongues. Why did he so restrict tongues and not prophesying? The answer is that tongues serve no purpose in the congregation unless they are translated. And even if they are translated, they often interrupt more than they edify.

In the case of prophesying, he does not want to quench the spirit when edification is the aim of the speaker. This follows perfectly with his words of 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 -

"Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not despise prophecies. <sup>21</sup> Test all things; hold fast what is good."

Having allowed the speaking of prophesy openly, and with the thought that two or three should speak, he then says, "and let the others judge." This is an important thought to consider. People claim "inspiration" all the time, but not all who speak are inspired. All we need to do is look at any person who speaks in an incoherent tongue within a church to see how prevalent this is. Based on Paul's words of instruction in this chapter, not one of them is under the inspiration of the Spirit.

Just like these false tongue speakers, people who speak coherently in a known language are not necessarily speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit. There is enough

about false prophets and false teachers in the Bible that we should truly pay heed to every word uttered as the congregation meets. Those who hear should judge the truth of what is said based on a competent understanding of Scripture. And the only way to make such a competent evaluation is to:

- Have the Bible handy for reference; and
- Know where to go in the Bible to evaluate what is said.

One cannot do these things unless the nose is kept in its pages constantly. If this doesn't occur as people speak, inevitably false doctrine will creep in. John warns us specifically about this in his first epistle -

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." 1 John 4:1

Life application: The old saying, "Trust no one" is good advice. Until a person's words have been compared to the word of God, they should be taken cautiously.

*Lord, Your word warns us time and time again to be wise and discerning concerning those who speak falsely. I know that this is not possible without knowing Your word. Anyone can say anything and claim that they are telling the truth, but how gullible I would be to accept someone at face value concerning my eternal destiny. Please give me wisdom and discernment concerning Your word and the proper handling of it. Amen.*

**But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.**

1 Corinthians 14:30

Taken together, verses 29 & 30 state -

"Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. <sup>30</sup> But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent."

Under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul notes that as people are prophesying, it is to be done in order, not simultaneously. This is a command for the church in order to keep harmony. But it is also a command to avoid confusion. The intent of such speaking is edification. If two are speaking simultaneously, others must choose to focus on one or the other. Some people may not be able to focus on either. Because of this, there can be no edification from at least one of the speakers and quite possibly both. Just as if tongues were spoken, there would be only noise and confusion.

And so, if one is speaking and another desires to impart what is revealed to him, "let the first keep silent." Just as in any adult conversation, be it among friends or in a business setting, it is polite and proper to allow others to speak without interruption.

Paul's words noted here are a command. Thus, once again we see the utterly false nature of churches where the congregation, or a portion of the congregation, supposedly "prophesy" at the same time. As the Spirit has breathed out the words of the Bible, and as the Spirit will never contradict Himself, there is no congregation which conducts such "prophesying" which is actually guided by the Spirit.

Life application: If you attend a church which speaks in false tongues or allows people to "prophesy" at the same time, it is time for you to find a new church. Don't let claims of "Holy Spirit power" lull you into participating in disobedience to the word of God.

*Lord, as I review 1 Corinthians chapter 14, I can see that there is a lot of false conduct in churches I have attended in the past. False tongues, false prophecies, and disobedience to Your word. I know that the Holy Spirit will never violate the word that He has breathed out in the pages of the Bible, and yet I see people claim they are being led by the Spirit in a manner contrary to that precious word. Help me to be discerning and not get lulled into participating in disobedience to You. Thank You Lord. Amen.*

**For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.**  
1 Corinthians 14:31

Continuing on with the gift of prophesy, Paul says that "you can all prophesy one by one." This doesn't mean that all in the congregation have the ability. Rather, it means that all who have the ability to prophesy also have the ability to do so in an orderly fashion; one by one. The reason for this will be more fully explained in the next verse. However, the purpose of prophesying in this orderly fashion is explained in his next words which are "that all may learn and all may be encouraged."

If everyone prophesied at once, there would be no edification and there would be no encouragement. Instead, there would be confusion. But this is to be the purpose of everything done in the church. Therefore, it would make no sense for people to utter prophecies at the same time. Again, Paul is calling the church to orderly worship and to the use of gifts in a harmonious and edifying manner.

Like the misuse of supposed "tongues" which are spoken in many churches, the disorderly conduct of congregations where many people supposedly "prophesy" at the

same time, claiming that it is under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is false. All one needs to do to determine this is to weigh what occurs in these meetings with the words of Paul. As the Bible is of divine origin, then what they are doing cannot be.

Life application: It is far better to learn from a biblically sound teacher than it is to attend a church which has great music, nice people, and an uplifting message, but which message isn't biblically sound.

*Lord, I mourn for the sheep of Your pasture who are misguided by shepherds that aren't obedient to Your word. Give Your people the desire to place the Bible above all else in their pursuit of You and to be willing to read it, contemplate it, and verify what they are taught against its pages. Pastors are fallible, Your word isn't. Help eyes to be opened and minds to be attentive to this most precious of all gifts. This I pray that Your people won't be misled by sweet messages which fail to align with Your word. Amen.*

### **And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 1 Corinthians 14:32**

To understand this verse properly, it should be considered with the instructions Paul has just given. Taken together, they read -

"Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. <sup>30</sup> But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. <sup>32</sup> And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets."

Those who have a word to impart should not start speaking at the same time as others who are speaking. But Paul has shown that they must remain silent as others are speaking. He then explained why by saying that in speaking one at a time "all may learn and all may be encouraged." However, someone may claim that the power of the Holy Spirit has taken them over like a rushing tide and they simply couldn't control themselves. In this ecstatic state, they claim they lost control, yielding to the greater power which was present.

This sounds pretty great, yes... "Look at me, I'm filled with the Spirit, even to overflowing! Why I simply couldn't control myself!" Paul says that this is not the case and it will never be the case because, "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." The Holy Spirit will not usurp the spirit of the man. Instead, He will work harmoniously with the man to accomplish His purposes. As Paul's words are guided by the Holy Spirit, they are true and they precede any such display found in churches

today. Therefore, any event in a church which violates Paul's prescriptions cannot be of the Holy Spirit.

Now consider this more fully. If this is true with prophecy, a greater gift, then it must be true with tongues, a lesser gift. As this is so, then "ecstatic tongues" and other violent reactions to "Holy Spirit power" such as being "slain in the spirit" are shown to be false. The Holy Spirit will not violate a precept in the word of God, ever. If someone is "slain in the spirit" it is because they have willingly allowed themselves to be duped by a charlatan, not the Holy Spirit. It may be a form of hypnosis, or it may be a form of self-induced delusion, but such an event is not of God.

Paul is clear concerning the spirit of the man; it is subject to the man.

Life application: Don't be duped by those who would make you feel you have less of the Holy Spirit than they do. The Holy Spirit is given upon belief. A believer will never get more of the Spirit than at that moment, but the Spirit can get more of the believer, just as a person can never get more married once they are married. Instead, a person can continually get more of their spouse (love, respect, bonding, etc.) as the spouse yields to them.

*Lord God, Your word shows me that the moment I believed in Christ as Lord, I was sealed with Your Holy Spirit and that I belong to You. Help me to yield myself to You as I walk in this life, and to yield to Your presence from moment to moment. Keep me from putting up barriers to this wonderful relationship, but rather help me to keep my heart receptive to You always. I never want to head back in the direction I was saved from! Thank You. Amen.*

**For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.**  
1 Corinthians 14:33

Too often this verse is taken out of its intended context to mean something other than what Paul is implying. It has been used, for example, to deny the doctrine of the Trinity because the Trinity is confusing. Because it is, it is claimed that it cannot be of God because God wouldn't promote confusion in the minds of His people from what stems from His very being. First, just because something is difficult for us to grasp, doesn't mean that it isn't of God. Secondly, the concept of the Trinity is clearly laid out in the pages of Scripture. And thirdly, this verse has nothing to do with such a matter. Paul has been speaking about order in the church. When tongues are spoken, there is often disorder because they are either false tongues or because they are real tongues

which are not translated. Likewise, prophecies are to be given one at a time so that they can be assimilated by the other members of the church. It is these, and the other related principles, which Paul is referring to. In other words, he is writing about order and propriety in the conduct of the church.

Why is this needed? Because "God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace." The term "confusion" is literally translated as "unsettlement." It indicates that which is mixed up rather than that which is harmonious. The Holy Spirit will never fill someone with a tongue that isn't a real language. He will never give a tongue which is not understandable to the congregation unless it will also be translated. And He will never give a prophecy which overwhelms the recipient to the point where he cuts others off as he spouts out his words.

These, and other such displays are merely attempts to draw attention to oneself. They are confused and they are not of God. As James says concerning such things -

"For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there."  
-James 3:16

Such things are not of God. If you attend a church where people speak out of order, where people speak false tongues which have no meaning, or where people draw attention to themselves through supposed "ecstatic" displays of the Holy Spirit, leave that church. Their activities are not of God. We know this because Paul finishes with the notion that this is the case "in all the churches of the saints." No church will be conducted in such a disorderly manner if it is guided by the Spirit of God.

Life application: Context drives the meaning of verses. Always check the context when analyzing or quoting Scripture.

*Heavenly Father! How absolutely wonderful it is to know that I am Yours. I once was far from You, but You brought me near through the blood of Christ. That bond can never be dissolved and it will never end. I have the eternal hope of glory, bestowed upon me by grace. I receive the Gift, I call on Jesus. Thank You that in His cross, I have restoration with You! Hallelujah and Amen.*

**Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says. 1 Corinthians 14:34**

Paul's words here are as clear and as positively stated as any other prescriptions found in the New Testament. They bear the weight and authority of the Lord who inspired the words, and they are universal in scope. There is nothing stated here to indicate that what he says is cultural, limited in geographical considerations, or temporary - as many claim in order to ignore what is stated. Rather, they are universal in all ways and binding on the church in all ages. Further, the intent and substance of his words are repeated in 1 Timothy 2:11, 12. This shows that it is a matter of paramount importance. To reject these words will inevitably lead to greater problems within the church and within society, as has been plainly evident in recent generations.

Paul has been speaking on the issues of "tongues" and "prophesying." This is exactly what he is referring to here. Nothing has changed in the direction of his dialogue and he will continue to speak on both prophesying and tongues until the end of the chapter. His words for the universal church are to "Let your women keep silent in the churches." This is clear and cannot be taken in any other way than what it says. But Paul, understanding the wickedness of the human heart, knew that there would be people who would take his words and twist them if he didn't re-explain them. And so, he does just that, repeating the prescription by saying "for they are not permitted to speak."

Understanding this, the exact same logic that was previously applied to tongues can be applied to this verse -

- The words of the Bible are inspired by the Spirit of God.
- The Spirit of God will never violate a precept which is found in the Bible, which He has inspired. Therefore,
- Any practice or occurrence which is seen in a church and which violates the prescriptions of the Bible cannot be inspired by the Spirit.

With this in mind, we can use it as a tool concerning the matter at hand -

The Bible says that a woman is not permitted to speak in a church.

The Spirit of God will never violate a precept which is found in the Bible, which He has inspired. Therefore,

- Any church gathering where a woman either speaks (particularly in a tongue or prophesying), violates the prescriptions of the Bible and what is said cannot be inspired by (nor condoned by) the Spirit.

In reading this one must ask, "Do I know more than God?" The answer is obvious. He has spoken and we are to obey. In today's modern church, many women claim the titles of

"pastor," "reverend," "bishop," "prophetess," or whatever. These titles are false and these women directly disobey the word of God. They are to be rejected.

As a third way of repeating his thought, Paul continues with "but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says." In Genesis 3:16, the woman was placed in a subordinate position to the man. Throughout the law, this precept continues to be seen in various ways. For example, Numbers 30 goes into some detail on the matter. What Paul has said is not an arbitrary decision made by a male chauvinist, but rather it is the proper order of things which has been ordained by God.

In three different ways, he has shown that women are not to be in any type of authority position in the church. They are not to speak, but are to remain silent. In the next verse, he will continue with his explanation, clarifying exactly what is expected in this matter.

Life application: Fame or exceptional teaching skills are not reasons to disobey God's word. Allowing women such as Beth Moore, Joyce Meyers, or a host of other supposed pastors and teachers, to preach from a pulpit shows direct disobedience to Him. Let us put aside star-struck eyes and return to obedience to Scripture.

*Heavenly Father, it's not popular in today's world to hold to Your word, especially in areas which the modern world has decided are outdated. But I would rather be obedient to Your word and be pleasing to You, than have all of the fame and riches of this temporary, fallen life in which I walk. Let me be unpopular toward the masses, but pleasing in Your sight. This is my hope and my joy. Amen.*

**And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. 1 Corinthians 14:35**

Like the previous verse, this is a command. Far too many scholars and teachers say that this is merely a cultural or geographically isolated command. Where does such manipulation of Scripture come from? Paul says nothing of this. Rather, his words are clear, contained within an epistle to the Gentile church (which is prescriptive for the entire church age), and it contains nothing that can justify it being temporary or not all-inclusive.

Again, who is the ultimate Author of Scripture? It is the Holy Spirit working through the hand of a human author. In the case of 1 Corinthians, He is working through Paul. There is no need to point angry fingers at those who hold to the sanctity of these words. Rather, there should be willing obedience to them. Paul, having brought up the issue of

women not being permitted to speak in the church, now gives further clarification of that. Not only are they to not prophesy or speak in tongues (which is what this chapter has been discussing), they have even further limitations placed on them. "If they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home."

As the men are conducting the affairs of the church, it would be disorderly for the wives to be having side conversations with their husbands. Anyone who has spoken in public will surely note that having people talk while they are speaking is a distraction to their attention. Cell phones ringing, babies crying, etc., all cause the mind to get sidetracked. Paul has already shown that those who speak in tongues and those who prophesy should do so in order. This is so that others will be edified. If someone is having a side conversation, it will be just as difficult for others to concentrate as if two were prophesying at the same time.

Instead of women asking their husbands about a matter during the church, he says that they should "ask their husbands at home." This will keep the church from being disorderly and it will allow the speakers to do so without breaking their concentration. But Paul goes further in his explanation. He not only says that they should ask their husbands at home, but he explains why. It is because "it is shameful for women to speak in church."

Understanding the roles of men and women in the Bible, which reveals a patriarchal society is the appropriate one, it is unruly, disorderly, and improper for women to speak in the congregation where men are present. It is actually a shame upon themselves and thus it then reflects shame on their head; the husband. Paul explained this in detail in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

His concern is for order and propriety in the church, leading to edification. If his words are ignored, there will always be a breakdown in that respect. Nobody would expect students in a university to be chatting during an important lecture on some great scientific principle, and yet the Bible is far more important than that. Time spent in a church each week for instruction is limited. Therefore, anything which detracts from those precious moments is to be restricted. This is Paul's intent and aim in his words.

Life application: The command in 1 Corinthians 14:35 is given for order and propriety. To violate it is to show a disregard for what God deems important. Let us always seek His will through His word, being obedient to it out of love and respect for Him.

*Another day in Your presence, O God! Thank You for this gift. May I use it wisely and bring You the honor that You are due. Let me do nothing that will diminish You in the eyes of others. Amen.*

**Or did the word of God come *originally* from you? Or *was it* you only that it reached?**

1 Corinthians 14:36

Paul's two questions form a scathing rebuke of the practices of those in Corinth. The entire chapter has obviously been one of repeated instruction, and the emotion has only increased in him as the ink flowed from his pen. He may have been thinking, "I've told them all of this already!" But they didn't heed.

He first asks, "Or did the word of God come *originally* from you?" It is a note of indignation. He is asking if they think they are the source of what should be considered church doctrine. Are they somehow the church which should establish doctrine for all the others? Paul is letting them know that it is he who brought them the word of Christ and established the church among them. His words of instruction demonstrate that they had fallen away from that. Instead they were involved in illicit practices. The very fact that he is writing instructions to them shows this to be true.

They have misused the gift of tongues; they had been disorderly in the preaching of the word, talking over one another; and they had allowed women to engage in these activities rather than having them remain silent as he had previously instructed them. In essence, he is showing that they have held in contempt the word of God and attempted to establish their own parameters for church conduct. If that doesn't sound like many churches in the world today, it's hard to see what else could! The word is ignored, women are ordained and speak openly on matters of doctrine when they are not authorized to by Scripture, and congregations spout out false tongues and false prophecies at will.

Paul was fed up then and we should be fed up now! And so, he continues, "Or *was it* you only that it reached?" It is a second line of indignation. "Suppose you don't feel you are the source of the word of God. Well then, the only other explanation is that you feel you are the only recipients of it; the only valid church."

They were acting as if they alone held the authority to interpret Scripture and thus their interpretation was however they saw fit. But the word had gone out to many churches. The message was consistent and it was clear. Other churches had properly followed the practices as they were received. But somehow, this dysfunctional church at Corinth had

gone out on its own, teaching aberrant guidelines that were not in sync with the rest of the churches. Paul's lengthy letter demonstrates this.

But it must be understood that if this church wasn't so dysfunctional, there would have been no letter to the Corinthians and then there would have been no written set-doctrine for later churches to follow. God, in His wisdom, allowed the church at Corinth to depart from Paul's sound instruction in order to give all of us a sure word, in writing, which is understandable and clear. With it, combined with the other Pauline epistles, we have right doctrine to lead the church. And yet... we ignore it and continue with the same dysfunctional problems that Corinth faced.

Can one not see the absolute importance of the Word of God when reading this letter to Corinth? How precious a treasure and yet how ignored it is! Let us leave misguided passion, emotion, and self-seeking ostentation at the door and enter into the church with the desire to honor the Lord by following His word!

Life application: Find a church which doesn't follow the crazy practices Paul outlines in his letter to the Corinthians.

*How precious is the wondrous treasure! It is a gift from God beyond all measure. It is a sure and sound word for us to obey; and yet we ignore it and disobey it, day by day. Women preach; false prophecies are spoken; exhortations are ignored and commands are broken. We find more pleasure in twisting this superior word, than we do in being obedient to the Lord. O God, forgive us for our arrogant attitude towards this book. From now on, into its pages we will look. And then in obedience we will walk, and of its precepts we shall talk. Thank You, O God, for this right word of instruction. Thank You for Your superior word. Amen.*

**If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.**

1 Corinthians 14:37

What a logical way to determine if certain conduct within the church is truly of the Spirit or not! The Bible proclaims that it is the word of God. It also shows us how that word came about. Prophets and men of God, under divine inspiration, received the words of the Lord. They are inerrant, infallible, and are intended to guide the church. And so, in order to determine if Paul's words are truly inspired, we can follow a logical process.

First, we can go to our thoughts about Jesus. Do we believe that the story about Him is true? If so, do we believe that He has the authority the Bible proclaims? If so, does that authority include the appointing of His apostles? If we have said "Yes" so far to each of these questions, then we can next go to find the Apostle Peter's recorded appointment.

Peter's selection, along with the other apostles, is found in Matthew 10, Mark 3, and Luke 6. His apostolic status is also noted in the Gospel of John and in Acts. If Peter is not accepted as an apostle, then there would be no point to accept any of the New Testament. It is as certain as it could be that he is, in fact, an apostle. Understanding this, we can then go to his second epistle for a note concerning Paul -

"Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;<sup>15</sup> and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,<sup>16</sup> as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures." 2 Peter 3:14-16

Peter clearly identifies Paul as authoritative, and he places Paul's epistles on the same level as "the rest of the Scriptures." In other words, it is an explicit reference to the inspiration of Paul's letters. Now, combining that with the selection of Paul as an apostle by Jesus' own mouth, we can demonstrate that he has both the authority and the inspiration to back up his words to the Corinthians. In response to a question by Ananias, Jesus proclaims Paul's commission and apostolic authority -

"Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.<sup>16</sup> For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." Acts 9:15, 16

It is impossible to deny Paul's authority and his inspiration without denying the rest of the New Testament. They are inextricably intertwined. Therefore, Paul has the right to state, "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord."

Understanding this, we have been given a valuable tool to refute the speaking of false tongues, to direct the order of prophesying within the church, and to confirm that women are not to speak in the congregation (which includes having any authority over a man - see 1 Timothy 2:11,12 which is tied into his thoughts of 1 Corinthians 14 on this

issue). When identifying any of these false practices, the one so charged must deny the authority of Scripture and thus the authority of Christ. Or, they must admit that their conduct is not in accord with Scripture and Christ's authority; they are being disobedient to both.

Life application: Paul's letters are prescriptive, they are of divine inspiration, and they bear the authority of the Lord Himself. To dismiss Paul's commandments is to directly ignore the Lord's authority. Do you want to be found in such a position of disobedience? If not, adhere to Paul's words which are set doctrine for the church age.

*Lord, my mind is often at odds with Your commandments and I know that it is my sinful nature pulling me in the wrong direction. When this happens, help me to redirect my heart and my attention back to You. Grant me friends who can build me up, and also give me the desire to know Your word more and more. For sure, my spirit is willing, but my flesh is weak. And so, send those strengthening measures to keep me from going astray. Amen.*

**But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.** 1 Corinthians 14:38

There are two variant readings on this from the Greek texts. Compared side by side they say -

But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. (NKJV)

But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored. (NIV)

Either way, it is a continued rebuke on those who reject the word of God either ignorantly or purposefully. If ignorantly, the blame still rests upon the individual for speaking without first knowing. In this case, Paul is saying that if they should purpose to speak without knowledge, then let them remain in their ignorance. As Ellicott says in this situation -

"...a person who could not recognise such an evident and simple truth must be of a perverse mind—his opposition would give the Apostle no further concern."

On the other hand, if the person is acting against the word purposefully, they have replaced their personal conduct above the explicit word of God. Such a person should be completely ignored. Only the word of God should guide the conduct of the saints. Therefore, if someone claims that speaking in incoherent tongues is acceptable, ignore him. If someone starts speaking (prophesying) while another person is speaking, then

ignore him. And if a woman inappropriately speaks words of instruction in the congregation, ignore her.

This is the context of the passage and it is the intent of Paul's words now. Unfortunately, they are often ignored in modern times. There has been a falling away from adherence to the word of God and an acceptance of that which is inappropriate. Let us turn our hearts and minds back to God's word and away from those who manipulate it, either willingly or in ignorance.

Life application: The only way to know if a person is misguiding you in their words about Scripture is to know Scripture yourself. Read and study your Bible!

*Praise You Lord! Again, I face a new day knowing that You are here with me. There is food for me to eat, there is work to be done, and there is the unknown which is unfolding moment by moment before my eyes. Whether good things happen, or whether this is my last day in this life, I know that it has been directed by You and that Your purposes for me will come about. And so, why should I fret? Thank You for the marvelous blessing of simply walking in Your presence! Amen.*

**Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:39**

Here in the final verse of Chapter 14, Paul inverts the order of the major areas of discussion of the chapter. In his comments, he first discussed tongues and then he moved to prophesying. After having demonstrated the superiority of prophesy, he places it first here.

"Therefore" is his conclusion on the matter. In essence, "Based on this detailed evaluation and the commands which I have issued, do the following."

"Brethren" is his way of showing that he recognizes that they are in the faith and that his words ahead are exhortations for them to conduct themselves in that manner.

"Desire earnestly to prophesy." As this is to be considered a more valuable gift than tongues, it should be the hope and aim of the brethren to speak words of instruction and edification. By doing so, not only will they be built up, but so will those who hear their words.

"And do not forbid to speak with tongues." He has given strict guidelines concerning tongues. If those guidelines are adhered to, then the tongues may serve a valid purpose. If not, there will be no edification and they are not to be spoken.

Life application: Chapter 14 has many important points for us to consider and to remember. It contains commands which are to be adhered to and exhortations meant for orderly church conduct. Logically, we have seen that if someone violates these through supposed tongues, prophesying, or violating the precepts concerning women preaching or teaching, their conduct is not of God. One cannot truthfully claim they are led by the Spirit while being actively disobedient to the word of God. Let us apply truth and honesty to our actions in the congregation by being obedient to His word. Everything we do in the church should be for the glory of God and for the edification of others.

*Glorious God! I stand in awe of Your majesty. I see the wondrous displays of Your wisdom and power throughout this world. And yet, it is a minute bubble in a sea of froth in comparison to this marvelous universe You have created. I know that for all eternity, I will continue to see Your immense and amazing wisdom and power on display as I search out the mysteries You reveal before us. And it is all possible because of the Lamb who was slain to reconcile me to You. Thank You, O God. I stand in awe of Your majesty! Amen.*

## CHAPTER 15

**Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 1 Corinthians 15:1**

Paul now enters into a new chapter with a new direction. This chapter concerns, above all else, the doctrine of the resurrection. It is divided into six noticeable parts as follows:

- The good news of Christ which is realized in His resurrection (verses 1-11)
- Our hope in the resurrection of Christ (verses 12-19)
- Dead in Adam; alive in Christ (verses 20 - 28)
- Remaining awake to righteousness (verses 29-34)
- A contrast between our present earthly body and our coming heavenly body (verses 35-49)
- Victory in Christ (verses 50-58)

This chapter, along with 1 Corinthians 13, stands out as one of Paul's most notable passages. In it is the hope of the believer and the surety of our faith. It gives us hints of the coming rapture, and it shows our unique and unbreakable tie to Christ our Lord. Should we find ourselves in a mental slump, we can come to the words of Chapter 15 and renew our souls in the hope we possess.

And so, he begins with "Moreover." The Greek conjunction can mean something like, "in addition to," or "now I am about to say," or something similar. In this case, it is a transition away from the doctrine of tongues and prophesying, and into that of the resurrection. This is directed to the "brethren." In other words, what he will say does not apply to all people. It only applies to those who are in Christ.

Next, he notes, "I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you." In the coming verses, he will sum up the good news of Christ; the gospel of salvation for all who believe. The word he uses is *gnorizo*. It means "to make known." But Vincent's Word Studies notes that he is stating this reproachfully; having to make known all over again this news. It is as if they had forgotten the very basic information which they had believed at the beginning.

This gospel is the good news "which also you received and in which you stand." He is making an effort to repeat the very basics which brought them to salvation and which continues to save them. But it is right and proper that Paul needed to repeat this to them in writing, because his letter to the Corinthians contains the same words which are

now included in the Bible. Their failing memories prompted Paul's hand to write the words of Scripture which continue to instruct the faithful 2000 years later.

Life application: Let us pay heed to the words of 1 Corinthians 15 and stand fast in the good news which Paul presents to us there. Let us apply them to our minds and fix them in our hearts in order to carry us through even the darkest moments of our continued walk in Christ.

*Heavenly Father, if there is one thing that I am absolutely sure about, it is that of the record of Christ's resurrection. It is as sure as anything else in all of history. I am more certain of the truth of that wondrous moment than I am that the sun will rise again each day. Even if the heavens fail to work properly, I have a sure foundation in the testimony of Your word that Christ is risen. And because I am in Him, I too will rise to eternal life. No fear here. Amen.*

**...by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. 1 Corinthians 15:2**

The difficult nature of Paul's words have led many to assume that he is saying:

Our continued salvation is dependent on a work of our own will, and  
That salvation can be lost if one fails to hold fast to what was preached

In other words, this verse is used as a denial of the doctrine of "eternal salvation." This is not the case. As Ellicott notes, "The idea here is not, as implied in the English version, that they were converted, and yet that heretofore no results have followed from their belief..." Rather, Paul will explain exactly what he means in verse 11, which says -

"Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed."  
(verse 11)

There has been belief and there has been forgiveness because of the gospel message. Paul's intent here in verse 2 is similar in meaning to what he will say in verse 17 -

"And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins!" (verse 17)

And so, the best avenue is to look at verses 1 and 2 together and then analyze verse 2 -

"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain."

In verse 1, the gospel was preached and it was received. It is also the truth in "which you stand." This is the gospel "by which you are saved." The words "are saved" indicate a done deal. It is the moving from Adam to Christ and the spiritual rebirth which was anticipated since the fall of man. From there it says, "if you hold fast that word which I preached to you." The essence of this difficult portion is speaking of a possibility (not a reality) that someone heard and didn't believe. The message didn't sink into their minds for them to "hold fast" to it.

It is being given as a possible scenario for someone who sat among the believers (and he has noted that they "received" the gospel) and didn't bind the truth of the gospel to the saving of their soul. However, for those who did, the gospel is perfectly able to save and keep on saving, "unless you believed in vain." These words are again not saying that someone first believed and then didn't believe. Instead, it is, like verse 17 (cited above), a hypothetical statement. In essence, "yes you believed, but the message that you believed isn't true and therefore you aren't saved."

Paul is attempting to get the Corinthians (and thus us!) to wake up to the fact that our very conduct in the church is to be based on the fact that we are saved. If we are, we have a hope which is grounded in reality. If it is grounded in reality, then we should act as if it is so. Chapter 15 has taken on a new direction, but it is still an orderly move from Chapter 14, which highlighted the disorder within the church.

If we have believed in vain, then our conduct doesn't matter. But we have not believed in vain. Instead, we have believed in the gospel and therefore our conduct should be based on that.

Life application: If you were saved by the blood of Christ, you are saved by the blood of Christ.

*Lord, I so love the world we live in which You have given to us. I thank You for the astonishing array of beauty, smells, sights, and tastes which flood my life each day. And yet, I so despise the world which we have made. There is war, death, hatred, perversion, and contempt for Your word. Help me to focus on what You have given, work against the wrong we have established, and keep me reminded of the perfection that lies ahead of*

*me when Christ returns. I look forward to an eternal walk in Your heavenly garden.  
Amen.*

**For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15:3**

Paul will now review "the gospel which I preached to you" which he mentioned in verse 1. This is not all-inclusive of his teaching, but it is, as he says, what "I delivered to you first of all." This is an idiom which is found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Genesis 33:2 and 2 Samuel 5:8. It is the placing of something before other things. His words then are those which are of paramount importance in understanding the work of Christ.

It needs to be considered that this letter was written about 25 years after the time of the resurrection. At this early point in Christian history, these tenets were passed on, understood, and held in the highest regard as points which were to be communicated during a gospel presentation. What he writes here closely matches the words of the Apostle's Creed.

It should also be noted that a portion of what he will state is not recorded anywhere in the gospels. For that reason, he says, "that which I also received." These words are a claim of divine inspiration. This then is what he is referring to in Galatians 1 -

"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. <sup>12</sup> For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ." Galatians 1:11, 12

The first point of his "first things" is "that Christ died for our sins." Christ wasn't just a martyr who did a good deed in giving up his life for another. Rather, He came with the specific intent and purpose of destroying the sinful state in which man exists, and which has been inherited in all men since the fall of man. Christ's death was an atonement for sins committed, and an expiation of those sins, carrying them away, never to be held against His people again. He died in place of us (a vicarious offering) so that we could be reconciled once again to our Creator. In Christ's death, our sins are nailed to His cross and we die to sin with Him. If this didn't occur, then we would remain in our sins; forever separated from God.

This is where the hope begins, and so this is where Paul begins with his "first things." And this death of Christ was "according to the Scriptures." It must be remembered that

there was no New Testament at the time of Paul. There were only the Hebrew Scriptures. Some of the gospels may have been recorded, and Paul was in the process of writing his epistles, but none were considered as "Scripture" at this point. Therefore, this is an explicit reference to the fact that the atoning death of Christ is referred to in the Old Testament.

And sure enough, it is found in every type and picture imaginable. It is also found in specific writings such as the psalms and in Isaiah. These truths may have been veiled, but upon completion of His work, they become clearly understood. All of Scripture speaks of the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Concerning these "first things" that Paul speaks of in this verse and the verses to come, the Pulpit commentary notes seven points that are worthy of being repeated here -

- It is the completest summary.
- It refers to some incidents which are not mentioned in the Gospels.
- It declares that the death and resurrection of Christ were a subject of ancient prophecy.
- It shows the force of the evidence on which the apostles relied and the number of living eye witnesses to whom they could appeal.
- It is the earliest written testimony to the Resurrection; for it was penned within twenty-five years of the event itself.
- It shows that the evidence for the Resurrection as a literal, historical, objective fact, was sufficient to convince the powerful intellect of a hostile contemporary observer.
- It probably embodies, and became the model for, a part of the earliest Creed of the Church.

Life application: Christ died for our sins. Let us not continue to live in sin, but to live in Christ, holy and undefiled.

*Heavenly Father, I see time and time again in the New Testament that the writers say that a truth about Jesus is "according to Scripture." And yet, there was no New Testament at that time, only the Old Testament. How wonderful it is to see that the coming work of Messiah was so clearly and plainly recorded in the Old so that when He came, it would be perfectly apparent to all that He is the fulfillment of what was written. Our hope isn't in the words of man, but in what You have revealed since the beginning. I have the surest hope of all; I have Jesus! Amen.*

**...and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15:4**

The death of Christ is confirmed in His burial, just as it was in the burial of Lazarus. The previous verse noted "that Christ died for our sins." If this is so, then that means He died in a sinless state, because only sinless perfection can take away the sin from one who has sin. This is something that Old Testament writings implicitly demonstrate.

Babies were often sacrificed by pagan nations, and even by wayward kings of Israel, in an attempt to expiate sin. But there is a sure proof that this didn't work; the babies remained dead. If "the wages of sin is death" as the Bible proclaims, then if a baby who was sacrificed for another's sin was sinless, the baby would resurrect. But this doesn't happen. Instead, they bore their own inherited sin from Adam. David notes this in the 51st Psalm -

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me." Psalm 51:5

There is no sinless perfection to be found, even in a mere babe. Thus Christ came, born of a woman, but His Father is God. Because of this, the line of sin was cut; there was no inherited sin. The God/Man was born sinless, and he was born under the law. The record of the gospels shows us that He was not only born without sin, but He lived perfectly and died without sin as well. Only He then could be an acceptable sacrifice for the sins of fallen man. Again, Micah 6 shows us the unacceptable nature of offering even one's child -

"With what shall I come before the LORD,  
*And* bow myself before the High God?  
Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings,  
With calves a year old?  
<sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
Ten thousand rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression,  
The fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul?" Micah 6:6, 7

God would be pleased with none of those things in exchange for the sin of our soul. Burnt offerings of calves or rams are in a different category than man. Oil, even ten thousand rivers of it, cannot carry away sin. And even the "fruit" of our body, meaning

our children, are unqualified because of inherited sin. But Christ could and He did. He died and "He was buried," thus providing sure evidence for His death.

After that we are told "that He rose again the third day." The death of Christ was a one-time-for-all-time occurrence, never to be repeated. His death was necessary to atone for our sin. However, just as the burial was sure evidence for His death, the resurrection of Christ is the sure proof that His death was sinless. If "the wages of sin is death" and Jesus had no sin of His own, then it would be impossible for Him to remain dead. Peter explains this in Acts 2, saying exactly that. Death could not hold Him because death had no jurisdiction over Him.

In approval of His sinless life, atoning death, and confirmed death through burial, God the Father raised Him from the dead. It was a one-time-and-forevermore event. The Lamb has overcome. And all of this is, as Paul again notes, according to the Scriptures. None of this was done in secret, and all of this was already anticipated by the very words which established the law that Christ came to fulfill. These things are revealed in that same law; crying out in anticipation of His fulfillment of them.

Life application: Christ died to take away our sins and to grant us eternal life. The very nature of the transaction shows that it is-

- Fully sufficient in and of itself, and
- Eternal in nature. Trust in Christ, rest in Christ, and anticipate in your heart the soon coming again of Christ.

*I am saved by the blood of Christ. Amen.*

**...and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.** 1 Corinthians 15:5

After the resurrection, and as a proof of the resurrection, Paul now gives (which were at his time still-living) witnesses by name who were trustworthy to speak of what they saw. He says that "He was seen." It is a common word, *ophthe*, which demonstrates that an actual appearance took place; He was literally seen.

First, it is noted that, "He was seen by Cephas." This is the Aramaic form of Peter's given name, and it means "the Rock." It is used nine times in the New Testament and only by John and by Paul in their writings. John uses it in John 1:42 when he explains that the name was given to him by Jesus. Paul uses it eight times in the books of 1 Corinthians and Galatians. Including his name in the Aramaic form lends credibility to the testimony

because it would have been the common form of address in Israel at that time; Aramaic was the commonly spoken language then. Further, noting him as "the Rock" was intended to show the stability and reliability of his testimony.

It is to be noted that women actually appeared to Jesus before Peter did, but Paul excludes their testimony, probably for two specific reasons. One is that at this time, women's testimony did not bear the same weight as that of men. He is establishing reliable testimony and wanted nothing to interfere with that. Secondly, in the previous chapter, he noted that it was shameful for a woman to speak in church. Should he now designate these women as witnesses of Christ's resurrection, they may then have been asked to verify that testimony. If a church were to call them for that witness, then it would cause them to violate the very words he had just written. Rather, Paul sticks to witnesses that were culturally accepted as reliable, and also acceptable to be speakers to the congregation.

After noting "Cephas," he then shows that Jesus was seen "by the twelve." Judas was already dead by then, but the term "twelve" is a title designating the office of the Apostles. Thus, it would be better rendered in the capitalized form as "the Twelve." This use of the term is not unique to Paul. In John 20:24, we read this -

"Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came."

Judas was dead, and Thomas wasn't around at this event, and yet John calls them "the twelve." Thus, just like the term, "the twelve sons of Israel," it is a designation for the collective whole.

Life application: God's word is sure. It is reliable in every way. If you have doubts about a portion of it, research the matter, praying for guidance. The Lord will alleviate those doubts as you honestly seek to know the truth.

*Thank You, O God! History, archaeology, internal witnesses, external witnesses, and even the sure test of fulfilled prophecy, all show me that Your word is true and reliable. Even in my own life, I have seen evidences for it come to pass. I can look to Israel and the Jews and know that what You said would happen would surely come about. I know that the Bible is God's word and there is no other. Sixty-six precious little books which have come together to form Your word. I will proclaim its truths, even at the expense of my own life, should that be required of me. I stand on Your word. Amen.*

**After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 1 Corinthians 15:6**

After noting that Jesus was "seen by Cephas, then by the twelve" Paul gives us words which should be remembered by every Christian willing to defend the truth of the resurrection account. He says, "After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once." This is the only recorded instance of this occurrence in the Bible, but it is of the utmost importance concerning the reliability of resurrection testimony.

Where this occurred is unknown, but it could have been in the region of Galilee where much of His ministry occurred. In Matthew 28:10, this is recorded -

"Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go *and* tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.'" Matthew 28:10

Wherever it was, it is recorded and therefore it could have been challenged. But even more than that are Paul's next words. Not only was He seen by five hundred brethren at once, but he notes that "of whom the great part remain to the present."

As Paul made this claim, any person who wanted to challenge it could have done so by asking for names or locations. If they did and he declined to give them, the claim could then have been refuted. But no such refutation exists. Further, if he gave a name, that person could have been checked with, who then could have identified others, and so on. If the story weren't true, it would have quickly become evident because lies tend to break down between false witnesses.

In the end, and one way or the other, the truth of this claim would have been easy to determine or refute. If it was refuted, a simple letter would have been sufficient to call the claim out as false. However, there is no record of such a claim. The written testimony of Paul's words, therefore, stand as positive and irrefutable evidence that these five hundred existed and testified to the truth of the account. Not only did the apostles, most of whom gave their lives for the gospel, testify to the resurrection, but so did five hundred others.

Finally, of these five hundred, Paul does note that "some have fallen asleep." It is another sure testimony to the truth of the account. By noting that "some have fallen asleep," he is granting that a portion of them could obviously not testify any longer to what they had seen. It is another added point of credibility to the claim.

As a side note, the Greek word for "fallen asleep" is *ekoimēthēsan*. It is where the word *koimeterion* comes from, which means "sleeping place." We translate that into the Christian idea of "cemetery." For the Christian, there is no true "graveyard" where hope and life end. Rather, there is the sweet place of rest until that day when we join Jesus with all our other Christian friends.

Life application: If you have doubts about your faith from time to time, stop having doubts. The word is sure and so is your hope.

*Wondrous promise, eternal life guaranteed; and so, the body planted is but a precious seed. For the soul who has placed their faith in Jesus, there is yet a hope so marvelous. Therefore, though we weep at our own loss; we can also rejoice because of the victory over Calvary's cross. As Christ rose to life eternal defeating the grave; so will those who follow Him - He is mighty to save. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 1 Corinthians 15:7**

"After that" means after the appearance of Christ first to Cephas, then to the twelve, and then to the five hundred-plus brethren mentioned in the preceding verse. At some time after these appearances, He was also "seen by James." This is not James the brother of John, who was already dead by the time Paul wrote this letter. Rather, it is James, the son of Mary and Joseph; the half-brother of the Lord and the leader of the Council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15. He is also the author of the book of James.

Paul notes the following in Galatians 1:18, 19 -

"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother."

It was probably during this time, when Paul explained his commission to the apostles, that James also told Paul that he had likewise been visited by the Lord after the resurrection. Because of this, he was qualified as an apostle. Like Peter's testimony concerning Paul's apostolic authority, Paul gives the same concerning James here. In other words, the Bible weaves together a solid tapestry which provides us all the assurance that we need to consider it reliable as a witness for the things of God.

Finally, Paul notes, "then by all the apostles." All who were considered apostles beyond the Twelve are who this is speaking of. When the visit occurred isn't noted, nor is a

specific number given. It is possible that these last mentioned might have been with Jesus at the ascension, thus appearing to them this one final time which is noted now by Paul.

Life application: Paul's careful detailing of who saw Christ after the resurrection is given to bolster our faith. We have every assurance that the account is true and accurate. And so, remember where these words are, and be prepared to defend your faith if it is challenged by a naysayer.

*Heavenly Father, a lot of Your people have lost their lives at the hands of wicked people lately. And with the uncaring attitude of our leadership, it's inevitable that these things will only increase in the days ahead. Should I be faced with an untimely demise because of my faith in You, I pray for strength to go out proclaiming my undying trust in the truth of Your word and in the Person of Jesus my Lord. Amen.*

**Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.**

1 Corinthians 15:8

Finally, of those who had seen the risen Christ, Paul notes that "last of all He was seen by me also." There is quite a bit to consider here. First, it demonstrates conclusively that what Paul saw was the same risen body which all of the other apostles saw. If this were not the case, then how could he assert that Christ was actually risen from the dead? He could have been a mere ghost, as was the case with the ghost of Samuel the prophet in the Old Testament. Rather, for Paul to claim having seen the risen Christ, it means that He was truly risen as a Man; it wasn't some apparition or vision. This proves that the claims of cults, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses - that Christ was raised a "spirit-being" - are false. He was raised in a body, not merely as a spirit.

Having noted this, he then proclaims that this visitation was not at all in a normal way. The term "as by one born out of due time" is insufficient and does not convey the meaning of the original. This makes it seem like the "timing" of his meeting is the main issue. Rather, the "state" of the visitation is what he is relaying. The Greek word is *ektroma* and it is rightly translated as "to the abortive born" (Pulpit Commentary).

This word properly means "abortion" or "stillborn." It is used nowhere else in the New Testament, but the Greek translation of the Old Testament (and other ancient Greek writings) uses it several times to indicate exactly this, a stillborn. This is seen, for example, in Job -

"Or *why* was I not hidden like a stillborn child,  
Like infants who never saw light?" Job 3:16

Paul's words indicate his state at the time of becoming an apostle then. The other apostles knew Christ in His earthly ministry and grew in knowledge during that time. They matured in their walk. When the resurrection occurred, they were surprised, yes, but they were also able to process it in a mature manner. Paul on the other hand, saw Christ before he was brought to a state of maturity. Thus, he saw his status as an apostle as one of exceeding unworthiness. As Vincent's Word Studies notes, he considered that he "had the same relation to that which was worthy of the apostolic office which an abortion has to a living child."

We could question then, "How is this appearance and conversion pertinent to us in the church then?" Also, "Why did the Lord choose this manner of conversion for Paul, who is the one to set the parameters for the church age?" The answer to this is found in his words to Timothy -

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, <sup>13</sup> although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. <sup>14</sup> And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. <sup>16</sup> However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life." 1 Timothy 1:12-16

Paul's unworthiness, coming forth to belief as an abortive child, is a pattern to show us that the same great grace and mercy has been poured out upon us. We can look to Paul and see that God truly cares about each of us, sinners though we may have been!

Life application: God called you into His light when you were in a miserable, unworthy state. Live for Him now as one who is purified and holy. Act in a manner worthy of your new position in Christ.

*O Lord, I look back on my life and wonder what it is that brought me to the saving knowledge of Christ. The sure answer is Your grace and mercy. I was so far away from You that nothing but His work could ever bridge the gap. And even since then, I've failed You so often. And yet, Your grace and mercy remain. Thank You for Your goodness to the*

*sons of men who have simply reached out by faith and called on Jesus. Thank You, O God! Amen.*

**For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 1 Corinthians 15:9**

In explanation of his previous verse where he said he was "born out of due time," he now notes that "I am the least of the apostles." He wasn't claiming this in gifts received, work-effort put forth, or rank and status. He was an apostle equal to the others, he notes in 2 Corinthians 11 that he labored more than all the others, and he is noted throughout Acts and the epistles as having an overflowing abundance of the gifts of the Spirit.

What he is referring to is his deserving of respect and honor. His calling was out of the order of the other apostles and without prior education by Christ. He felt that because of this he was "not worthy to be called an apostle." Specifically, during that time of spiritual darkness, he not only wasn't neutral to the gospel, but he actually "persecuted the church of God." His persecution of the church is noted in Acts 8 and 9, but he gives great detail of what this constituted in Acts 26 -

"This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*. <sup>11</sup> And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities." Acts 26:10, 11

He also mentions those areas of his life which he felt disqualified him from any esteem in his epistles, and he never seemed to quite forgive himself even though the Lord had washed him clean of all of his transgressions. Or it could be that he simply didn't want to forget his past, lest he exalt himself above other sinners in need of a Savior. It could even be that he reminded himself often of his past so that he would never fall back into his old ways. Whatever his actual thoughts, he carried his past with him and he spoke of it freely.

Life application: All in Christ "have a past." Some are "worse" than others, but James notes that one infraction of the law breaks the whole law. Therefore, we all stand guilty before God without the shed blood of Christ. Let us cling to this notion, not exalting ourselves over others, and in the hope of never returning to a life of sin. Let us live for Christ, exalting Him for His infinite grace and mercy.

*Lord, I know that there needs to be a balance in how I approach those who have not yet called on Christ. Their sin is to be condemned and yet their souls need to be renewed. Help me to discern rightly between those who are perverse and antagonistic towards You, and those who are simply stuck in whatever addiction or perversion they are caught in. Help me be a light to the lost while still being firm towards the belligerent among us. It is often hard to know the right course, and so give me wise discernment in this, O God. Amen.*

**But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was with me*. 1 Corinthians 15:10**

Previously speaking of his state of unworthiness as an apostle, Paul now shows the attention that he committed to the high honor that was bestowed upon him. He went from a persecutor of the church to a staunch defender and supporter of it. The cause of Christ became his sole passion (even his soul-passion) and desire. And so, to show this contrast between his past and who he had become, he begins with the words "But by the grace of God I am what I am."

His conversion was solely "by the grace of God." He was on his way to Damascus to persecute the church, and on the way there the Lord appeared to him personally. There was nothing he did to deserve it. He was looking to destroy the notion of the Lord, but instead the Lord lavished His grace upon him in a personal appearance and calling. He could have been destroyed, but the Lord mercifully spared him.

And not only had the Lord spared him unto the calling of an apostle, but Paul notes that "His grace toward me was not in vain." Grace which is taken for granted will be displayed in wasted effort. If you give a sluggard a thousand dollars (grace), it will be spent by the end of the day on useless things which will be in the garbage by the weekend. But if you give a thousand dollars to a diligent, energetic person who will strive to make a better life for himself, that same money will turn into a business, a home, education for his children, and an inheritance for his family.

The sluggard will soon be back, asking for more; the diligent soul will be back to repay what was given and to acknowledge your goodness to him. The Lord knew the man He was selecting and He knew the great and effective ministry he would produce. And so, Paul was selected. In response to this act of grace, he notes that "I labored more abundantly than they all."

All the other apostles had been granted their title and ministry while Christ was alive. Though undeserving of their title, just as Paul was, they had grown into it and were comfortable with it. Paul, on the other hand, had it almost thrust upon him. He understood the weight of glory which had surrounded him, and he knew that he could never repay the grace and mercy he received. And therefore, he labored in a way that no other did. He who rightly perceives the grace he has received will show gratitude for it. Paul was such a person.

And yet, despite laboring with all of his effort for the cause of Christ, he was humble enough in his heart, and wise enough in his mind to proclaim that it was "not I, but the grace of God *which was with me.*" Every breath a man takes is by the grace of God. The gifts we possess are all grace. Paul understood this and used his past experience, his make up, his knowledge, and every part of who he was to work for Christ. It was all of grace and therefore it was all Christ. The selection was made and Paul understood what that meant. He notes this several times in his writings. A good example is to be found in Colossians –

"To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily." Colossians 1:29

Life application: Can we boast about what we have received? Certainly not! And yet how often we do. Let us credit the glory to God in all things that we accomplish for Him. Let us exalt Christ who so effectively works in us for His good purposes and pleasure.

*Lord, I cannot take credit for anything I have done for You. The knowledge I possess is from the brain You have given me and the experiences You have granted for me. The money I have was from working with hands that You fashioned and with a physique which You designed. The time I live, the place where my feet are, and the very air that I breathe all came from You. And so, how can I boast about the things which I have done in this life? It all stems from You. Use me according to Your wisdom; I am Your workmanship ready for service to You. Amen.*

**Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.**

1 Corinthians 15:11

Paul begins verse 11 with two conjunctions, "Therefore, whether." The "therefore" covers all the way back to the first verses of the chapter which said -

"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain."

-1 Corinthians 15:1, 2

After that, he gave the pertinent points of the gospel message; the same message which is preached by all the apostles. It is these words which were preached, and it is those same words that were believed by the Corinthians. Therefore, having believed, they are truly saved. Their belief was not grounded in a false gospel, but the true gospel, and their faith is not in vain.

This then explains the often-confused concept of verse 2. It is that verse which people incorrectly assume can mean a "loss of salvation" is possible. The reason is because they look at the verse out of context. The entire context of these first 11 verses shows us that this is not the case, but that salvation is eternal. If one believes, they *are* (emphatic) saved.

The word "whether" refers to the party who spoke the message - either himself or one of the other apostles. It didn't matter which, it didn't matter how they became apostles, it didn't matter whether he was once a persecutor of the church, etc. Regardless of those issues, the message spoken was the same as from any or all of the apostles.

The word Paul uses for "preach" in this verse is *kerusso*. There are different words used in the Greek which are translated as "preach." Of them, one indicates "to prophesy." That would be a spiritual instruction or exhortation. Another would be to evangelize. This word in verse 11 means "to proclaim." It indicates the stating of the facts of the message of the gospel. Paul has "proclaimed" them to those in Corinth and they are in unison with the proclamation of the other apostles. It is the one, only, true, and saving message; it is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Life application: Verse 2 of 1 Corinthians 15 took many surrounding verses to understand correctly. When citing individual verses, context must be maintained. If it is not, then a false understanding of what is being relayed may occur. In this case, salvation is conditioned upon belief in the true gospel message. If that message is heard, received, and believed, then it saves the one who believes... for all time!

*Lord Jesus, I am so grateful that my salvation is not contingent upon anything I do after believing the gospel message. It is based on faith, and it is a done deal. And yet, I know that rewards in heaven are based on what I do now. So, Lord, give me the wisdom, the*

*desire, and the get-up-and-go gumption to do wonderful things in Your name. I long for a pleased look upon Your face when I come before You. May it be so! Amen.*

**Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 1 Corinthians 15:12**

Paul has clearly presented the gospel message concerning Christ. It is this same message which was "believed" by those in Corinth. The purpose and effect of this preaching takes us right back to his earlier words that it is the gospel "by which also you are saved." A moment later he said, "unless you believed in vain." Salvation implies more than just this life. It implies something which transcends this life. If it doesn't, then his coming words in verse 19 are all the more poignant - "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."

In this gospel message which they believed, and which he reiterated to them, is the fact "that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." His words here repeat this thought by saying, "Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

What he is surely referring to here is that some in the church denied that there would be a resurrection of the dead. These were probably either Epicureans, who denied any sort of future life, or another group known as the Stoics who denied a physical, bodily resurrection. Instead, they taught that a future life was spiritual in nature. Paul's words now, and in the verses to come, will logically dispel such nonsense. They will also show the consequences of such a notion.

To show them the utter folly of this, he tells them that the message that was preached, and which they believed, already demonstrated that there had been one example of a literal, bodily resurrection; that of Jesus. He went to great lengths to show that not only did it occur, but that it was witnessed by a large number of people, thus confirming the surety of the matter. If there was one such resurrection, then it naturally followed that there would be more.

The premise of calling on Christ is that the individual moves from fallen Adam to the risen Christ. If we are in Christ, then we will follow him from death to life. It is the logical and natural outcropping of the matter. This will continue to be explained in detail throughout the chapter.

Life application: What God does is logical and reasonable. If "the wages of sin is death," and if Christ had no sin, then death could not hold Him. If we are "in Christ" and our sins are no longer counted against us, then we too must rise to eternal life as well. It is impossible to be any other way. Don't have doubts, but have full confidence in the surety of eternal life - all granted because of the work of God in Christ!

*O God - I come before You in full confidence. I will rise again to eternal life. There is no "maybe" and there is no "what if." Man dies because of sin, but my sin is nailed to the cross, never to be reckoned against me. All of Your wrath has been poured out on Another. And yet, because He was without sin, He rose. As I am in Him now, I too shall rise. No fear here. I come before You in full confidence, O God. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.** 1 Corinthians 15:13

"But" is given as a contrast to what was just said, "Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" Those in the church who denied a literal resurrection of the body had not thought through their faith very well. If there is no such thing as a literal resurrection, then it must logically follow that Christ didn't literally resurrect either. If He did, and we move to Him as our Head by faith, then we are "in" Him and we will naturally resurrect when the fullness of time comes for that to occur.

Also implied in this verse is that the Apostles, and all of the others noted as having seen the resurrected Christ, are either liars or delusional. Paul said that "Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead." This is based on the eyewitness testimony of that noted list given in verses 5-8. However, "if there is no resurrection" then the testimony that Christ resurrected is false. If it is false, then what on earth are people doing in church?

The resurrection is wholly and inextricably tied to the sinless death of Christ. If there was no sinless death, then there was no resurrection. If there was a resurrection, then there must have been a sinless death. One cannot have one without the other. If one is false, they are both false. If both are false, then there is no gospel and there is no true church. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

Life application: Don't let people cause your faith to be diminished by fine sounding arguments. The doctrines of the Bible are perfectly revealed in the Bible and show a perfect plan given by the perfect Creator. If you have a doubt about one of the primary

doctrines of the faith, then research it while praying for God to lead you to competent scholars with knowledgeable commentaries on the issue you are struggling with.

*Lord God, the Bible tells me that Christ the Man died in sinless perfection. As the wages of sin is death, then I can logically see that He must also have resurrected, because He had no sin of His own. If He resurrected, it was as a Man with a body, not just as a spirit-being. If this is true, then I know I will resurrect with an eternal body as well. I have moved from Adam to Christ through Your gracious Gift of love. No fear here! I shall walk forever in Your presence. Hallelujah to the Lamb of God! Amen.*

**And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.**

1 Corinthians 15:14

In the next few verses, Paul will state explicit consequences for us if Christ didn't actually rise. If He did, there is one result, but if not, there is another. His coming words are to be taken soberly. And they must also make us question the sanity of those who sit in churches and yet deny that Jesus did, in fact, rise.

What he will say then is a *reductio ad absurdum*, or an "argument to absurdity." "If Christ is not risen" begins the thought. "What if this is the case?" "What would be the result of such a truth?" "Where would that leave the apostles?" "Where would that leave you?" The answers will flow from his pen with almost a sense of mourning at the state of despair which would then result. "If Christ is not risen, then..." The word "then" is intended as a forceful statement of irony which conveys the idea of "such it would be" or "after all."

If so, "then our preaching is empty." All of the effort of the apostles, any hope or comfort they have imparted, any trials they have faced in spreading the word about Jesus, and so much more... all of it is vanity and without any substance. If the words of the apostles could be seen as they came forth from their mouths, those same words would melt in the air as they were uttered, disappearing back into nothingness. This is the result of Christ not having risen. The words would have no value whatsoever.

But more than just the apostles' words, the believers' "faith is also empty." It would mean that the entire story presented was pointless. Who cares at all if a person named "Jesus" lived in the land of Israel and went around doing good stuff? Who cares if such a person healed others, told interesting stories, and claimed to be the Son of God? And so, what if this person was nailed to a cross? If there is no resurrection, then all that was

accomplished is just another story of man, like any other story of a man who has existed.

There is no hope in man. Every great leader who ever lived eventually died, and with him went everything that he was - right back to the dust. If Christ did not rise again, then the dust would have reclaimed him as well. Think it through! Why would anyone go to church, even once, if the resurrection isn't true?

Life application: Jesus Christ did rise and our hope is not in vain. We look to a blood stained cross, but an empty grave. Because of Jesus, it is literally impossible that His followers could remain in the grave. It is more certain that we will be resurrected than it is that the law of gravity will suddenly cease to exist.

*Where is your hope, my dear friend, when your life will come to its end? Will the money you possess keep you from the grave? Will life's good deeds, your only soul save? All is vanity and fading away, unless your hope is grounded in truth. And so, to you I will proclaim today, of Christ's resurrection there is the surest proof. In Him eternal life is a guarantee; and because of Him, God's radiance you can see. Trust Him and follow Him with all of your heart, and at that moment will your eternal life start. Thank You, O God, for such a hope - perfect and sure. Thank You, O God, for my hope in Christ - perfect and pure. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise.**

1 Corinthians 15:15

Not only would the preaching of the apostles be found empty, which would in turn mean that the faith of those who heard and believed be found empty, but moreover it would demonstrate something even deeper and more sinister - that the apostles "are found false witnesses of God." The word for "found" implies "proven to be." It would not be a mistake in their preaching and teaching, but rather a proof-positive that there was an intentional hand of deceit involved. Why? Because Paul has already claimed in the preceding verses that all of the apostles had seen the risen Christ.

Thus, should someone have checked his story (for example, by searching out some of the 500 mentioned in verse 6), and determined they were lying, then it would be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that they had "testified of God that He was raised up, whom He did not raise up." Imagine the severity of the charge! This isn't just a lie about who ate the cake that was being saved for dessert. Rather, this would be a lie about the

truth of God himself. The severity of the charge would be against not just Paul, but all of the apostles. It would show an intricate conspiracy that went to establish the heretical cult-worship of a false god.

This would be punishable by death if proven true and it would also bring about the highest disgrace upon the name they were trying to exalt. Everything about the matter would be exposed and then soon forgotten by the world, leaving nothing but a legacy of miscreants bringing dishonor upon the true God they claimed to serve.

All of this is tied up in the notion of what Paul is showing "if in fact the dead do not rise." Everything about the Christian faith, and every person who has given life or limb for it, has its basis in the resurrection of Christ. Without that event, it would be nothing but a hopeless system based on an intricately detailed web of lies.

Life application: If you do not believe in the literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, your hope of eternal life is in vain, and you should well-question your salvation. Calling on a dead Lord is about as stupid as driving a large nail into your forehead.

*Lord God, if the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not true, then it is the most intricately woven web of lies ever constructed. Over 40 prophets, writing over a 1500-year period would have had to have jointly conspired together to falsify the record of Christ. The other innumerable witnesses recorded in the Bible would have been involved in the lie too. And after that, 2000 years of faithful scholars would also be involved in hiding the truth of what would otherwise be so easily proven false. It is too far-fetched to even consider! Rather, I am as certain about the resurrection of my Lord as I am about anything I know. I place my trust, my hope, and my eternal soul in His capable hands. Thank You for the surety of my faith! Amen.*

**For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.** 1 Corinthians 15:16

Verse 13 and verse 16 are parallel lines of thought -

"But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen." (verse 13)

"For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen." (verse 16)

Why has Paul repeated himself after such a short time? First, the answer is that if the claim is false (verse 13), then the witness of the resurrection was also untrue (verses 14-15). Now, repeating himself, he shows that if the claim is false (verse 16), then the logical effects of the resurrection in the life of believers would also be false (verses 17-

18). In turn, the consequences of such a false premise would then be realized in the lives of such hopeless creatures (verse 19). It is a second *reductio absurdum* used to show the utter folly of a person claiming they are a Christian while denying that the resurrection of the body is true.

Viewed from either angle, without a literal resurrection of Christ, there is only futility and folly in claiming to be a Christian. Everything about the faith either stands or falls on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Life application: If you have a problem with one of the principle doctrines of the faith, take time to think them through to their logical conclusion. Inevitably, if you fail to accept the truth of these principle doctrines, you should probably question your faith and thus your salvation. Stand firm on the truth of Christ as presented in the Bible.

*Lord, I am so glad that Christ Jesus came as a Man, died for my sins, and was resurrected in a literal body. Should any of these things not have happened, there would be no hope for the sons of Adam. But in Your great love and care for us, You stepped out of the eternal realm and did these things to restore us to You. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, and I can only stand back in awe of Your great and majestic work! Wondrous are Your ways, O God. Amen.*

**And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins!**

1 Corinthians 15:17

Paul, just prior to this verse, noted that "if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen." The logical result of this would be the most terrifying of all news. The premise of the resurrection comes from the truth that "the wages of sin is death." The Bible notes that "all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God." It is an all-inclusive statement because sin is not only some offense which has been actively committed, but it is also something that has been inherited by all people.

Because Adam who sinned at the beginning is our federal head, and all people are born from Adam's line, then all people are born in a state of sin. As an infinitely holy God cannot have fellowship with fallen, sinful creatures, then all must be condemned. Christ came to undo this terrible state. The resurrection of Christ would imply that He was, in fact, sinless. If He was sinless, then His death could be a suitable offering for our sins. But "if Christ is not risen," then our "faith *is* futile" because it would indicate that He died in sin.

Logically, if "the wages of sin is death," and Christ remained dead, then He died in sin. The word "futile" is the Greek word *mataia*. It is a different word than that translated as "empty" in verse 14. It signifies something fruitless. It indicates a difference between "reality and result" (Vincent's Word Studies).

Therefore, His death could not be a sin-offering, our sins could not be forgiven, and thus Paul notes that "you are still in your sins!" There is nothing magical or mystical about the work of Christ. Rather, it is exactly what is needed to free fallen man from the guilt he bears. Christ came to do that. In the cross, the Christian finds release from his sin-debt only if Christ rose again. The resurrection proves the offering was accepted by God, it proves Christ's sinless perfection, and it proves that those who call on Him are truly forgiven - once and for all.

Life application: The resurrection proves that the work of Christ at the cross was effective. If there is no literal, bodily resurrection of Christ, then there is no "Christian faith." It would be the greatest of lies. Further, there would still be no hope of reconciliation with God. All humanity would still be in their sins and destined for hell. Therefore, if someone tries to teach you that Christ didn't rise, or if they tell you that Christ didn't rise bodily, then tell them, "Take a hike, heretic. I stand on the truth of the Bible. Christ is risen! I believe!"

*O God, it is an amazing story! Adam sinned; I was born of Adam; and therefore, I bear Adam's sin. As the wages of sin is death, I was destined for a terrifying place of eternal separation from You. But in Your great grace and mercy, You sent Your Son into the world. Because You are His Father, He bore none of Adam's sin and was thus qualified to take Adam's place as a perfect, sinless Substitute. As His life became a sin-offering for me, I am freed from Adam's guilt. And to prove it is so, He came back from the dead - never to die again! I believe! The guilt is gone. Hallelujah to the Lamb of God who took away my sin. Hallelujah! I believe! Amen.*

**Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.**

1 Corinthians 15:18

Paul has been noting the consequences which would exist if Christ is not risen. The list has been sobering -

- Preaching the gospel is empty
- The faith of the believer is also empty
- The apostles are found to be false witnesses of God

- The believer's faith is futile
- All remain in bondage to their sins

Now he notes another saddening consequence. If Christ hasn't risen, "then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." If someone called on a dead "Lord," then they are "in" that dead Lord. Because He is dead, when they die (Paul continues with the theme of "falling asleep" because his words are rhetorical), then they will "have perished."

A dead "Lord" who is not raised can certainly not raise another! Therefore, it is the end of the line for those who followed him as Lord. The dreams of a future restoration were lost. The efforts they put forth for their trusted Lord were wasted. The things they taught their own family and friends were lies. And the stake they were burned at, or the bullet which ended their life as they called out "I am Yours; O Christ" was of no merit. If Christ is not risen, then all the hopes, dreams, aspirations, tears of joy, tears of sorrow, heartfelt prayers, and longing desires for His return... it was all misguided waste.

Paul will show the final consequence of such a notion in the coming verse.

Life application: There are a jillion religions on earth and the adherents of those various religions all believe that they are pursuing the true avenue to spiritual healing. And yet, only one can be true if God is truly God. There is but one way to be restored to our Creator and it is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The resurrection proves this is so, and the resurrection is not a mere vain hope. Instead, it is the truth of God. Be confident that your faith in Christ will be rewarded with eternal life in His wondrous presence.

*Lord God, as the seasons begin to change, I adapt according to them - always being prepared for what is coming. In the winter, I have different preparations than the summer. In the spring, I look for different pleasures than I do in the fall. I know the timing of the seasons and what to expect. How much more then should I be prepared for the changing seasons of my life! An early winter storm may be unexpected, and I need to be equipped. And my last breath may come today - have I properly prepared? Give me wisdom to remember that my span is set by You and that I need to be prepared for that day. Help me to use my time rightly. Amen.*

**If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.**

1 Corinthians 15:19

In the preceding verse, a list of reasons was noted concerning our sad state if Christ is not in fact risen. Today's verse completes Paul's list. Taken together, his seven reasons are:

- 1) Preaching the gospel is empty
- 2) The faith of the believer is also empty
- 3) The apostles are found to be false witnesses of God
- 4) The believer's faith is futile
- 5) All remain in bondage to their sins
- 6) Those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished
- 7) We are of all men the most pitiable

Many scholars believe that Paul's words in this final consequence are directed to the apostles only and not to believers in general. However, when looking at the list as a whole, it is quite clear that this is not the case. He makes no distinction between the apostles and the believers unless it is otherwise noted. Further, he moved his thoughts from the apostles to all believers by consequence 4. Thus, that is a bad analysis. Rather, this final consequence applies to all who have put their faith in Christ.

The reason for this is that as believers, we are asked to not only hope in the future to come (which, admittedly is something many other religions do), but to also live a life worthy of that calling now. In other words, most people expect that they will "go to heaven" even without Jesus. And so, this can't be what Paul is speaking of. Further, most religions also teach to do good works in order to have the balances tip in their favor in hopes of heaven. As this is so, our good works and self-denial can't be the sole reason that Paul is speaking of.

Additionally, of those who do good works and practice self-denial, there are zillions of people who do far more than Christians. There are Buddhist monks, Hindu priests, Islamic Imams, Jewish Rabbis, Jehovah's Witnesses and the like - all who do stuff for their false gods or false perceptions about the true God. Islam even teaches that getting martyred in the cause of jihad is a one-way guarantee to heaven. All of these people are to be pitied for their misguided allegiances to false gods and/or false worship. And so, what is it about Paul's statement that makes this ring true?

The answer is first to understand the grammar of the Greek. The word "only" comes at the end of the clause in the structure of the Greek - "If in the life this, in Christ having hope we are only..." The "only" is emphatic. If Christ isn't risen, then we are putting our hope only in Christ for this life. We have no hope of heaven like all the others have

(even though they are wrong about their hope). We are hoping in something which ends in this life.

Further, our good deeds are *based on* our forgiveness of sins. They are not *in hopes of* forgiveness of sins. It is the great distinction between Christianity and all other religions. And so, logically, if we are out doing good stuff when we have already been forgiven, but with no hope of heaven (because Christ hasn't risen), then truly "we are of all men the most pitiable."

Without some reason for the good deeds, why do them? As Paul says later in verse 33, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" If this is all there is, then the doing of good deeds *after* forgiveness is about as stupid as making football bats. You are doing something that has no final purpose. Why be a faithful spouse? Why tell the truth? Why be honest in business dealings? Why do anything moral and proper? If you are forgiven in advance, then take advantage of it! If there are no further consequences, dive into sin and immerse yourself in it!

Life application: We have a sure hope in heaven *because* of the work of Christ - all of the work of Christ, including the resurrection. We are not to be pitied; we are to be regarded with a burning jealousy which should drive men to Christ for the same sure hope that each of us possesses. Demonstrate your faith so that others see it and desire it as well.

*Heavenly Father, unlike every other religion on earth, Christianity asks us to do good because we are saved, not in order to get saved. I trust solely and completely in the finished work of Christ. I know that the moment I received Him, I was saved - once and for all eternity. Now, give me the burning desire to live for Him, work for His name, and even to die proclaiming the truth of His message. Let my life be given for Christ, whose life was given for me. Amen.*

**But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** 1 Corinthians 15:20

After stating the terrifying consequences for believers if Christ isn't raised, Paul now begins a much happier thought with the resounding word "But." In contrast to the hopelessness of his previous words, there is the absolute assurance and promise that "Christ is risen from the dead." The many witnesses, the truth of the apostles' preaching, the reality of changed hearts and lives - they are all a testament to the surety of the believers' hope in this life and in the promised wonders of the time to come.

And in what is a response to the previous notion of verse 12 which said that "some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead," he shows that this was more than a single occurrence, but one which will include all believers of Him. Yes, "Christ is risen from the dead," but even more He "has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." This word, firstfruits, is Old Testament symbolism found in Leviticus 23; the passage where the "Feasts of the Lord" are detailed. Each of these feasts points to the work of Christ, and their fulfillment is in Him.

There are eight feasts noted in Leviticus 23. In order they are -

- Sabbath
- Passover &
- Unleavened Bread (at times these are combined in terminology)
- Firstfruits
- Weeks
- Trumpets
- Atonement
- Tabernacles

Each of them has been fulfilled in His work. For example, in 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul showed that "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us." His cross for our redemption was the fulfillment of the Passover. In that same verse he also said, "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened." His sinless perfection, imputed to us, is the fulfillment of Unleavened Bread. Such is the case with all of these feasts.

Firstfruits is a picture of the resurrection. Here is how the feast is described in Leviticus 23 -

<sup>10</sup>"When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. <sup>11</sup>He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. <sup>12</sup>And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD. <sup>13</sup>Its grain offering *shall be* two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the LORD, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering *shall be* of wine, one-fourth of a hin. <sup>14</sup>You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an

offering to your God; *it shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings." Leviticus 23:10-14

The "sheaf of the firstfruits" was a representation of all of the harvest to come. It was offered with the expectation that all of the rest of the harvest would follow to maturity. This was "on the day after the Sabbath." Christ was crucified on a Friday, was entombed over the Sabbath, and rose early on the morning of the first day of the week.

Everything about the rites and rituals of this feast pointed to the work of the Lord. He "has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Just as He slept the sleep of death, but was raised by the power of God, so we too have the absolute assurance that even if we sleep in Christ, we too will be raised by the same great power of God. As His life is eternal, so we too shall be granted eternal life. Paul's words show us the absolute assurance we have; because of Christ, we also!

Life application: The Old Testament is only old in that it finds its fulfillment in Christ. Never stop reading it and searching it out. Every detail contains hidden gems, pointing us to Him. We mature in our understanding of Christ by understanding the Old Testament as well as the New.

*O God! It is so amazing to read the Old Testament and see Christ revealed on every page and in every detail. The Feasts of the Lord in Leviticus 23 are all pointing to Him, and they are all shown to be fulfilled in Him. We have unconditional assurance in knowing that the truth of Scripture is absolute and pure. It is all about Your wondrous Son, our Lord Jesus. Hallelujah! The Messiah of Israel is the Christ of the nations. Amen.*

**For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead.**  
1 Corinthians 15:21

Paul has, in his ever-consistent way, confirmed his words of Romans 5:12 -

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned..."

He explains this in further detail in the following two verses -

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23

"For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23

One can see the logical progression of sin's entrance into the world through Adam. Death came into humanity because of sin, and that sin spread to all men because all are "in Adam," and thus "all have sinned." Humanity is condemned to death because of one transgression. But there is the good news of Jesus Christ to follow up the terrible news of Adam! "By Man also came the resurrection of the dead."

What is implicit here, but explicit elsewhere, is that this Man (meaning Christ Jesus) had no sin. If the resurrection of the dead came through Him, but the wages of sin is death, then He must have been sinless in order to resurrect. It also means that He had to die *because* of sin, even if not *in* sin. The meaning of this is that His death was substitutionary in nature. If He died, but had no sin of His own, then He must have died because of some other sin, because "the wages of sin is death." How could Christ die if He had no sins unless there was still sin involved? The answer is that He died *for our sins*, not *in* His own.

In this then is a truth that cannot be missed. If He died for our sins, but had none of His own, then death could not hold Him. And at the same time, death can no longer hold us because "the wages of sin is death;" but Christ died for our sins. If our sins resulted in the death of Another, then our sins can no longer be imputed to us. The guilt is pardoned, the stain is removed, and the life which is true life has come. Paul dealt with this in Romans, and he will continue to touch on it as he proceeds through the verses ahead.

Life application: Our sins are forgiven in Christ; all of them. We are completely free from the condemnation of sins committed in the body. However, we are still responsible for not sinning once we are "in Christ." Our future rewards and losses will be determined by our deeds and by sins committed from the time we are saved. Let us live in holiness and apart from sin as we await our final redemption!

*O God! What a truly amazing honor to know Your love as is revealed in the giving of Christ. When sin separated us, and where there was nothing I could do to resolve that sin, You sent Jesus to handle it. Born without sin, living out the law in sinless perfection, and giving His life in exchange for me! Now I stand free because of Another. What a Gift! What a blessing! What an honor bestowed upon undeserving me. Thank You for my Lord. Amen.*

**For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.**

1 Corinthians 15:22

Paul's previous words stated, "For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead." Our "For" now builds upon that. Death came by man and so life also comes by Man. The man through whom death came was Adam. The Man through whom life comes is Christ.

Adam transgressed God's commandment and plunged humanity into death. This was noted in Genesis 3. But there is more to be understood in this than physical death. In Genesis 2, the Lord told Adam -

"Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Genesis 2:16, 17

However, after eating of the fruit, it says that Adam continued to live until the age of 930 years. Therefore, the death that occurred was spiritual death. The connection between God and man was lost; severed completely. Adam lived in time, and time was moving forward. He could not go back and undo what he had done. After his transgression, he had children, all of whom were born with the same spiritual disconnect from God. This has continued to be inherited by all humans since then, thus "in Adam all die."

Christ came to repair this spiritual rift though. Through His work we are spiritually restored to God. He was born without Adam's sin. As His Father is God, He did not receive Adam's sin nature. After this, the Bible records His life. He lived without sin and died without sin. Therefore, the natural, logical, and only possibility was that He would resurrect. Without sin, the spiritual connection to God remained.

In this then is the truth that our physical death also came as a result of inherited sin. If the spiritual rebirth doesn't occur before the physical death comes, then we will remain spiritually dead; forever separated from our Creator. This must be true because Paul says that "in Christ, all shall be made alive." Many people have called on Christ, and to this day, all of them have or will physically die. However, if we are "in Christ" and this was speaking only of physical life and death, we would never die.

Therefore, this must be speaking first of "spiritual life." As Jesus Himself said, "...whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:26). Because all have or

will physically die, even since Jesus said this, then He must have first been speaking of the "spiritual" state of the person. Once this has been corrected, the inevitable outcropping of it is physical resurrection. If we are "in Christ" and now deemed without sin, then death no longer has mastery over us. Therefore, we shall come to eternal physical life at the call of the Lord as well.

In this then, Paul's words "in Christ all shall be made alive" are speaking of those who are "in Christ." Those who remain "in Adam" cannot be counted in this "all." It is dealing with rebirth, not continued death. All will, in fact, be raised. Those "in Christ" will be raised to eternal life at the resurrection. Those "in Adam" will be raised for judgment and condemnation. All of this is explained elsewhere in the Bible.

Life application: One is either "in Adam" with their father as the devil, or "in Christ" with their Father as God. These are the only two possibilities for humanity. Choose wisely; choose Christ.

*Lord, Your word shows me that just one infraction of the law breaks the entire law and therefore I am guilty of the whole law. If Adam's one sin plunged the whole world into death, then how just is my condemnation! Even if I spend my whole life trying to live out the law as best I can, it will never undo what has been done. Understanding this, I look to the grace of Jesus and am so grateful for what He did. In Him, the law is nailed to the cross. In Him is life anew. In Him is eternal joy in Your presence. I choose life! I choose Jesus! Amen.*

**But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming.** 1 Corinthians 15:23

In this verse, Paul speaks of "order" concerning resurrection, not specifically "timing." The timing of the future events is dealt with elsewhere and must be inferred from a careful reading of the Bible. Concerning order, however, specific detail is revealed in this verse. He just noted that, "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." He follows this with "But each one in his own order." This order then explains more fully the concept of "in Christ" from the preceding verse.

The word for "order" is used only here in the New Testament and it indicates a "band" or a "troop." The stalk of grain at the harvest of the firstfruits was emblematic of the entire harvest. Christ was raised and those who are "in" Him will be raised in the same manner with the same eternal likeness (see 1 Corinthians 15:49). This is the "order" then. As Vincent's Word Studies notes concerning this -

"The reference is not to time or merit, but simply to the fact that each occupies his own place in the economy of resurrection, which is one great process in several acts. Band after band rises. First Christ, then Christians. The same idea appears in the first-fruits and the harvest."

Life application: If you are a part of Christ's harvest field, then you will be presented before God, just as He was. As with the Firstfruits, so with the rest of the harvest!

*O God! It is so comforting to know that the Firstfruits of the harvest are representative of the entire harvest. Just as Christ was raised to life, so will I and all who have called on Him be raised to life as well! I stand ready at His coming, a stalk approved as of the finest wheat - not because I am so great, but because of the Lord who planted, watered, and tended to me. Thank You for Christ my Lord - the Lord of the Harvest! Amen.*

**Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 1 Corinthians 15:24**

Paul is giving a logical order of things to come, not all of the details included in those things. There is within his words a multitude of events not mentioned. What he said in the previous verse spoke of the order of the resurrection - first Christ and then those who are His. There is nothing to discount a rapture, a post-tribulation resurrection, and other events all occurring in his wording.

After the resurrection phase will come "the end." The word is *telos*. It signifies an end; event or issue; the principal end, aim, purpose; or even a tax (which would be considered a final payment on something, thus "ending" it). This then is the end of the mediatorial role of Christ. He is currently in this position, working between God and man. However, there will be a time when this is no longer necessary.

That time will be "when He delivers the kingdom to God." When there is no longer the need for a Mediator between God and man, God will be open and accessible directly. At this time, when Christ's work of redemption and mediation are finished, God will receive the kingdom directly rather than through His Mediator. When this occurs, our relationship to God will be close and personal, rather than only accessible through Christ. All who are redeemed will be, in fact, redeemed. God will be "the Father" that we have truly anticipated since the fall of man.

This term, "God the Father," can be taken in one of two ways. The first is speaking of the Father within the Godhead - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The second would be the

nature of God as the Father. The second is surely the use of "Father" which is intended here. This same concept of God as Father is seen many times in Scripture. One explicit use of this is found in Malachi 2:10 -

"Have we not all one Father?  
Has not one God created us?"

Paul's continued words will bear out that this is certainly speaking of God as Father of all rather than the Person of "God the Father" in the Trinity. But logically, even from this verse, we can deduce this to be true. If there is no need for a Mediator, then we will have access to the Father-God referred to, such as in Malachi. He will truly be our eternal Father figure in the fullest sense. But such is not the case at this time because there are still people who are being redeemed (who are not yet God's children, but who will be at some future point), and thus there is still the need for Christ's work.

When that work is done, a new order of things will take form. However, this must wait until the time "when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power." Until then, we as saved believers are God's adopted children, but we are still awaiting the fullness of what that means. The last page of the Bible gives us a glimpse of that. Take a gander at it today and revel in what lies ahead as we await the completion of Christ's marvelous work!

Life application: There is one God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This God, our Creator, is a Father to all who are saved by the blood of Christ. Keep getting the word out while you can. The day is coming when those who are not adopted as His children will be banished from His presence forever. Now is the time to go about our business telling of the great work of Christ to redeem fallen man.

*Lord, too often people mistake being a part of creation as being a child of God, and so the common term "we are all God's children" is used in this way. But this is incorrect. We are all God's creatures, but only those redeemed by the work of Christ can truly be called God's children. Help us to see this distinction while there is still time. The words of Jesus - that He alone is the path to You - are clear and precise. Give me the sense of urgency I should have to get this word out now. This I pray that You will be glorified through many children - redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Amen.*

**For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 1 Corinthians 15:25**

The previous verse spoke of things to come concerning the rule of Christ; a rule which will continue until the kingdom is delivered "to God the Father." This will be when all rule, authority, and power have been ended and there is only the kingdom of God which remains. In fact, "He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet."

There are at least two logical reasons why this must be so. The first is because it is morally proper for it to be this way. God created Adam and gave him free reign in the Garden of Eden, with but one prohibition. Adam disobeyed and plunged the world into sin. The devil's rule began and with it there have been many lesser kingdoms which have sprung up in this fallen world. To return things to the way they were intended to be, all these lesser kingdoms must be ended, and the rule go back to one Man.

This is already accomplished in God's mind, and it is revealed as accomplished in the pages of Scripture. Two pertinent verses of note from Revelation are -

"Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'" Revelation 11:15

"The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." Revelation 20:10

The kingdoms of the world will come to an end, and the devil who deceived man will be destroyed forever. It was morally proper for this to occur, and the Bible shows us that it will, in fact, come about.

The second reason that Christ "must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet" is because Scripture (based on the moral necessity of the matter) foretold that it would occur. It has been done throughout the Old Testament, and it is confirmed in the New. Two parallel passages which highlight this are -

"The LORD said to my Lord,  
'Sit at My right hand,  
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" Psalm 110:1

"But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool." Hebrews 10:12, 13

What is right and proper has been prophesied. As the Bible is the word of God, it cannot fail to come about. And therefore, Christ must rule until it does. We should have more surety in our hearts that Christ will accomplish these things than we do anything else.

Life application: In God's mind, the battle is already won. He has revealed this truth to us for our comfort and reassurance during times of trouble and difficulty. Let us hold fast to the truth of Christ as an anchor for our souls.

*Heavenly Father, when I look at the plan of redemption as You have laid it out in the Bible, I feel one hundred percent confident in my future. Scripture said Christ was coming; Scripture has shown He has come; and Scripture tells us of the rest of the plan which is future to us now. Because these words are from You, the part ahead cannot fail. And so, I have all the assurance in the world that even if troubles come, the end for me is secure. Thank You for the confidence I possess because of the promises and guarantees written in Your word! Thank You for this superior word! Amen!*

**The last enemy *that will be destroyed is death.*** 1 Corinthians 15:26

Considering the Greek here will shed light on what Paul is thinking. The verb for "will be destroyed" is in the present indicative middle or passive voice. And so rather than "will be" the action has already begun and is on-going until a fixed point.

A good way to understand this would be to consider a major league baseball team which has no chance of winning the pennant. They have lost the right to play in the World Series, and yet they continue to play because other teams still have a chance. Until the series is ended, they continue to meet a set plan which was initiated at the beginning of the season. Though they are defeated, their defeat will continue until the plan is finished.

As the Pulpit Commentary notes, it is "already begun and continuing by an inevitable law." Therefore, Paul is thinking "is being destroyed until it is finished." Further, there is a definite article in front of "death." Therefore, "death" is being personified and capitalizing it is more appropriate. As Tyndale's version renders this -

"Lastly, Death the enemy shall be destroyed."

In support of the on-going (and yet inevitably completed) nature of the action, we can review several pertinent verses from the New Testament which concern the work of Christ. These are only a few among many which show us that Death is defeated, but that it will continue in this defeated condition for a set amount of time. First, from Paul's second letter to Timothy -

"...but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, *who* has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel..." 2 Timothy 1:10

Paul shows that in Christ's first appearance death was abolished. However, death still exists as is quite evident from the world around us. To understand this, again think of the baseball team that has no chance of winning the pennant and yet, it still plays during the regular season. And so even though this action is done, it is awaiting a future fulfillment.

Next, From Hebrews 2, we see that it was through Christ's death that this came about. In this, "death" is tied in with the devil, showing that it is the devil who had "the power of death" -

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup> and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Hebrews 2:14, 15

Next, in John's first epistle, he shows that death is tied to sin. This takes us back to the very beginning when the devil deceived the man. In so doing, man sinned, and death entered the world. As the wages of sin is death, it shows that the work of the devil is what brought death about -

"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8

Jesus Christ came to undo this. He accomplished it at the cross, destroying the power of the devil in all who believe. But why didn't He just toss the devil into hell right then? The answer is that He is building a church out of the redeemed of the world. If He simply destroyed the devil at that time, there would be no church and thus no "living temple." Instead, the victory was won, but the devil has been allowed to continue in the world

until a time determined by God. In this, we can think of the team which will eventually win the pennant. It is comprised of people who are winners, but they are not winners until the end of the season.

Those who come to Christ are "in Christ" and can never die again. But those who are not will both physically die, and they will be eternally separated from God in the process, because Death continues to reign over them. Thus, we see why there is an on-going nature to the work of Christ. But some wondrous day, even Death will be eliminated forever. This is noted in Revelation 21 and it fits perfectly with Paul's words of verse 26 which we are evaluating -

"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. <sup>15</sup>  
And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

-Revelation 20:14, 15

Life application: In Christ, Death is defeated. If you are in Christ, don't be fearful of the Death which surrounds us; he has no mastery over you.

*Heavenly Father, even though death continues on in the world today, I know that it is already defeated because of the work of Christ. Of those who have called on Him, You are building a temple of living stones to serve and worship You for all eternity. Death can no longer harm them. My prayer today is that those who have not yet called on Christ will understand that because of sin, the devil is their master. I pray that eyes will be opened and that they will long for You. Eternal life is possible because Jesus has defeated the enemy. Open eyes and change hearts, O God. To Your glory I pray this. Amen.*

**For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.**

1 Corinthians 15:27

This verse goes back to verse 25, thus it makes verse 26 a parenthetical thought. The "For" at the beginning of the verse shows us this. The work of Messiah is on-going in time, and it will continue until all things are placed under His feet (meaning that all things are subjected to Him.) This is found in Psalm 8 -

"You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;  
You have put all *things* under his feet." Psalm 8:6

This verse from the psalm is speaking of man, but in the greater sense it is speaking of Christ who took on the nature of man. Adam (man) fell and lost his right to the world. Christ came to reclaim that. It is this work of Christ that is on-going in the lives of people around the world. Someday this work will be complete, and Death and Hades will be cast into the Lake of Fire. When this occurs, all things will truly have been placed under His feet because, "The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death."

However, Paul wants to clarify the nature of the Godhead and so he continues with "But..." His term "all things" is speaking of the created order. Elsewhere, Christ's authority and supremacy over all things is noted, such as in Colossians 1:15-20, Hebrews 2:5-9, etc. But it is not possible that He would have supremacy over the Godhead. Rather, He is a member of the Godhead. Therefore, Paul notes that "*it is* evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted."

God is God. As the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all revealed to be "God" in the Bible, then it cannot be that one is greater than the others. They are co-equal because each is God. Therefore, He (meaning God) who put all things under Him (meaning Christ) is excepted. Paul will continue his explanation of this in the next verse.

Life application: We as Christians do not worship and serve a "lesser god." Rather, we worship and serve Jesus - fully God. The doctrine of the Trinity is complicated, but it is neither contradictory nor irrational. It is logical and it reveals the true nature of God.

*Glorious God! I look at the creation and am astonished at the wisdom and intricacy of what You have done. Once there was nothing and now there is a universe which is logical, orderly, and beautiful in the extreme. All things have purpose and all things reflect Your infinite wisdom. My soul is overwhelmed at Your splendid majesty and Your surpassing greatness. Truly, O God, You are to be exalted! Amen.*

**Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.**

1 Corinthians 15:28

This verse brings us to the final realization of the work of Christ and its meaning in the eternal state which will proceed from it. Paul's words are obvious on the surface, and yet there are those who would attempt to undermine them. We have been shown that Christ will deliver "the kingdom to God the Father." As noted, this is referring to "God as Father" rather than "the Father" within the Godhead.

After showing us this, Paul then noted that "the last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death." This is described in Revelation 21 where Death and Hades were cast into the Lake of Fire. After that time is when Christ will deliver the kingdom over. To understand what this means, we arrive at verse 28.

"Now when all things are made subject to Him (meaning Christ), then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him." Christ's mission being complete, there will be no more need for the mediatorial role He once performed. There will be no need for "going through Christ" to speak to God. Instead, we shall fellowship directly with God, who is Jesus. As Revelation 1:8 notes -

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Christ, who is now our focal point for all matters related to God will be made subject to Him "that God may be all in all." Ellicott explains these words thus -

"In these words are expressed the complete redemption both of the race and of the individual. It is the great and sublime conclusion to which the moral enthusiasm and the earnest logic of the previous argument has necessarily brought us."

There will be no consideration of any special office within the Godhead as there now is. Now we have the anticipation of God the Father as we always look forward to His presence, but He is ever out of reach. We have God the Son who is our focal point in all matters related to our relationship with God. He is the Light and Path to that sublime time when we shall again be in full fellowship with God. And we have the Holy Spirit who is our Helper in this walk. He is our Comforter in our anticipation of full redemption by reminding us of the work of Christ.

However, in the eternal state to come, there won't be these distinctions within the Godhead. Instead, there will be God ever before us, radiating out His wondrous light for all eternity. This is shown to be the case in Revelation 22 -

"And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. <sup>4</sup>They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads." Revelation 22:3, 4

The distinctions within the Godhead that we now perceive will no longer be perceived in the same way. Instead, an entirely new order of understanding God will be realized. May that day be soon!

Life application: To deny the Trinity is to deny what God has done and is doing for man. We cannot deny the Trinity while attempting to lead someone to salvation because in a denial of the Trinity, we deny that Jesus Christ is the God/Man. If He is not the God/Man, then He is not the Mediator for us to the Godhead. If He is not the Mediator, then we are still in our sins and we are not reconciled to God. Stand fast on the truth of God as is revealed in the pages of the Bible.

*What I desire above all else, O God, is to behold You as You are when the redemption of man is finally complete. We shall walk in the purity of Your light for all eternity, and we shall know You even as we are fully known. From moment to moment and for all eternity, You will continue to reveal to us Your surpassing beauty, wisdom, and glory. I long for that time, and I thank You that it is already guaranteed because of the work of Christ. Thank You for what You have done for Your children! Hallelujah and Amen.*

**Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? 1 Corinthians 15:29**

The subject verse is one which has resulted in many aberrant teachings and practices within the church and even among cults. For example, the Mormons practice baptism for the dead, meaning *in absentia*, or in place of a person who has died but was not baptized. Other odd interpretations of this verse have also arisen, the list being too long to go through. However, these words have nothing to do with baptism *in absentia* or any other such unusual rendering.

Rather, the context must be considered to draw out the intended meaning. Paul begins with "Otherwise" to show us that this is something in contradistinction to something else. The proper context then is to go back to the end of the argument which precipitated his words from 15:20-15:28. Those verses spoke of the reality of Christ's resurrection and the significance of that great act. The thought now is given in response to the words of 15:12 - 15:19 which ended with the exclamation -

"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."

-1 Corinthians 15:19

In those verses, he was writing about the futility of our hope and faith if Christ is not risen from the dead. If Christ wasn't raised, then neither will anyone else be raised; all are dead and remain dead. And so, Paul asks (based on his "otherwise") "what will they do who are baptized for the dead." The word "dead" here is plural and is referring to all who have believed in the resurrection of the dead and who have now passed on or who will pass on. All are baptized in hope and in eager anticipation of a literal resurrection from the dead.

But if there is no resurrection, then the hope is in vain. "For the dead" then is a reference to the state of the believer if the resurrection isn't true. They are baptized as dead, and they will remain dead; the baptism was a useless gesture. On the contrary though, we are not baptized for the dead, but for the hope of life. The very nature of baptism shows us that Christ died (being submersed in the water is a picture of this) and then rose to newness of life (being raised from the water is a picture of this).

But "if the dead do not rise at all," then "why then are they baptized for the dead?" These words go back to the thought of verse 18, which said, "Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." If they have perished, then their hope is perished as well. Why would anyone follow these supposed faithful in baptism if they died without hope? Being baptized to replace dead people who will never rise to life would be as pointless as their baptism was. They died in the hopes of a Savior who is still in the grave, and thus no Savior at all.

The entire thought that Paul is relaying is that in Christ there is hope and those who have died in Christ have not died in vain, nor will any die in vain who follow in baptism in the hopes of eternal life through the risen Christ. This is why Paul uses both the terms "sleep" and "dead" at various points of his discussion. "Sleep" implies hope; "dead" implies none. In Christ, there is hope. Paul's next three verses will continue to explain this.

Life application: Despite the difficult nature of 1 Corinthians 15:29, it is a verse which speaks of hope, not only for those who have gone before us, but for we who are still alive today. We receive baptism in the hope that is based on the work of Christ, and which has been established in our forefathers who have gone before us. Christ is risen and our hope is not in vain!

*Lord God, when I think of those who have gone before me in the hope of the resurrection, I am grateful that they persevered in their faith, even to the point of death. Their courage is something I can look to and know that there is an unbroken succession*

*of people, all the way back to the apostles, who died in the absolute assurance of being raised again. With their faithfulness recorded, I am strengthened for whatever I may face as well. Thank You for this, O God. Amen.*

### **And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? 1 Corinthians 15:30**

Paul now delivers an added note of surety concerning the truth of the resurrection by beginning with the words "And why...." This then is tied to the previous verse concerning being "baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all." Contrasting "the dead" of the previous verse, he now says "we." In this, he is speaking of the work of the apostles who risked life and limb in the spreading of the message of Christ.

These men, and those who had heard and decided to follow their path, were known to "stand in jeopardy every hour." Their lives were constantly threatened as they carried on the work of sharing the gospel. He will conclude this line of reasoning with 1 Corinthians 15:32, but there is much more concerning the difficult lives of the apostles recorded in Acts and in extra-biblical documents as well. Further, in 2 Corinthians 11, Paul writes concerning many of the difficulties he personally faced -

".....in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. <sup>24</sup> From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; <sup>26</sup> *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; <sup>27</sup> in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— <sup>28</sup> besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. <sup>29</sup> Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn *with indignation*?" 2 Corinthians 11:23-29

His question is basically, "What would be the point of going through all of this if the resurrection wasn't true?" It would make no sense. Wouldn't it be better to follow any path than this one! But they did follow it, because the path ultimately leads to Christ Jesus and the truth that we too shall be resurrected, just as He was, if in fact we believe the gospel message. The real question then should be, "How could somebody not be willing to stand in jeopardy every hour?"

Life application: With Christ, there is hope; without Christ there is none. Be willing to put yourself at risk for the truth of Christ and the sanctity of His superior, most precious word.

*Lord God, there are people who would question the sanity of those who are willing to give their lives for the gospel message. Why would anyone put themselves at harm in a hostile world for this word? But Lord, the real question is, "How is it possible that a true Christian would not be willing to stand in jeopardy every moment for it?" Without this message, there is only eternal separation from You. Give me the heart's desire to be willing to speak out, even at the cost of my own life, for the truth of Your word. Amen.*

**I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.**

1 Corinthians 15:31

The difficulty of verse 29 is partially explained in this verse. Paul noted those who are "baptized for the dead." He tells us now, as an affirmation ("I affirm") a note concerning the surety of hope that the believer possesses in Christ. This follows directly from his words of verse 30 which told us that he stood "in jeopardy every hour." As follow-on to that, he says, "...by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily."

The "boasting" he notes concerning the Corinthians is noted in 2 Corinthians 9:3 also. They are his converts and the people of the church he helped to establish. He had suffered greatly for them, placing his life in jeopardy for their sake as much as for the sake of any other churches he was involved in. They were as children to a father to him.

This boast of Paul is then noted as "in Christ Jesus our Lord." Those who have called on Christ are "in" Christ. They have moved from death to life. And yet, he says "I die daily." He put himself on the line for their sake through many trials and sufferings. Of these trials and sufferings, any could result in his actual death, and so he metaphorically says, "I die daily." What would be the point of such a life if the hope of the resurrection wasn't true? And thus, what would be the point of baptism in that hope?

The very nature of baptism is a picture of death in Christ and then being raised to newness of life. Being submersed pictures His death and thus our participation in that. Being raised pictures His resurrection and thus our participation in that. Therefore, Paul's comment that he "dies daily" has no true and lasting consequences because, ultimately, he is "in Christ" and he already possesses eternal life.

When those who follow him in his example are baptized, they are so baptized in this same hope. He will continue to explain this in the coming verse.

Life application: If you have received Christ, and you truly believe that you have been granted eternal life, then why should the prospect of facing death in this life really matter? Yes, the thought of physical death can be unnerving, but if our hope in Christ is sure, it is not the end of the story. Should we face death, let us demonstrate the faith we possess in a manner worthy of the promise tied to that faith.

*O God! My heart is steadfast, and I will not be moved. No matter what trials I face, I will not lose heart, nor will my faith in Christ be diminished. Jesus has overcome death and He will return to raise me up as well some wondrous day, and so even the great enemy of death has no mastery over me. Should he come for me today, I will consider it a welcome rest until I awake to see my Lord's glorious face. No fear here! Amen.*

**If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage *is it* to me? If *the* dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"**

1 Corinthians 15:32

This completes Paul's thoughts which are tied to verse 29 concerning the difficult words "baptized for the dead." In that verse, he noted "...if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?" He again ties in the same thought concerning the dead rising now. In preparation for that, he explains what he meant in the preceding verse which said, "I die daily."

Putting it in the form of a question, he asks, "If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage *is it* to me?" First, "in the manner of men" is speaking of his mortal nature. It is a nature which can and will die. It could come about by any event, from a mild infection turning into a greater one, to a sudden heart attack, or even to an external disaster such as being run over by a stampede of bulls.

Life is tenuous and it can end in a myriad of ways. And so to stress the foolish nature of living a life for Christ if the dead do not rise, he uses a real-life example which could have led to his death and which was not accidental, but purposeful. That example is fighting "with beasts at Ephesus." It is unknown here whether Paul is speaking of literal beasts, or if he is speaking figuratively. The book of Acts, and his other writings, tells us nothing of him fighting with literal beasts, and so this is probably a figurative term for people who fought rabidly against him. This type of speaking is common in the world and even in the Bible. In just one psalm, there are three examples of it -

"Many bulls have surrounded Me;  
Strong *bulls* of Bashan have encircled Me.  
<sup>13</sup> They gape at Me *with* their mouths,  
*Like* a raging and roaring lion." Psalm 22:12, 13

"For dogs have surrounded Me;  
The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me." Psalm 22:16

"Deliver Me from the sword,  
My precious *life* from the power of the dog.  
<sup>21</sup> Save Me from the lion's mouth  
And from the horns of the wild oxen!" Psalm 22:20, 21

Paul even comments that he was "delivered from the lion's mouth" in 2 Timothy 4:17, certainly speaking metaphorically. Additionally, as a Roman citizen, he would not have been subject to fighting beasts in an amphitheater. Therefore, the probability is that he is speaking figuratively. This then would be in contrast to "in the manner of men" that he opened this verse with.

Regardless of this, whether real beasts or enemies with the characteristics of beasts, if he willingly put his life in peril in such a manner, knowing that the dead do not rise, it would be an utterly foolish gesture. If life is tenuous on a good day, how much more so when one eagerly steps into harm's way; and that for a cause which he would have known to be false!

Rather than such a foolish waste, it would be so much better to follow another path - "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" If the dead are not raised, then this life is all we have. Wouldn't it be better to party the time away and do all the things that we wanted to, regardless as to whether they were moral and proper? Wouldn't it be better to get all one could get, experience all one could experience, and live life to the fullest? If this one life is it, then why not make the best of it.

And to show even more forcefully that this is the case, he cites a portion of Isaiah 22. In that passage, Isaiah speaks of Jerusalem being hemmed in by enemies, ready to be destroyed. For the people inside, they made a choice. Rather than reaching out to God in repentance because of their sin which caused the destruction to come, and rather than asking for His powerful hand to have mercy and save them, they turned to tables full of food for one last delightful meal. Here is the account, which contains the verse cited by Paul -

"And in that day the Lord GOD of hosts  
Called for weeping and for mourning,  
For baldness and for girding with sackcloth.

<sup>13</sup> But instead, joy and gladness,

Slaying oxen and killing sheep,  
Eating meat and drinking wine:

'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!'

<sup>14</sup> Then it was revealed in my hearing by the LORD of hosts,

'Surely for this iniquity there will be no atonement for you,  
Even to your death,' says the Lord GOD of hosts." Isaiah 22:12-14

The utterly disrespectful attitude of those in Jerusalem was so brazen that the Lord said their sin would never be atoned for. Even if they lived through the siege, they would never be forgiven. Paul uses their words as the ultimate example of futility in a life without hope of the resurrection. If there is no resurrection, then there is also no atonement. If there is no atonement, then the prospects of meeting God are to be considered utterly futile. Only condemnation awaits the departed soul.

This line of reasoning by Paul explains the difficult meaning of "baptized for the dead" in verse 29. "What will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all?" The answer is, "They will perish like all flesh." Without the resurrection, there is no hope at all. But because Christ is risen, there is hope and therefore there is a reason to put oneself in harm's way. With Christ, every action we take has purpose if it is done in the hope of the resurrection.

Life application: Instead of "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die," our attitude should be "Let us rejoice, for our souls live... even if we die."

*O my wondrous God! As I think on the resurrection of Christ and what it means for me, I lose all fear in this life. What can man do to me? What can sickness take from me? What heartache can I not endure? All of these things are temporary and will be replaced with joy everlasting. Every tear shall be wiped away as eternity unfolds before me. What can steal my joy? Notta thing! No fear here. I am in Christ. Amen!*

**Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." 1 Corinthians 15:33**

This verse refers all the way back to verse 12, which Paul then went on to argue against for the next many verses. There in verse 12 he asked, "Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no

resurrection of the dead?" From there, he defended the truth of a literal, bodily resurrection. For them to stop listening to contrary arguments which can only pervert the simplicity of the gospel, he tells them first, "Do not be deceived."

Anything which is not in line with the gospel that was presented to them (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-8) is to be considered a deception. If one were to listen to such nonsense, it could only negatively affect them. To help them understand this, he says "Evil company corrupts good habits." This is an iambic line from *Thais* by Menander. It would have probably been a commonly quoted maxim by those in Corinth and so Paul uses it to help them remember the warning.

In this quote, the word for "company" includes the idea of communications as well as associations. We pick up bad habits from those we closely align ourselves with. Also in this quote, the word "habits" comes from the Greek word *homiliai*. It is only used this once in the New Testament and it refers to a place where one is accustomed to hang out or sit at. In the plural then, it leads to the thought of morals, manners, and character.

Life application: In 1 Corinthians 5:9-11, Paul indicates that we can associate with worldly people who act in a manner which is not Christ like. However, he now shows that becoming too closely attached to them, or anyone who would draw us away from the truth of Christ, is not healthy. There must be an appropriate balance in our associations to stay strong and properly attuned to the things of Christ.

*Lord, grant me the wisdom to know how closely I can associate with others without compromising my walk with You. I live in this world, but I don't want to be overcome by it. Help me to know when it is time to separate from conduct which could weaken my walk with You and give me the will to follow through with what I know to do. Thank You Lord for watching over me in this way. Amen!*

**Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame. 1 Corinthians 15:34**

Paul now sums up the entire passage of 1 Corinthians 15 thus far. After this, he will head in a slightly different direction while still speaking of the resurrection. But here, after concluding his defense of the resurrection, he provides a stinging rebuke intended to keep the Corinthians (and thus us!) from heading down the path of doubt or heresy again.

In doing so, he begins with "Awake." The Greek word is *eknephō*. It is used only this once in the New Testament and can be rightly translated as "sober up!" It indicates awakening as if from a drunken stupor. When someone is tired, they may be naive about a matter but still able to think clearly. However, when in a drunken stupor, right thinking isn't possible. He had given all the evidences and defenses necessary concerning the resurrection. Now they needed to soberly process them.

He continues with "to righteousness." This is an adverb and so the thought is more appropriately rendered, "Sober up righteously." He is asking them to come to a state of sound doctrine and to live by it. To do so, he further implores them by saying, "and do not sin." The implication here (which should be taken as an axiom) is that bad doctrine is sin.

When one is presented with proper doctrine, and they either reject it or are unwilling to take the time to understand it, they err. Nobody will be able to say, "I just didn't have time to learn the truth." Man finds time for every unnecessary thing on earth, but fails to make time for knowing, fellowshiping with, and being obedient to his Creator. This is sin.

To confirm that "do not sin" is tied to proper doctrine, he next says, "...for some do not have the knowledge of God." In particular, he is speaking about those in verse 12. There he said that "some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead." As the resurrection is one of the principle doctrines of the faith, to believe such rubbish, or to teach it, is sin.

People come along all the time making unfounded statements about Christianity, either purposefully or out of incompetence. To listen to such people can only lead down Heresy Highway and then on to Apostasy Avenue. And so, to be caught up in their lies shows a true dullness of mind. For them to realize this, he says, "I speak *this* to your shame." He is speaking to the entire church at Corinth, but also to each individual. And because his words are recorded in the Bible, he is speaking to all churches and all individuals.

We are all individually responsible for our doctrine. It is true that teachers are more so (see James 3:1), but everyone should at least know the basics of the faith. When a cult comes knocking at the door, there should be enough knowledge of Scripture to tell them to beat it and stop teaching falsities.

Life application: What is of most value to you in this life? Everything we possess and everything we do is temporary and will eventually disappear into obscurity... except our relationship with the Lord. And the only way to properly understand this relationship is through knowing Scripture. If you aren't reading it and studying it constantly, you are showing great disrespect to the Lord who gave it to you.

*The most precious treasure I could ever own sits by my bed getting dusty. And yet I wouldn't allow such neglect if my car was getting rusty. The book which holds all of the answers that I need; this is ignored for other things... I pass it by with speed. The word of God which will be opened on that great Judgment Day; it is carelessly overlooked so that I can play. Forgive me for such neglect; in my soul great sin I detect. Please O God help me get my priorities right; and to pursue Your word as my highest delight. Amen.*

**But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" 1 Corinthians 15:35**

Thus far, Paul has spoken about the fact of the resurrection of the dead. It has occurred in Christ and so there is a precedent for it. If there is a precedent, then it logically follows that the resurrection is a natural outcome of being "in Christ" for the believer. Now that he has fully established this truth, he poses questions which had certainly been asked of him. From this, he will provide answers sufficient for our present state and future hope.

As the fact of the resurrection is established, the introduction of the questions moves to the *manner* and *form* of it. Concerning *manner*, the question is, "How are the dead raised up?" There are almost an infinite number of things that could go through the mind concerning this. How can the dead be reanimated? What about someone who got eaten by sharks, alligators, or worms? How could a person dissolved in a nuclear blast be re-gathered together and come alive again? What about those who died 2000 years ago? How can a person be resurrected after such a long time? Questions like this address *manner* in the resurrection process.

Next concerning *form*, the question might be, "With what body do they come?" Will the resurrected feel pain like we feel it now? Will we be able to fly? Will we be able to see in 3D? Will we need food to eat, sleep to rest, or exercise to stay fit? What about a child that dies... will he resurrect as a child? Will an old person remain old? Will we know one another? Will we have the same affections, likes, and dislikes?

On and on, we can posit questions concerning the *form* of the resurrection. This is especially the case because Paul uses the term "come" rather than "return." If the *manner* questions are logically considered and answered (for example, cannibals who once ate Christian missionaries and later came to Christ themselves), the *form* questions necessitate "coming" rather than "returning." In this, we can know that the body of the resurrection is the same in individuality, but not necessarily in material make-up. Paul will give explanations of this as he continues.

Life application: God has it all figured out. If He promises a resurrection for those who are in Christ, it will come about just as He promised... and it will be glorious.

*Lord God, Your word tells us that heaven and hell really exist. Knowing this, I am certain that for those who have called on Christ this world is as close to hell as they will ever get. And for those without Christ, this world is as close to heaven as they will ever get. The hope for me lies in how wonderful it will be in comparison to the very best thing I have ever known. I am glad that I don't have to worry about a comparison to the very worst thing I have ever experienced. Thank You, O God, for Christ my Lord who has made heaven possible once again. Amen.*

**Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies.** 1 Corinthians 15:36

Paul's words here are in response to the questions posited in the previous verse concerning the "how" and "what" of the resurrection. His answer is directed to those who would submit such questions in an attempt to trip up another, not specifically to someone who was merely curious about the matter. In other words, a person who asked those questions in a dismissive manner, attempting to show the illogical nature of a literal resurrection, is who Paul is responding to.

His answer begins with a mild rebuke, "Foolish one." It is equivalent to saying, "O unreasonable!" And the choice of words is supported by his continued comment - "What you sow is not made alive unless it dies." The word "you" is emphatic. What this means is that anyone who has ever planted a seed (or even anyone who hasn't, but still understands what occurs when a seed is planted) should be able to understand that it is a comparable analogy to the resurrection itself. It is seen daily and is understood clearly. As pretty much every person knows what happens to a seed in this situation, then the "you" is to be understood as all people, including the deniers of the resurrection.

A seed remains a seed until it is used for some other purpose. If it is eaten, it is no longer a seed, but it becomes a source of nutrition for the one who ate it. But if the seed

is stored, even for thousands of years, it remains a seed. Seeds have been found in Israel, China, and elsewhere that go back eons. When planted, they do what seeds are intended to do. First, they break down (Paul notes that it dies) and then they come back up in a completely different state.

The body of the seed as a whole "dies." It decays to become a source of food for the germ. In this, new life occurs. Paul is using this analogy, not because it is an exact representation of what occurs in the believer, but because it demonstrates that even in nature there is a comparable occurrence to what is taught concerning the resurrection. Jesus uses the same terminology in John 12 -

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain." John 12:24

Life application: We can transfer all of the data on an old vinyl disc to a magnetic tape, to a CD, or even to a computer's hard drive. The same music is retained even though it is in a different format. If we can do this with Tinker Toys, how much more can God ensure that all of what comprises us will be retained and restored as well! Have no fear that God has it all under control.

*Lord, I have music which was once on vinyl records now stored on a computer's hard drive. It is the same information and nothing was lost in the process. If we can do this with earthly elements to keep the music we enjoy alive, how much more certain is it that You can do it with all that comprises us. I have no problem in accepting that at the resurrection, I will still be me, but in an eternal body which will be able to make joyful music to You forever. I'm excited about what lies ahead. No fear here! Praise You, O God. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other *grain*.** 1 Corinthians 15:37

Paul continues with his remarks concerning the resurrection body, using the analogy of grains to show the marvelous nature of what will occur. In this, he begins with "And what you sow..." Earlier in Chapter 3, he noted the process of planting and watering in regard to the gospel message. He now returns to that analogy once again with the sowing of grain. Even though he was a Pharisee, a tentmaker, and an apostle, he had a sound knowledge of the process.

In planting a garden or a crop, you will choose a certain type of seed to sow in hopes of a future harvest. But when you plant the seed, you aren't sowing "that body that shall be." Instead, all you are doing is putting seeds into the ground, "mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other *grain*." One can discern between different types of grain, but it doesn't mean that the grain itself will look like what the seed produces.

What goes into the ground may be small, brownish, hard, and somewhat round, but from it will come something soft, green, tall, and which produces leaves, flowers, and new grains. A completely different body comes out of the ground than what went into the ground. And yet, the original identity of the seed is completely preserved. This goes all the way back to the first chapter of the Bible -

"Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed, *and* the fruit tree *that* yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed *is* in itself, on the earth'; and it was so. <sup>12</sup> And the earth brought forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed according to its kind, and the tree *that* yields fruit, whose seed *is* in itself according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good.'" Genesis 1:11, 12

God ordained that things would produce after their own kind. Despite the seeds being completely different in appearance, the identity is not lost in dissolution. It is retained and yet it bears a marvelous new look. Such will be the case at the resurrection.

Life application: Though we may be planted 'neath the clods of dirt today, we shall rise again in a glorious way.

*Heavenly Father, time keeps heading forward and the years have consumed my youth. Soon enough I may be planted 'neath the clods of soil, like a seed sown in a field. But that time of rest will be a short span in comparison to the eternal days I will see when You come to raise me once again. When I close my eyes, I will see corruption. When I open them again, I will see perfection. I cannot wait for Your plan to be realized. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.**

1 Corinthians 15:38

As noted in the preceding verse, God originally created the trees and plants, and each contained seed according to its nature. This was seen in Genesis 1:11, 12. Likewise, the other life which was described in the original creation account was "according to its own

kind." This included the sea creatures, the creeping things, the beasts of the earth, and even man. Each thing reproduces after its own kind.

This precept dismisses both a long-term creation and any sort of evolution. The trees were created, not evolved, and they were created as fully functioning and capable-of-reproducing because they bore their seed. The same is true with each form of animal life. Paul's words bear this out. These things didn't "evolve" into what they are. Rather, he says, "But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body."

And not only is this true at the original creation, but it is true with the resurrection. The form of the resurrection body is according to the pleasure of God. The same life that went into the ground as a seed will spring forth anew with the body that God chooses for it. Likewise, the same life of the person that was planted in the ground at burial will spring forth anew with the resurrection body that God has prepared for it.

Life application:

- 1) We will not "evolve" into a resurrection body. Instead, God has prepared one for us, and this is what we will wear in our eternal walk in His presence.
- 2) Whatever this body will be like, it will be wonderful. Be prepared to be amazed!

*Lord God, if You have prepared such an intricate and marvelous body for me as I walk in this fallen world, then how much more magnificent will the body be that You have chosen for my eternal walk in Your presence! I long to be adorned in these eternal garments and to be clothed in Your righteousness. No fear here, great things lie ahead! Even so, come Lord Jesus! Amen.*

**All flesh is not the same flesh, but *there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds.* 1 Corinthians 15:39**

Paul is still answering the question found in verse 35 - "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" After those questions, he used the seed as an example we could grasp. Put a seed in the ground and out comes a plant, and yet it is the same life. So why should it be considered impossible for the resurrection body to be substantially different than the earthly body while still being the same person?

To highlight this further, he notes that, "All flesh *is* not the same flesh." The word flesh here denotes the body as much as the material with which the body is made. Each animated being has a body unique and perfectly suited for the environment in which it

lives. Thus, he notes that "*there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds.*"

The body of man is given to man based on his capabilities. He was given dominion over the earth and to fulfill that, he was given hands to grasp, legs to run, a mind to think, etc. But he was also given the ability to swim in the ocean. With the development of technology, he can swim under the waters, even for extended periods of time. And because of technological developments he can also fly. Thus, man has a body which is designed by God to fulfill the commission he was given.

The animals all have their own bodies, each suited for the purpose God intended. Squirrels eat nuts, but they also store them. Sometimes, those nuts are forgotten, covered over by mud from a flood, or maybe even the squirrel dies, leaving the nut uneaten. When this happens, the nut sprouts into a tree. And so, squirrels serve a purpose in this way, helping to sew new forests or continue forests that exist. This is just one example of an almost infinite variety of things that various animals do with the bodies they have been given.

Paul notes also that there is "another of fish." If flesh were flesh without variety, then we would think it impossible that a being could live under water. We would have no concept of something that could accomplish this feat. But there are fish. Because there are, we can see that life can live and thrive where we cannot. So why should we think it is impossible that we will someday be given bodies that are substantially different than the ones we have now, ones which are able to live and act in a way we cannot yet comprehend?

Paul finishes this verse with, "another of birds." Will we be able to fly in our resurrected bodies? Birds can fly even though we can't. They have another type of flesh than we have. They have been designed to do what birds do. Like the squirrel, many birds provide transporting services for seeds and nuts. As they do, new life springs up. Along with this, they live their lives doing all those things that birds do, working harmoniously within the realm for which they were designed.

A final thought concerning animal life and the resurrection body would be to consider the butterfly. It transforms into its beautiful state from a mere caterpillar. If this is possible within the natural creation, why should we assume that it is impossible for the resurrection body to be wholly different than what we now know while still being the same life-force that we always have been, memories and all.

Life application: If we have nifty bodies that can do really amazing stuff now, imagine what God has prepared for us in our resurrected bodies! Don't be afraid of death, it is a temporary and necessary step on the way to amazing glory.

*O God! A caterpillar becomes a butterfly because this is what You have ordained for it to do. It is the same life-being and yet it is a completely different form than it once was. All things have come from Your wisdom, and we can accept them because we see them. Help us to have faith that the same Word which created the butterfly can also resurrect us to eternal life. You have spoken it will happen, and so we can be confident it will come to pass. Thank You for Jesus who makes it possible. Amen.*

**There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.** 1 Corinthians 15:40

If this verse isn't read as a part of the whole paragraph and one immediately goes to the next verse (verse 41), it may leave the misperception that verse 41 explains verse 40; that the "celestial bodies" are the sun, moon, and stars mentioned there. This, however, would not properly explain Paul's use of wording. Instead, it would "provide a false antithesis to 'bodies terrestrial'" (Pulpit Commentary).

In other words, Paul has three separate groupings from verse 39 to 41 -

Verse 39 - flesh; men, animals, fish, birds

Verse 40 - bodies; celestial bodies, terrestrial bodies

Verse 41 - glory; sun, moon, stars (and star from star)

The word for "celestial" here is *epouranios*. It signifies that which is heavenly. It is used 19 times in the New Testament, and it is consistently speaking of a heavenly matter, meaning a spiritual one. One of those 19 examples will help clarify what this means -

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

-Ephesians 2:4-7

In this, the word "heavenly" is speaking of the "spiritual" realm of heaven, not the cosmos where the sun, moon, and stars are. We are currently seated with Christ in God's redemptive plans even though we have not actually arrived there yet. This is the type of "heaven" that the word signifies.

Understanding this, we can properly perceive what Paul is writing about here. They are not specifically angels, but "heavenly" beings. These are being contrasted to earthly, or "terrestrial," beings. This same word, *epouranios*, will be used 3 times in verses 48 & 49 when speaking of our resurrection bodies which will be like the resurrected body of Christ. Therefore, Paul is showing us a taste of that now by placing this comparison between two examples of natural types of bodies - those in verse 39 and those in verse 41.

As noted, this is not speaking specifically of angels, but it is a comparison to such heavenly beings. This is stated by Jesus concerning those of the resurrection in Matthew 22:30 -

"For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven."

To further substantiate this, we can see a similar analogy of the resurrected bodies to stars. This is found in Daniel 12 -

"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,  
Some to everlasting life,  
Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.  
<sup>3</sup>Those who are wise shall shine  
Like the brightness of the firmament,  
And those who turn many to righteousness  
Like the stars forever and ever." Daniel 12:2, 3

And so, we can see in this verse, Paul is using both natural types of bodies (those of verse 39 and those of verse 41) as examples to help us understand the difference between the heavenly and the earthly bodies of verse 40.

Life application: Whatever our coming heavenly bodies will be like, they will be amazing. They will be so vastly superior to what we are clothed in now, that we should rejoice at the thought of heading off to be with Jesus. Let us not fear the temporary hold of physical death. It has no mastery over us!

*Heavenly Father, eternity sure is a long time. If the bodies we have now wear out after a few decades, how amazing our coming resurrected bodies must be! They will endure throughout the ages of ages and still be able to keep going. They will be able to assimilate a continuous stream of information without getting overloaded in the mind, and they will be able to stand in Your presence, not in fear of being consumed, but in the joy of being ever-invigorated. Personally, I can't wait! No fear here. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.*

***There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.*** 1 Corinthians 15:41

In the previous verse, Paul noted that there are "also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and the *glory* of the terrestrial *is* another." This verse now is not explaining that, but rather it is confirming the truth in another way. Just as there are different types of flesh on the earth, there are different types of glory in the sky above us.

When we look up, we don't see just one object in the sky. Rather we see different objects at different times, and they have a variety of purposes. First, "there is one glory of the sun." The sun rules the daytime. It provides heat to the world, and it lights the day. God purposed this. It is a certain distance from the earth so that the right amount of heat and light arrive for life to continue.

There is also "another glory of the moon." When the sun is hidden from our sight, the moon is often there reflecting the light of the sun. It appears closer or farther away at various times, and it can go from a tiny sliver to a full circle as it moves. It serves God's purposes in a variety of ways for the benefit of His creatures on earth.

And Paul notes that there is even "another glory of the stars; for *one* star differs from *another* star in glory." Not only do the stars differ in the glory they radiate on earth in comparison to the sun and the moon, but they also do so in comparison to one another. They are set in the heavens and often appear as groupings which we call constellations. The North Star remains fixed in one spot. Some stars appear bluish, others have a silvery or reddish tone. Every one of them is there for a purpose and not one is unknown to God (see Psalm 147:4).

Genesis 1:14-19 notes that each and all of these heavenly orbs have a purpose according to the wisdom of God -

"Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; <sup>15</sup> and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth'; and it was so. <sup>16</sup> Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. *He made* the stars also. <sup>17</sup> God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, <sup>18</sup> and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that *it was good*. <sup>19</sup> So the evening and the morning were the fourth day."

Life application: If God has put such minute care into the structure of the heavenly bodies, which were placed there as "signs and seasons" for man, then how much more can we be certain that God cares for man! And if in our fallen state He attends to us, then how much more attention can we hope for when we receive our resurrected bodies! Whatever He has planned for our eternal abode, we can trust that it will be magnificent.

*Lord God, there is careful attention to the layout of the heavenly bodies so that they show us Your plan of redemption and also signs of events which occur at fixed and preset times. If You have done this for our benefit so that we can see Your mighty hand at work, then how much more do You care for us, for whom these things were ordained! We can look to the heavens and trust that You who created them have a good plan and purpose for those You have redeemed. Great are You, O God, and greatly are You to be praised! Amen.*

**So also is the resurrection of the dead. *The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.*** 1 Corinthians 15:42

Paul now begins to respond to the question in 1 Corinthians 15:35 with specific details. These are based on the analogies he provided in verses 36-41. This particular verse responds to verses 36-38. The seed went into the ground in corruption, it sprang into a new and exciting form, and yet it was the same life which went into the ground. The analogy has been given, it is appropriate, and Paul confirms it with the words, "So also *is* the resurrection of the dead."

What happens with the seed will also be the case with those who die. This then is speaking of the *form* of the resurrection, not the *manner*. Their body "is sown in corruption." When a believer is planted in the ground, they decompose and return to the form of the basic elements from which they were taken, eventually becoming

nothing but dust once again. But this is not the end of the story. Like the seed, the body of the believer will change, and it will be "raised in incorruption."

This change will take place and its results will be explained in greater detail in verses 51-54. The body we now have is corruptible; the body we will be given will be incorruptible. The body we have now is prone to weakness, sickness, fractures, infection, etc.; the body we will receive will not have such characteristics of corruption. Instead, like the body of the plant, which is completely different than the seed, the body of the believer will be completely different from what we now experience.

Life application: Unless we have observed a particular type of seed being planted and growing into a plant, we could never guess what that plant would look like and what its characteristics would be. The same is true with our resurrection bodies. We cannot fully imagine what lies ahead. But we can know that it has been planned by the Creator of all things. Because all things are possible to God, we can be certain that what lies ahead for us will be marvelous. If you're struggling with some human weakness today, just remember that it is but a temporary and light affliction compared to the glory which awaits!

*Heavenly Father, the older I get, the closer I am to my inevitable end. And as that approaches, so come the difficulties with my aging body. My eyes aren't as strong, my joints ache a bit more, a bout with the flu is more difficult to overcome, and those around me that I have known and loved have begun departing in ever-increasing numbers. And yet, I am not dispirited. I know that this is the way of life and that You have a far better way ahead, reserved for me because of the resurrection of Jesus. I too will share in that honor when old things have passed away. I know that all things will be made new. I cherish the thought of what is coming. Amen.*

**It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. 1 Corinthians 15:43**

Paul is speaking of the form of the resurrection, responding to the question which had been asked, "With what body do they come?" Like the previous verse, he gives contrasting thoughts. When our current body dies he says, "It is sown in dishonor." Why do we bury bodies? The answer is because they quickly begin to degrade and become offensive to the senses, and so we secret them away because of the shame (the dishonor) which occurs in them. This state of decay is a direct result of something else which is shameful, sin.

When Adam sinned against the Lord, he hid himself and covered himself with fig leaves. There was dishonor in what occurred. When the man sinned, he died spiritually.

Further, as a result of this spiritually dead condition, the Lord told him he would also die physically. He would return to the dust from which he came. After this, the Lord clothed him with a tunic of skin, thus covering him. All of this indicates that shame and dishonor are associated with this life in which we live. The stain continues in all men because all are in Adam and thus all have sinned. The result of this is death. And the result of death is being "sown in dishonor."

However, for those in Christ, the seed that is planted will be "raised in glory." There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Sin is no longer imputed to us because we have moved to Christ. Therefore, when this body of sin is taken away, what comes from it will be glorious. The Greek word for "glory" is *doxa*. It carries the meanings of, "honor, renown; glory, an especially divine quality, the unspoken manifestation of God, splendor." The fallen image of Adam will be replaced with the glorious image of Christ.

In addition to this, Paul notes that, "It is sown in weakness." Our human lives are exceedingly frail. Our bodies are susceptible to all kinds of limitations and potentially catastrophic occurrences. We cut easily, bones break, sickness is always around the corner from infections, pollens, viruses, etc. The earthly body that we exist in is temporary and degrades in just a few decades. At the end of our days, it is sown in this same weak condition and degrades even more swiftly until it is nothing but dust once again.

However, for those in Christ, the seed which is planted "is raised in power." As Paul is giving contrasts, the word for power is to be taken as the opposite of "weakness." It is the Greek word *dunamis*. It can carry a host of meanings including physical strength, endurance, and the like. The "weakness" spoke of frailty and eventually death. The "power" then is speaking of robustness, hardiness, and life. We will not be susceptible to the same limitations and ultimate termination that we now face. Instead, a whole new order of existence will be realized.

Life application: At this time, we can only imagine the state of our future body in relation to what our current body is like. We can make logical assumptions of what lies ahead, but we cannot know exactly what it will be like. However, we can be certain that our bodies will be fitting for being in the presence of the God of glory, and they will be sufficient to last us for all eternity there in that wondrous place.

*Lord God, Christ arose conquering death for all who place their faith in Him. This is what the Bible proclaims. I want a ride on that train, a walk on that path, and a future with that certain guarantee. I want what Jesus offers! I believe and I receive. Jesus Christ died for my atonement, and He rose for my justification. I receive the Gift and I call on the name of the Lord Jesus. Hallelujah and Amen!*

**It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 1 Corinthians 15:44**

Paul continues with his explanation of the resurrection body. Still referring to the example of a seed he says that, "It is sown a natural body." Seeds are sown; the corrupt and weak bodies of the dead are buried. This is its natural state, and this is what is placed into the ground. Just like all the animals of the earth, they live a certain amount of time, they age, and then they die and return to the soil from which they came. However, for the believer in Christ, the body that was sown will have a marvelous change. Paul says that, "it is raised a spiritual body."

It must be noted that it doesn't say a "spirit body." This would be contradictory to a literal, bodily resurrection. The body which is raised is "spiritual" not "spirit." Misunderstanding this, or purposefully changing the intent and meaning (as for example the Jehovah's Witnesses do), leads to heresy. Christ was raised with a literal, physical body. He made this abundantly clear when He ate among the apostles and even asked them to touch Him. He was showing that His body, in fact, was literal and physical. As we will be like Him in nature (not deity, but body) we will also have a literal, physical body.

To ensure his words are perfectly comprehended, he repeats the thought saying, "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." In an emphatic way, Paul is showing here that there are two bodies for the believer. We have one like a seed which dies, and yet there is another which sprouts from that decay to be like a plant. It is different in form and yet it has all the same life of the original. Our spiritual body will not rely on the natural order that we now know for its continuance. Rather we will derive our continuance from our spiritual reconnection to God through the power of the resurrection.

Life application: What God has promised He is fully capable of fulfilling. Know and understand that we will have a literal body and it will never wear out. It will be spiritual, not natural, in nature.

*O God! I am so thankful that eternity will be spent in a way that I cannot even comprehend now. At this time, I get so tired, I get worn out, and I get frustrated with the events around me. Sometimes I get sick or injured too. And this happens to those around me that I love as well. We trudge through life, we get old, and then we die. But You have promised a new order of things which will sustain us for all eternity. I simply can't wait for what You have in store for Your people. Thank You, O God, for the hope I have because of my Lord Jesus! Amen.*

**And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit. 1 Corinthians 15:45**

In the previous verse, Paul noted that, "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." In support of this, he returns to Scripture to establish that this is an indisputable truth. Here he cites the Greek version of the Old Testament from a portion of Genesis 2:7 -

"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

He adds into the thought the words "first" and "Adam" to show the contrast between our first father, Adam, and our Redeemer, Christ. Even though Jesus isn't mentioned directly in this verse, it is obvious that he is substituting His name for the term "the last Adam." It is similar to what he submits in Romans 5:19 -

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous."

These contrasts are given to show us a distinction between our mortal, human nature and our anticipated eternal nature through the work of God in Christ. God breathed life into the mortal man, Adam. At that time, there was no anticipation of death, but there is also the truth that he was fashioned from the dust and is thus closely connected to it. After his creation, he was told that there would be consequences for disobedience. The account goes on to show that he disobeyed and he "died." This was first a spiritual death; a spiritual disconnect from God. This eventually led to his physical death as well.

In contrast to this sad state (which is inherited by all of Adam's fallen seed) there is Christ, "the last Adam." He was not born with Adam's inherited sin, and He lived in sinless perfection under God's law. Having paid the price for the sins of man through His death, He "*became* a life-giving spirit." Paul speaks of this in Romans 8:11 -

"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

As Matthew Poole says of this verse,

"Adam was the first, with respect of natural and carnal propagation, so Christ was the last Head, in respect of grace and spiritual regeneration, he was made a quickening spirit."

Life application: We still bear Adam's fallen nature. Until this corruptible body is done away with, we struggle against the flesh and the weaknesses of this life. However, for those who have called on Christ, these things are already defeated and are only awaiting their final realization. Be fully confident that whatever weaknesses and temptations you face now, they will be done away with when Christ comes to change us and bring us to Himself.

*Lord God, I am still in my first father Adam. I face trials, temptations, weaknesses, and failings. There are days where I can't seem to get anything right. Frustrations arise and I get disheartened. I long to be clothed in my eternal body and to be taken away from these present shortcomings. Until that day, I have the sure hope that it will come to pass. Jesus prevailed over death, and He has saved me, promising to return and grant me that life which is true life. How I long for that day! Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.**

1 Corinthians 15:46

Speaking of the process of the resurrection and the order of it, Paul now explicitly states a truth to consider which confirms what he has been saying. There is an order to the progression of man (not meaning all men, but those who will be of the resurrection).

Earlier in 1 Corinthians 15:21-23 Paul spoke of this order which has been ordained. Included in it is not only resurrection to life, but a different category of life than what we currently understand. There was first "the natural." Adam was created as a living being, brought from the dust. He was given free will and he (known to God before it happened) exercised that free will. In doing so, corruption ensued. This is the state of the natural.

However, for those who will participate in the resurrection, like the seed which changes into something else, we too will change. It will be from "the natural" into "the spiritual." This is the process which God ordained for the order of things. Whereas the natural was of decay and death, the spiritual will be of eternal vigor and life.

Life application: What we perceive now will be put away and something far better than we can imagine will replace it. Whatever is coming, it will be glorious!

*Heavenly Father, without a life of difficulty, disease, death, and decay, we could never truly appreciate eternal life. Contrast provides perspective, and knowledge allows us to perceive it in its proper way. Knowing this, I am happy to say that "This world isn't my hope or my home." I long for that which lies ahead. No fear here! Even so, come Lord Jesus! Amen.*

**The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust; the second Man *is* the Lord from heaven.** 1 Corinthians 15:47

Paul has been speaking of the body of believers in their current state as well as their bodies to come. He continues with that now. To compliment what he said in the previous verse, he enters this thought. Speaking of Adam, he says, "The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust." Adam is wholly earthly; he came from the earth and his body is suited for life on the earth. The earth is perishable and thus Adam is also perishable.

In contrast to this is the Lord Jesus. He is "the second Man." Paul is not saying that Adam existed before the Lord, but that in the order of redemptive history, and thus the order of the body of the believer, we follow this pattern. Even Jesus followed this pattern, coming in human flesh and participating in His creation. It is the pattern which Paul is focusing on. First came Adam; next comes Christ. First came the natural; next comes the spiritual. First came the earthly; next comes the heavenly.

The Greek gives extra hints concerning the nature of the heavenly body. Citing Meyer, Vincent's Word Studies notes that, "'no predicate in this second clause corresponds to the earthy of the first half of the verse, because the material of the glorified body of Christ transcends alike conception and expression.' The phrase includes both the divine origin and the heavenly nature; and its reference, determined by the line of the whole argument, is to the glorified body of Christ - the Lord who shall descend from heaven in His glorified body."

To Paul it is an axiom that Adam stands as the representative of the entire earthly human race. He was created and earthly and thus all who issue from him bear that same image. Likewise, the Lord is the Head and Representative of all of His spiritual children. Therefore, we (meaning believers in Christ) will participate in His heavenly nature, just as we have participated in Adam's earthly nature. John gives an insight into this in his first epistle -

"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." 1 John 3:2

Life application: As surely as we bear Adam's image because we are of Adam, we shall bear Christ's image because we are now in Christ. Don't despair but be prepared to be amazed.

*Lord, Your word is orderly, it is precise, and it is intricate in the extreme. Every detail shows us that a set plan has been in the works and that we can have absolute confidence that all will come out as it should. For those in Christ, the temporary pain and sadness we face will be swallowed up in an eternity of joy and blessing. I don't need to read horoscopes or look to the stars for the answers which my soul desires... No, I have Your superior word and it is the guide to my feet and the light to my path as I walk on toward glory. Thank You for the Bible. Amen.*

**As was the *man* of dust, so also *are* those *who are made* of dust; and as *is* the heavenly *Man*, so also *are* those *who are* heavenly. 1 Corinthians 15:48**

Paul has just made statements of fact concerning the state of man in regards to Adam and regarding the Lord. In verse 46 he said, "...the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual." Then in verse 47 he noted that, "The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust; the second Man *is* the Lord from heaven." Verse 48 now further explains verse 47. Verse 46 will be further explained in verse 49.

Adam was of the earth, made of dust. Logically then it follows that, "As *was* the *man* of dust, so also *are* those *who are made* of dust." All who are "in Adam" are like Adam. Everything follows after its own kind. Pumpkins don't come from whales nor do papayas come from mangos. As Adam is earthly, it naturally follows that all who issue from him will be earthly as well.

Likewise, we can take it as an axiom that just "as is the heavenly *Man*, so also are those who are heavenly." Christ is "the heavenly *Man*," and therefore all who are of Christ are also of the "heavenly."

Paul states this as a fact based on verse 47. In the next verse, he will show what that means to those who are "in Christ."

Life application: If you are in Christ, you are in Christ. Nothing can change this. He cannot deny Himself. If you falter in your walk with Him, you may lose rewards, but your salvation is not in question. Be confident that God's eternal grace and mercy in Christ are greater than your temporary failings.

*Lord, Your word says that when my sin was transferred to the cross of Christ, it included all of my sin. An exchange was made which changed me from an earthly position to a heavenly one. I cannot tell You how grateful I am for this. As I walk along this current path, I stumble and fall often, but I have the complete confidence that I am saved, once and for all through the work of Another; through the work of Jesus. Thank You for the assurance I have. I need it often as I know I fail You often. Amen.*

**And as we have borne the image of the *man* of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly *Man*.** 1 Corinthians 15:49

This verse further explains verse 46 which said, "However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual." Adam is the "natural" whom Paul is referring to. He was created from the dust and was earthly. As we are descendants of Adam, we bear his image. This means that we are also of the dust. It is an obvious truth that all people know and understand. When our lives end, we quickly decay and return to the earth from which we came. But there is good news for the believer in Christ!

Just "as we have borne the image of the *man* of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly *Man*." This does not mean all humans, but rather only those who have called on Christ. We are now "positionally" in Christ even though we don't yet actually bear His image. Eventually, we will bear His image; a reality which means that we will never again see decay or corruption. What He is like, we shall also be like. As our current body is suited to the earth and is tied to our relationship to Adam, our future body will be suited to heaven and will be tied to our relationship to Christ.

It should be noted that some translations say, "let us also bear" rather than "we shall also bear." This comes from a variant reading in some manuscripts, but this does not

flow with the rest of Paul's words in the surrounding verses. He is not exhorting us, but rather teaching us. His words in this chapter are an explanation of the issue. It is true that because we are "in Christ" we should act in that manner, but regardless of whether we do or to what level we do, we shall in fact bear the image of Christ, the heavenly Man.

Life application: Christ rose from the dead, never to see corruption. He possesses a resurrection body which is glorious and suited for eternity. We shall be changed to be like this as well. What occurs here is temporary and will pass. What is coming will be eternal and it will be glorious. Don't lose hope, but rather cling to the truth that is presented in the Bible concerning our future state.

*Heavenly Father, I am grateful for every good blessing that You send my way, but I often fail to acknowledge them as they come. Forgive me for taking for granted the many wonderful things that You have graced me with in this life. Help me to acknowledge them openly so that others will see and learn to do so as well. May the praises You deserve rise in abundance from Your undeserving creatures. How great You are, and You are greatly to be praised! Amen.*

**Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 1 Corinthians 15:50**

In verse 35, Paul noted that, "... someone will say, 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?'" He has been answering this question since then by making analogies that we can comprehend based on our knowledge of things. However, an entirely new revelation is given from him which is not based on analogy. Rather, it is given as a statement of fact. His words, "Now I say, brethren..." mean that he is adamant about his thoughts and they are words directed specifically at believers.

"Flesh and blood" is a term which is set against, "flesh and bone." According to Genesis 9:4 (and a principle taught many times after that in Scripture), the life is in the blood. When Jesus died on the cross, His blood was shed. This was the necessary evidence to prove His death. After the resurrection, He used the term "flesh and bones" when showing Himself to the apostles -

"Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." Luke 24:39

This same basic terminology was used by Adam when Eve was created -

"This *is* now bone of my bones  
And flesh of my flesh;  
She shall be called Woman,  
Because she was taken out of Man." Genesis 2:23

These words, "bone" and "flesh," are used quite a few more times in Scripture to indicate identification between individuals. The last time it is used is in Ephesians 5:30 when speaking of the relationship of believers within the body of Christ -

"For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones."

However, the words "flesh" and "blood" are used when speaking of Jesus' earthly ministry; a ministry which is now complete. That is found explained in Hebrews 2:14 -

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil."

The "flesh and blood" is corruptible and this state "cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Whatever our bodies will be like, the Bible shows that they will be different than what we now possess. This is why Paul is so careful to show us that our corruption will not inherit incorruption.

Life application: Our current bodies, as marvelous as they are, are weak and corruptible. The blood which runs through our veins will someday be replaced with a new life force, a life force which will allow us to continue on through all eternity. Hold fast to the truth that God has it all under control and that what He has promised will come about just as it is written!

*O God! Access is restored through the blood of the Lamb. I now can again enter into Your presence and fellowship with You in the Garden of Delight which we lost so long ago. I believe the message; I receive Your Gift. Thank You for Jesus who has made all things new. Give me the heart and desire to share this wonderful word with others so that they also may walk in Your presence for all eternity! Hallelujah to the Lamb. Amen.*

**Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—**  
1 Corinthians 15:51

This verse and the next one to come are "rapture" verses. They provide details that, when taken with the other rapture verses of the New Testament, show us the general order in which the rapture will occur within the framework of the greater panorama of redemptive history. Paul's words here are descriptive in the sense that they depict what will occur. However, they are to be taken literally. One must have rapture theology trained out of them to deny a literal rendering of what they say. When taken at face value they are clear and obvious.

Paul first begins with "Behold." The word is *horao*. According to Helps Word Studies it means "properly, *see*, often with *metaphorical* meaning: "to see with the mind" (i.e. spiritually see), i.e. perceive (with inward spiritual perception)." This is just what Paul intends with the use of the word because he next says, "I tell you a mystery."

This word, *mystery*, is *mustérion*. In addition to meaning "mystery" it carries the connotation of a "secret, of which initiation is necessary; in the NT: the counsels of God, once hidden but now revealed in the Gospel or some fact thereof; the Christian revelation generally; particular truths or details of the Christian revelation." In other words, Paul is now explaining something that, until he revealed it to those at Corinth, was completely unknown except to him. It had been revealed to him by God and he was now passing it on for the edification and instruction of the Corinthians, and thus us as well!

And this mystery which is now revealed is that "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed..." The meaning is obvious on its surface. Not all believers in Christ will die a physical death (Paul uses the Christian concept of "sleep" to mean "physical death") but will instead be transformed immediately from the "earthly" to the "heavenly" body that he described earlier.

Paul will continue with his rapture theology to the Corinthians in the next verse and then he will explain why this will occur and the hope which it signifies. In this, other than the fact that there will be living Christians at the time of the event, no specifics concerning that timing are given in this epistle. Rather, it must be discerned by uniting these words with those in other areas of the New Testament.

Life application: Rapture theology is often spoken against by Christian fuddyduddies. Don't be a Christian fuddyduddy. Instead, accept what the Bible says at face value and know that the Lord will bring the people of His church to Himself. It is the blessed hope of the faithful.

*Lord, Your word gives specific details concerning the rapture. It tells us about the way in which it will happen, the timing in relation to other events of redemptive history, and who will be included among those changed. It even tells us about the speed which it will occur... in the twinkling of an eye. I'm excited about that and I am prepared. Oh, to be with You forever... I'm ready anytime Lord! Amen!*

**...in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.**

1 Corinthians 15:52

In the previous verse, Paul explained that "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." Now to provide detailed insight into this marvelous event, he says that it will come about "in a moment." The word he uses is *atomos*, which is where we get our word "atom" from. It is only used this one time in the New Testament, and it comes from the prefix *a* which means "not," and *temno* which means "to cut." Thus, it indicates a moment of time which is indivisible; instant. In explanation of that, he further defines what he means by saying, "in the twinkling of an eye."

The word used to describe this is also used only once in the New Testament. It is *rhipe*. It means "a glance, twinkle or flash of the eye; a rush of wind or flame; any rapid movement." It comes from another word, *rhiptó*, which indicates "to throw, cast, toss, set down; pass." It thus is an event which occurs in one combined action, without any delay and nothing to hinder it.

A person can blink their eye five times in a single second. So fast is this that the brain doesn't always register events which occur so quickly as they flash by. This is the rapidity of the event which is coming. It will be as if a door is opened, we are taken, and then the door is closed before those around us can even perceive what occurred. And the timing of the event is given for us. Nobody can say that "we can't know when the rapture will occur." The fact is that we have been told in advance that it will be "at the last trumpet." Far too often, this is used by students of prophecy to indicate that this sudden event will occur at the seventh trumpet judgment of Revelation. There is no substantiation for this at all, and it doesn't fit with a host of other verses in the Bible which indicate that we will be gone before, not during or after, the events of the seven-year tribulation period.

Rather, the word "last" here is described well by Albert Barnes. He says it "does not imply that any trumpet shall have been before sounded at the resurrection, but is a word denoting that this is the consummation or close of things; it will end the economy of this world; it will be connected with the last state of things."

Understanding this then shows us that even though we know exactly when the rapture will occur - which is at the last trumpet, we will not know when the last trumpet will occur. Instead, all we need to know is that when the trumpet sounds, we are out of here. So, keep your ears always ready for that wondrous blast.

When the trump sounds, the blessed hope of the believer in Christ will be realized. "For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." The many words Paul has used so far in this chapter to describe our resurrection bodies will be realized in each believer at that moment. All who have called on Christ, from the dead of thousands of years ago all the way to the final sinner who says, "I'm sorry Lord Jesus, I receive You as my Savior" at that last moment before the trump will be caught away together. We shall be changed, never again to see corruption or death.

Life application: We can send an entire movie through the internet in a moment; something that wasn't even conceived of a short time ago. We can send all of the information of the internet around the world with tinker toys we call computers. If we can do these things, then why should we believe it is impossible that God can do what His word states, just as His word states it? Have faith in God and in His word.

*O God, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, there is going to be a change in those who have received Jesus; and we understand the reason why - it's because He has done all of the work for us. We shall be raised to eternal life, never again to see corruption of any kind. Then will end the burdensome strife; then will come peace and joy to the believer's mind. Thank You, O God for the comfort Your word provides to us! Thank You for the hope that is found in the Lord Jesus. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.** 1 Corinthians 15:53

Paul continues with his explanation of the words of verse 50. In this verse now, he states two truths concerning our resurrection body -

- 1) It must be suited to the spiritual nature of heaven, and
- 2) It must be suited to the eternal nature of heaven

Both of these are requirements concerning the body we will be given. The word for "put on" here concerning both the incorrupt and the immortal aspects of this body is *enduo*. According to Strong's, this comes from two words, "*en* and *duno* (in the sense of sinking

into a garment); to invest with clothing (literally or figuratively) -- array, clothe (with), endue, have (put) on."

This is elsewhere explained in greater detail by Paul -

"For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup> For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, <sup>3</sup> if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life." 2 Corinthians 5:1-4

In this, we can see the use of two separate metaphors for what our heavenly bodies will be like. The first is a garment, and the second is a tent. These will be garments that never wear out and a home which is from everlasting to everlasting, given by God for the glories which lie ahead.

Life application: What discomfort do you feel right now? You won't be feeling it ever again when you get your resurrection body.

*Precious Lord, stars are beautiful at night, lighting up the sky like diamonds. The sun is wonderful, bathing us with its heat and light for our daily work and enjoyment. The moon is soft and kind on our eyes as we sit under it and ponder Your goodness. But these... these are nothing compared to Your radiant beauty. I long for eternity in Your house and in Your presence. May that day be soon! Come Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 1 Corinthians 15:54**

The thought of the previous verse is repeated by beginning it with "So when..." At the time that these things occur, what was written by Isaiah the prophet will come to pass. In chapter 28 of his book, he writes about the work of the Lord which Paul cites -

"He will swallow up death forever,  
And the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces;  
The rebuke of His people  
He will take away from all the earth;  
For the LORD has spoken." Isaiah 25:8

Paul's citation is not a direct quote, but the intent remains. In the Old Testament, the word "forever" in Hebrew is elsewhere translated as "in victory" in Greek because the intent of the words is ultimately the same. That which is rendered forever has been accomplished by a victor.

The word for "swallowed" is *katapinó* which means to drink down, swallow, devour, destroy, consume. Paul uses the same word in the same way in 2 Corinthians 5 when speaking about our resurrection bodies -

"For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life."

-2 Corinthians 5:4

As there is a definite article in front of "Death" in both Isaiah's and Paul's words, there is in this the idea that "Death the swallower is swallowed up." The final realization of this is found in Revelation 20:14 -

"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire."

However, for the believer, we don't have to wait until the final destruction of death, but only for that time when we receive our eternal, glorified bodies. Therefore, Paul's words are directed at individuals who make up the collective whole. When each person who is glorified receives their body, for them it is the start of an eternal walk. For some, it will be at the rapture, and others it will be at the first resurrection which follows the tribulation period. And for others still, it will be at the end of the millennium. For all, it will be glorious!

Life application: Because of the resurrection of Christ, we have the absolute sure proof of the fulfillment of the words of the Bible. God's word cannot fail. What He has promised will be realized. Be of good cheer, Christ has overcome!

*Oh Lord, it is a hard thing to lose a loved one. We are left with emptiness in our hearts that is beyond our ability to overcome. But for those who are in Christ, the separation and pain are temporary. He has prevailed over death and promises the same to all who will simply trust Him by faith - "I have done it all, trust that it is sufficient." I do trust; I do believe. Thank You for the comfort of this surest of all hopes! Amen.*

**“O Death, where *is* your sting?**

**O Hades, where *is* your victory?” 1 Corinthians 15:55**

Paul, in a sense of jubilation over what he is considering, now adapts the words of Hosea 13:14 to his comments on the work of the Lord. Cited from the Hebrew, that passage reads -

“I will ransom them from the power of the grave;  
I will redeem them from death.  
O Death, I will be your plagues!  
O Grave, I will be your destruction!  
Pity is hidden from My eyes.” Hosea 13:14

The work of the Lord is the destroyer of Death and Hades (the grave) and so in his exuberance at the thought of Christ fulfilling that passage, he adapts the words for his audience to consider with him. We have all experienced the effects of Death, and we all know the seeming finality of it. What Death claims is beyond our power to restore and so all we are left with is hopelessness at the eternal separation he has brought to us. Paul likens that to a "sting." The word in Greek is *kentron* and means a sting or goad. In this it specifically indicates one which ends in death.

The word is used in Revelation 9:10 in the sense of a tormentor from scorpions -

"They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power *was* to hurt men five months."

This "sting" is removed through the work of Jesus and so Paul poetically asks Death, "Where is your sting." In Christ it is no longer the great destroyer it once was. His sting is gone, and Death has been rendered impotent. And as the sting of Death once filled the abyss of Hades, it appeared that its consuming pit was the final victor. But Christ Himself unlocked the gates of Hades and paved the way for the souls of men to be revived to eternal life.

Because of this Paul asks, "O Hades, where *is* your victory?" Hell stood open, welcoming all who came its way. It reveled in its ability to hold more and more souls as the ages passed. It felt smug, as if its power was unstoppable, but Christ prevailed over it and purchased release for the captive souls. This is why Revelation 20 says that someday these two foes will be forever banished from their once exalted position. They will be cast into the Lake of Fire, never to consume another. The victory belongs to the Lord!

"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."  
-Revelation 20:14

Life application: Nothing is impossible for the Lord. What we feel is the most hopeless of all situations is completely under His control. Stand fast in your faith in Him and in His ability to handle every detail of every promise His word provides.

*Heavenly Father, by Your great hand You have vanquished Death. You have sent Your Son to defeat this great enemy of man. Now there is no power in his sting and there are no gates on hell which can hold the souls of those who die in Christ Jesus. We can mock this once great enemy and we can scorn the place where he resides. Death is ended; the Grave is opened; the dead shall rise. Hallelujah to our great God! Amen.*

**The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law.** 1 Corinthians 15:56

In the previous verse, Paul cited Scripture which said, "O Death, where *is* your sting?" He now takes time to explain what this is telling us. "The sting of death *is* sin." Again, Death is personified, as if he was a serpent or a scorpion with a powerful sting; a sting called sin. When sin is found in man, then Death has prevailed. This is seen explicitly in Romans 6:23 -

"For the wages of sin *is* death..."

But Paul also provided another truth in Romans. Adam sinned and that sin became an infection in him which spread to all of his descendants. In Romans 5:12, he explained this -

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." Romans 5:12

But Paul, being thorough and methodical, goes further in his explanation by saying that "the strength of sin *is* the law." Adam had a law, albeit one commandment, but a law, nonetheless. When he broke that law, even though it was done in innocence, wrath ensued. Paul explains the reason for this as well in Romans 4:15 -

"...because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law *there is* no transgression."

If there were no command given to Adam, there would have been no transgression. But there was a command, and it was violated. Thus wrath, resulting in death, was the consequence. However, there was even a reason for this. In God's wisdom, He gave a law that He knew Adam would break. But to show man his utter dependence on the Lord, this took place. If not, then Adam would never have truly understood his relationship to his Creator. Paul shows us this in Romans 7 and in particular Romans 7:7-

"What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law."

Adam realized what sin was because a law was given which he then broke. By that, sin entered the world and along with that came Death. This is what Paul is showing us in 1 Corinthians 15. But it must be remembered that he is doing it in relation to the work of Christ, work which is greater than the failing of Adam. Thus, in Adam all die, but in Christ all will be made alive! Every person who trusts that God's provision in Christ is sufficient will be rewarded with eternal life.

Life application: In Christ sin is dead because the law is nailed to the cross. We have prevailed over the law, not by our own actions, but through the work of Jesus. Our faith in this act is what brings us reconciliation with God. Have faith that even your present failings can never separate you again from the love of God in Him.

*O God, there are many religious expressions on earth and some of them have parallel thoughts to the work of Christ, but only one of them reveals Christ in His fullness. Help me to be able to express to others clearly the truth that there is one path and one door to reconciliation with You. There is partial truth and there is ultimate truth, and I know that only in Jesus is there ultimate truth. Thank You for Jesus who has lighted the path and opened the door for all who will but believe! Amen.*

**But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

1 Corinthians 15:57

Paul's pen now rejoices as the ink flows to the paper. You can almost hear his heart pounding with joy as he pens these words. An entire chapter of instruction and information concerning the resurrection of Christ, and what it means to us, has been written and as he closes in on the end of his thoughts, he bursts into an ode of thanks, "But thanks be to God...!" It was God who sent His Son into the world on our behalf. It was God who allowed His Son to die on the cross, thus paying man's sin debt. And it was

God who raised Him from the dead, having accepted His work. All of this came from the mind of God and from His eternal counsel for the sake of His wayward creatures.

And so, Paul gives thanks to God "who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." In this, the word "gives" is a present participle. His words are so sure of the future victory that he states them as being accomplished in us already. In essence, "He is giving us the victory..." We can think of a battle between warring parties and one side is not only winning but assured of winning. The leader of the army could say, "God is giving us the victory" as an encouragement to the men still fighting. This is comparable to what Paul is saying here. We have no need to worry if we slip or fall along the way. Instead, we have absolute assurance of the victory which is being accomplished!

Life application: Everything we do during the day, even if it seems a hindrance to our walk with the Lord, can be included in our mental thoughts of the victory which lies ahead. If things get difficult, we can still say to ourselves, "God is giving me the victory despite this." What a reassuring thought as we trudge through the muck and mire of this earthly existence. Let us be unwavering in our faith of the good end which Christ's work has already achieved for us!

*Thank You, O God, that the battle is already won. You are now giving us the victory which has been attained through the work of Your Son. He died, paying our sin-debt. He fulfilled the law, nailing it to the cross. He broke open the gates of death. All of this came from Your wisdom and love for Your creatures. As we walk along each day, we have the absolute assurance that the battle is won, and we are being given that victory as we head to glory. Hallelujah and Amen!*

**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**

1 Corinthians 15:58

In this last verse of chapter 15, Paul sums up the entire discourse with a word of exhortation. "Therefore" is given as a result of the entire chapter, but more specifically based on the note of victory seen in verses 54-57. Because Death is defeated in Christ and because we are in Christ, Death is defeated in us. What fear should we possess? What attack against us can prevail?

"My beloved brethren" means that Paul is speaking to saved believers. The hope which is found in Jesus Christ is not a universal hope of man. Those not in Christ will not be included in the glories of which he has written. There is no such thing as universal

salvation, there is no fellowship with Belial, and there is no hope in Paul's words for the non-believer.

"Be steadfast." This comes from the Greek *hedraios*. This word comes from a root word meaning "seat" and thus it means "sitting" or "immovable." It is used only three times; twice in 1 Corinthians and once in Colossians 1. This is speaking of being firm and fixed in the doctrine which he has presented; the truth of the gospel of Christ and the knowledge which that truth leads to in the believer.

Be "immovable." This is from the Greek *ametakinétos*. It is its only use in the New Testament. This comes from two words - the negative *a*, and *metakineó* which means to "move away" or "dislodge." Hence, it means to not be moved. Whereas the last word was given concerning established doctrine, this one is given concerning perseverance in that doctrine. Whether persecution or temptation comes along, we should be set in our faith so that neither can cause us to falter.

Paul parallels these thoughts in his letter to the Galatians. In his words to them, he said -

"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." Galatians 6:9

Next, we are instructed to be "always abounding in the work of the Lord." How easy it is to get distracted in this life! And yet Paul asks us to have our priorities right. We have the Bible to study, we have church to attend, we have a ministry we have been called to, we have people to speak to about Christ, we have devotionals to read and ponder, we have thanks and praise to be offered continuously, etc. Paul is asking us to set aside the temporary things of this world to direct our lives to the work which has eternal meaning.

Finally, he tells us that in these efforts, we are to know that our "labor is not in vain in the Lord." He has meticulously defended the truth of the gospel and he has given answers to those who questioned the truth of the resurrection. As he did, he provided examples of known things (such as a seed sprouting to new life) to show that even in creation there is a suitable precedent for us to comprehend and trust. And in his words, he used Scripture itself as proof of what he stated.

The surety of the word of God stands as a testament to the guarantee of the fact that we who are "in the Lord" will participate in His resurrection and the eternal life which

stems from it. Therefore, we are to be unmovable in our faith and practice, knowing that a better reward awaits us in our heavenly life to come!

Life application: In those moments of life when doubt, anxiety, weariness, or confusion come into our minds, all we need to do is return to 1 Corinthians 15 and ponder its truths. When we do, we can refresh our souls and reengage the battle around us with confidence in the hope we possess.

*Lord God, having received the Gift of Jesus, and having been assured that eternal life is mine because of His work, I can see that nothing in this life can compare to what lies ahead. Would it be a waste of time for me to pursue my work in the Lord in this life? No! Rather, it would be a waste of my time to not do so! Because I believe the message, I should act as if I do. And so, Lord, help my life to be one dedicated to Your service at all times. Thank You for being with me in this. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 16

**Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 1 Corinthians 16:1**

Chapter 16 begins with a new thought which Paul has carefully placed after the great hope of the believer, the resurrection. He has given many instructions so far in this epistle concerning doctrine. He will continue this in part during this chapter, but it will also be a final chapter of greetings and exhortations.

And so, he begins with "Now concerning the collection for the saints." In the Greek, there is an article before "collection" which indicates that it is an issue which he had previously mentioned to them. It is not just any collection, but "the" collection, meaning something that had been talked about in the past.

The word for "collection" is *logeia* and is found only here and in the next verse in the New Testament. It means "a collection, collecting (of money), particularly of an irregular local contribution for religious purposes." This collection was necessary for those in Jerusalem who were suffering deprivation because of persecution and because of the unstable political and religious climate of the times.

The words "for the saints" also give an indication that this was a previously discussed matter. All believers are "saints," but these have been singled out which means that those in Corinth already understood who was being spoken of.

Paul continues with, "...as I have given order to the churches of Galatia." In fact, this collection from Corinth and other appeals for those in Jerusalem are found noted at various points in Acts; Romans 15; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9; and Galatians 2. It was a matter which Paul felt was of the highest importance. As the Apostle to the Gentiles, he wanted them to understand the necessity of providing for the physical needs of the saints from which came their spiritual heritage. This is explicitly stated in Romans 15:27 -

"For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things."

Finally, this verse finishes with, "...so you must do also." The word translated as "do also" is in the aorist imperative active. The implication in this is that they must do it and they are to do it immediately. It is something of great importance and of great necessity.

Life application: Paul felt the burden of contributing to the physical needs of those who brought the spiritual message of Christ to the Gentiles. Today, each of us receives spiritual food from pastors and teachers and it is right and proper that we should also endeavor to help them in their physical needs as well. Often, church budgets pay their salaries, but it is good to be attentive to other needs that may exist in their lives beyond the paycheck. They are ministering to you for your good, so remember to return the blessing to them for their good.

*Lord, thank You so much for those who instruct me in Your word. Many have lived in ages past, and some are alive today, searching out Your word, explaining to me its truths, and instructing me in how to apply them to my life. I thank You for them and I would ask that You give them an abundance of blessings because of the diligent efforts they have put into the care of these things. Amen.*

**On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. 1 Corinthians 16:2**

Care needs to be given concerning this verse so that it is kept in its intended context. It is true that by this time the Lord's Day, or Sunday, was considered the first day of the week and a time when the believers gathered together in worship. That is found in Acts 20:7 -

"Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."

It is also later noted in Revelation 1:10 with the name "the Lord's Day." However, this verse in 1 Corinthians 16 says in the Greek "on the Sabbaths." The wording is generally considered to follow a Hebrew idiom which would then be comparable to "the next day after the Sabbath." The idea is that when one has received his paycheck from the previous week, that day is when the action is to be taken.

On whatever day this occurs is the principle of what Paul gives to those at Corinth that is important. The word translated here as "On the..." has the sense of "every." Therefore, Paul is asking each of the Corinthians to "lay something aside."

The implication here is that they were to set aside money, either at home or some trusted place, specifically for a collection that Paul would be taking. Rather than getting to Corinth and finding out that the people were lousy savers and had to take a portion

of whatever they had available at the time, he was asking that they make a purposeful effort to put something aside for a specific reason. He didn't want to get there and have a one-time collection that would fail to meet the needs of the saints in Jerusalem.

As far as the amount to be laid aside, he only gives a general guideline - "storing up as he may prosper." There is no "You must give ten percent," or "You need to give until it hurts," or any such intimidation. The amount was solely up to the discretion of the believer based on how he felt that the Lord had prospered him. And he gives the reason for the specific weekly setting aside of this money. It is so "that there be no collections when I come."

Paul wanted this gift from the Corinthians to be ready and to be an amount suitable for the purpose for which it was intended. By asking them to follow his guidelines, there would be no shortfall and there would be no pain in the giving. Paul's intent was that needs be met and that it occurred from a grateful heart. Further, he wanted no one to say that they had been pressured into giving. The Old Testament standard of tithing was not considered in this request, and it is never considered in the New Testament. If you have been told that you need to tithe to your church, then you have been instructed incorrectly.

Further, if you have been told to tithe, you have probably been misguided on what tithing actually entailed even from the Old Testament standard. To get your giving right, please watch this informative sermon and you will see that what is commonly preached in churches is not what the Bible proclaims for the Christian – Click [YouTube](#) or [Sermon Audio](#) to watch.

Life application: Giving is vital for the continuance of the church and for meeting its goals and expenses. However, it should never be done under compulsion, and it should be from a New Testament perspective. Do not let pastors or televangelists shame you into giving. Give from a grateful heart from out of what you have been given.

*Heavenly Father, You have given me so much. I am abundantly blessed in all ways. Help me to remember to return a portion of those blessings to ministries that will faithfully proclaim Your word. Help me not to be stingy, but at the same time, I pray that my giving is not under pressure or compulsion because I've been subtly made to feel guilty about it. Help my heart to be pure in the gifts I give. May You be glorified through my giving. Amen.*

**And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.** 1 Corinthians 16:3

Over the years, translators have chosen one of two main ways of translating this verse. The first would be as the NKJV and others render it. The second would be such as the NIV and others render it. Side by side for comparison, they read:

And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. (NKJV)

When, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. (NIV)

The Greek could go either way, but the likely rendering is the second. The word "your" is inserted by translators in the NKJV because they have opted for the first view. Because of this, it could be misleading unless one knows that it is actually an inserted word.

At other times, Paul gave notes of recommendation concerning individuals (e.g., Romans 16:1), or he referred to letters of recommendation as a means of confirming authority or status (e.g., 2 Corinthians 3:1). He is the apostle with the authority concerning the matter, and it is his letter which would be received in the light which is needed for such a gift to the saints.

Therefore, Paul has asked those in Corinth to set aside money weekly. After his arrival, the money would be collected and counted. Those in Corinth would select men considered honorable and capable of taking the money to Jerusalem, and Paul would send a letter of introduction concerning the gift. This line of reasoning will become more obvious when the next verse is evaluated.

It could be that translators and scholars who hold the first view have been concerned that there is a letter written by Paul which had been lost and not included in the Bible. However, this is a non-starter. The Bible refers to other communications by writers of the Bible which are not included in its pages. Everything written by a prophet or apostle which is in the Bible is inspired and a part of the word of God, but not everything written by a prophet or apostle was inspired by God.

Finally, the word for "gift" here literally means "grace." Such is the nature of a gift for ministering to others. Such gifts should be without compulsion, and they should be without strings attached.

Life application: God has ensured that His word has everything necessary to guide us in our walk and instruct us in our theology. We have a reliable witness to His plan of redemption in the pages of the Bible.

*Lord God, You have given me so much in this life of mine. Help me to be gracious in my giving to others as well. Give me a heart to never attach strings to a gift that I give, and to never act out of a sense of compulsion either. Instead, may my heart be right towards You in whatever I give to others and in how I handle the many blessings which have come from Your open hand of grace. Amen.*

**But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.** 1 Corinthians 16:4

In the previous verse, Paul mentioned that brothers from Corinth should be selected to carry their gift to Jerusalem. He also mentioned letters of approval to accompany them, evidencing apostolic authority in the matter. However, if the gift were of a sufficient size to warrant a personal visit by Paul, he would accompany them as well. This would be to highlight the exceptional generosity of the Gentiles towards the saints in Jerusalem.

No matter what though, Paul would not consider taking the money by himself without some from Corinth to accompany it. This was a safeguard in several ways. There were factions in Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 1:12), and those opposed to him could make unfounded claims against him. There were also many enemies which Paul had made in Jerusalem when he converted to Christ. To ensure that the entire process was kept above reproach, it was necessary for brothers in Corinth to be a part of the traveling party.

It is seen in Romans 15:25 that Paul did go with them when the gift was finally prepared. It is also noted in Acts 20:4 that delegates from Corinth went as well. In all, Paul set an exceptional example for others to follow. When matters of such importance are concerned, every detail is to be kept above reproach.

Life application: The Lord showed in the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16) that we are to be trustworthy with earthly riches. If we fail at this, then how can we be trusted with true riches? Let us take this to heart and remember that we have a responsibility to honesty in all matters because we bear the name of the Lord.

*Lord God, help my heart to be free from thoughts of greed, immorality, and self-centeredness. This is just a temporary life and I know that You are far more pleased with how I act towards the eternal riches You offer than You ever would be if I became a*

*millionaire with a large house, fancy cars, and glamorous looks. Those things will fade, but a heart directed toward Your glory will shine for eternity. Help me to remember this always. Amen.*

**Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia).** 1 Corinthians 16:5

At some point, Paul had sent a letter to the Corinthians (which is not a part of the Bible) that he would travel to Corinth from Ephesus, stay for a while, and then go to Macedonia. After his trip to Macedonia, he intended to return to Corinth for a longer stay before heading to Jerusalem.

However, due to the chaotic state of affairs in Corinth, he decided that it would be better for all involved that he instead would forego this first trip to Corinth. Otherwise, he would be compelled to personally speak to them about the issues which are contained in 1 Corinthians rather than write them. If he did, it would be a meeting of discipline rather than a loving embrace. In this, he only had the best in mind for all involved, but the Corinthians viewed his actions as a snub.

He explains himself fully at several key points in 2 Corinthians concerning this matter, but 2 Corinthians 1:23 gives us a direct statement from Paul's heart concerning his actions -

"Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth."

Life application: We have all felt snubbed at various times in our lives and we often allow these occurrences to cause rifts between ourselves and the perceived offender. But quite often, such snubs are unintentional or misunderstood. It is right, particularly among believers, to give others the benefit of the doubt and be willing to listen to the reasons for their actions and then to move on, letting go of the resentment we have harbored.

*Lord, so many times I've felt snubbed by others over things which they have done or left undone in a matter which concerns me. At times, I've found that some of those occasions were actually intended to keep me from personal inconvenience and it was me who misunderstood. At other times, what happened was simply unintentional. I would ask that You help me with difficult times like this so that I handle them without making*

*things worse. Be with me as I encounter such personal conflicts and guide my actions rightly. Amen.*

**And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go.** 1 Corinthians 16:6

The words Paul writes here are fulfilled in Acts 20:1-6. He did go through Macedonia and eventually came to Greece. And he did, in fact, spend three full months there. The record in Acts 20 reads as follows -

<sup>1</sup>"After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to *himself*, embraced *them*, and departed to go to Macedonia. <sup>2</sup> Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece <sup>3</sup> and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. <sup>4</sup> And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. <sup>5</sup> These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas. <sup>6</sup> But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days." Acts 20:1-6

As you can see from this account, Paul's life was directed by events beyond his control and yet he adapted to them as they came about. In the end, each step was a part of God's greater plan and the events, though surely distressing at the time, all were a part of fulfilling that plan as intended.

God is directing us in the same way as well. We may feel that life is coming at us with all kinds of unexpected issues which hamper us from doing our duties for the Lord, and yet the very things which occur are those things which He knew would come about. Nothing is outside of His knowledge and providential care.

Life application: If we can remember that God knows in advance of the trials and difficulties we face, it can help us to mentally accept those things. The difficulty isn't lessened, and the trial still exists, but how we are able to cope with it while it is occurring can make all the difference in the world to our mental state. So let us trust in His foreknowledge and be ready to accept all things that come our way, both good and bad.

*Lord, going through difficult times isn't a barrel of joy, but knowing that You are there with me in them makes them so much easier to handle. I have the comfort and reassurance that You knew I would be where I am and that You felt I could bear up under the pressures that would come. Because of this, I will rest in You and trust that everything is as it should be. You have a greater plan which is being worked out, and I am a part of that! Thank You for this reassurance. Amen.*

**For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits. 1 Corinthians 16:7**

This refers back to verse 5 and Paul's intent to visit the Corinthians as he passed through Macedonia. Rather than merely stopping for a short, hurried visit, he desired to spend a greater amount of time with them. Having stated his intention, he adds in the notable phrase, "...if the Lord permits." He was aware that his movements were guided by the Lord and that anything could change his plans.

In this statement, he is granting the sovereignty of the Lord over his life and actions. James asks all believers to have this same attitude in matters relating to life -

"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit';<sup>14</sup> whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.<sup>15</sup> Instead you *ought* to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'<sup>16</sup> But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil." James 4:13-16

This is a principle not only for life decisions though. It is also a principle for learning and growing in our spiritual walk with the Lord. In his instruction to the Hebrew audience to whom the apostle was writing, we read these words from the book of Hebrews -

"Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary *principles* of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,<sup>2</sup> of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.<sup>3</sup> And this we will do if God permits." Hebrews 6:1-3

No matter what the issue, we are only granted what the Lord allows. Therefore, if we are hindered in our plans, or if we are permitted to execute them, the Lord has granted the outcome. Likewise, if we are slow of learning or if we are a great teacher or

preacher, the Lord's hand is what shaped us for who we are. Therefore, the Lord is to be acknowledged as the One behind all things as He shapes us for His purposes.

Life application: What we possess came from God. Therefore, how can we boast over others? Let us be grateful for what we have, not envious of what others have. Let us be willing to give thanks and praise to the Lord for all of it. His hand of wisdom and grace has so placed us.

*Heavenly Father, I know that all that I possess has come from You. Even if I worked for it, You are the one who gave me the strength to work, the motivation to get up and accomplish the task, and the means by which I could do it. Therefore, how can I boast against another who has less and how can I be envious of another who has more? Help me not to get caught up in class-warfare, but to strive for excellence with what You have given me and to be satisfied with it. To Your glory alone I pray. Amen!*

**But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. 1 Corinthians 16:8**

There are often little clues interspersed throughout the book of Acts and the Epistles to show us when books were written, where they were written, etc. The book of 1 Corinthians is known to have been written at Ephesus based on this comment here. Paul was there and decided that he would stay there "until Pentecost."

Pentecost would have been known to the Jewish believers as the Feast of Shavuot, or Weeks, from Leviticus 23. Further, the believers - both Jew and Gentile - would know that this was the day that the Holy Spirit descended on the believers in Jerusalem, thus initiating the church age. Paul will explain in the coming verse why he was to tarry in Ephesus until this time. After that, he would continue with his travels.

The period in Acts which this points to is found in Acts 19. It is noted, however, in Act 20:16 that he amended his plans and decided to arrive in Jerusalem prior to Pentecost. Things kept creeping up in his life which caused plans to change, but he accepted them and continued on in the understanding that the Lord was directing his feet according to a higher wisdom.

Life application: If you are being obedient to the Lord and seeking His will in your life, then wherever you are is exactly where you are supposed to be. He is using you and directing you, even if it might not always seem that way.

*Lord, it sure is nice to know that wherever I am, it is exactly where I am supposed to be. If I wasn't Your servant, I would always be wondering if I was doing the right thing or making the right steps in life. But because I am Yours, I am completely confident that where I am is where I should be. You are directing me according to Your wisdom as I walk along this highway which You have set before me! Thank You for this. Amen.*

**For a great and effective door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries.**

1 Corinthians 16:9

Here Paul explains the reason why he wanted to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost. It is because a "great and effective door has opened to me." The metaphor of a door is common in the New Testament and is even seen in the old, often translated as "gate." Jesus said in John 10 that He is the Door (or gate, depending on translator's choice of word). In Revelation 4:1, John saw a door (same word as used in John 10) open in heaven at which time he was taken up through it to see his vision of the future.

Jesus speaks of an open door in Revelation 3:8, and that He is knocking at the door waiting for it to be opened in Revelation 3:20. Each of these uses carries a spiritual connotation and Paul uses it in this manner as well. A few other examples of his use of the word are:

"Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles." Acts 14:27

"Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord..." 2 Corinthians 2:12

"...meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains...." Colossians 4:3

He uses the word in a consistent manner. Opportunities for spreading the gospel are considered a "door" of opportunity. There is a narrow opening which leads to a large space on the other side. And the only way to get to that large space is to go through the door. The symbolism is elegant. If the door isn't used, then what lies beyond it remains unchanged.

But Paul continues with his thought in saying, "and *there are* many adversaries." In his travels, there was always the constant challenge of those who would work against the

message he proclaimed. While he was attempting to open the doors around him, there were those who sought to keep the door closed. If they could, they would nail it shut to keep him and his message out forever. Despite their efforts, Paul was adamant that he should continue to press forward to bring light to those who so desperately needed it.

Life application: In the Bible, words which seem to simply be a part of a thought and without any further import can actually have great significance. Never stop contemplating individual words and what the spiritual meaning behind them is. There is great treasure to be found in word studies because God uses tangible items to teach us spiritual and moral lessons.

*Heavenly Father, as I read and study Your word, one thought keeps coming into my mind - "There is wisdom here." The more I pry into its depths, the more I realize how wondrous it is. Forgive me for not spending more effort in the study of Your word. From today on, I ask for a heart which burns to know it more and more. It is what tells me of Jesus and He is the One who reveals You to me. Thank You for Your superior word! Open my eyes to its majesty! Amen.*

**And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do.** 1 Corinthians 16:10

Earlier in the epistle, Paul had mentioned that Timothy had been sent to the Corinthians. He is reminding them of that now. That is found in Chapter 4 -

"For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church." 1 Corinthians 4:17

Also, from the book of Acts, it is known that Erastus joined Timothy on this mission, and they went by way of Macedonia -

"So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time." Acts 19:22

Paul does say "if" in this verse though because at times plans changed and in the uncertainty of ancient travel there were often delays or diversions. There isn't any record of Timothy in Corinth after this, but it doesn't mean it didn't happen. No matter what though, if Timothy arrived, Paul implored them to "see that he may be with you without fear."

Timothy was young and the times he is recorded show someone who had a rather timid and somewhat sensitive disposition. If the Corinthians were willing to argue with and about Paul, how much more intimidating might they be to Timothy! In Corinth, there were headstrong people, people of high society, people of argumentative dispositions, and the like. Paul wanted them to ensure that none of such intimidating aspects be directed towards him. And the reason is that "he does the work of the Lord, as I also do."

Timothy was young in the faith, but he was strong enough in it to accept mission duties and to carry on the work which Paul required of him. Because he was the apostle's spokesman, Paul wanted the Corinthians to treat him with the respect of the apostle's office.

Life application: There are offices within the faith which call out for respect regardless of the age or constitution of the holder of that office. If they have been entrusted with specific authority, they deserve the respect associated with it. Should charges or accusations of a person in such an office arise, the Bible gives the appropriate measures for them to be considered. Otherwise, the office and the office holder should be afforded the honor they deserve.

*Lord God today is a new day with many exciting possibilities. Help me to make the most of it and to use the time wisely. When I come to the end of the day, I would pray that there won't be regrets for time wasted or opportunities missed. And so now, before the day gets going, I pray that You will be with me, direct me, and use me according to Your wisdom, not mine. Help me to be effective in my use of this precious day which You have granted to me. Amen.*

**Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren. 1 Corinthians 16:11**

This is still referring to Timothy. Paul already asked the Corinthians to "see that he may be with you without fear." Not only should he not be intimidated, but he shouldn't be looked down on either. Timothy was probably unaware of this kindness which is added into the letter. We can imagine Paul saying to him, "Don't worry, you'll be fine. They will treat you well." But to ensure his words were met with like action, he is imploring them to so act. It would be a confidence-building moment in the life of Timothy.

After a proper reception and a welcome stay, Paul also implores them to "send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me." This is another petition for grace to be

bestowed upon him. When Timothy departed Corinth, Paul wanted it to be with a blessing and in a brotherly way. He knew that if these things didn't come about, Timothy might be ruined as a future leader. But by ensuring that he was cared for, he would then more readily accept future challenges in the mission field or in other ministries.

Finally, this verse notes, "...for I am waiting for him with the brethren." As the NKJV translates this, it sounds as if Paul is with others and together they are awaiting the arrival of Timothy. If this is a proper translation, he has added it in to deter the Corinthians from anything but bestowing the highest kindness on Timothy, knowing that he will be meeting with Paul and so any negative actions or attitudes would come to him directly.

Other translations read this verse as, "... I am expecting him along with the brothers." This would mean that Paul was expecting the arrival of both Timothy and those who were with him. If this is the correct rendering, then it would add even more weight to Paul's request for kindness to Timothy. Not only would he have a report of the Corinthians' conduct, but it would be supported by those he traveled with. Either way, by adding the ending comment, he is ensuring that those in Corinth actually treat Timothy in a kind manner and that he would hear about it if they didn't.

Life application: Just because someone may seem young, timid, or uninformed in certain areas of life, it doesn't mean that they are incapable of doing the Lord's work. Everyone has been given gifts which they can use to His glory. We should never despise their weaknesses, but rather exalt their strengths.

*Lord, help me to look at others within Your church with the same eyes that You do. Each person has abilities that they can use to improve the body of believers. I know that the task for me is to encourage them in the things they can do rather than discourage them because of the things they cannot do or that they don't want to do. Help me to have discerning eyes that can see their strengths and overlook their limitations. Each person is a valuable member of the whole. Help me to realize this. Amen.*

**Now concerning *our* brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time. 1 Corinthians 16:12**

In 1 Corinthians 1:12, Apollos was noted as one of those who the factions within Corinth identified with. Paul is including this verse particularly to show that he had in no way hindered Apollos in coming to Corinth, and that he had in fact "strongly urged" him to

come. It is probable that his presence was requested in the letter that precipitated Paul's letter to them (see 1 Corinthians 7:1). If he didn't come, some may blame Paul for hindering him. But this verse shows this wasn't the case.

Despite the possible request by the Corinthians for Apollos to visit, and Paul's urging him to go, "he was quite unwilling to come at this time." The reason for this seems to be that he didn't want to cause further dissensions at Corinth. He and Paul probably read their letter together and said, "What a hornet's nest!" From that, Paul wrote this letter of response in order to answer their many questions. By not coming with the letter, it would give the Corinthians time to consider its words and to work towards harmony rather than increased divisions.

In this, it is notable of Apollos that he restrained himself from going. Further, he promised them that, "He will come when he has a convenient time." At some point, probably when news that the church was working together harmoniously, he would join them and minister to them.

In all, Paul's words concerning Apollos show that there was friendship between them and that they both had the best intent in mind for the church at Corinth.

Life application: Reading how Paul and Apollos handled the divisions at Corinth can give us insights into how to handle these same types of things in our own churches. Unfortunately, if pastors, elders, or others in authority promote such divisions they can truly get out of hand. It is important to try to not participate in these factions and to be aware of how detrimental they can be.

*Lord Jesus, I am a member of Your church, and it is my desire to honor You with my conduct in it. At times, factions and egos step in and attempt to divide the congregation. Whenever they do, it always leads to hard feelings and unhappy times of worship. Instead of rejoicing in You, we stew over the disharmony of the church. Lord, help me to be one who works for harmony and fellowship. Help me to keep the eyes of the people on You at all times. Amen.*

**Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.** 1 Corinthians 16:13

Paul has laid out his doctrine, explained his intentions, and given his directions for the coming gift which is to be taken to Jerusalem. Now he immediately turns to final exhortations beginning with, "Watch!" This is a common sentiment found in the Bible. Ezekiel was designated a watchman, Jesus exhorted the disciples to watch on several

occasions, and Paul follows along with this same admonition. It is an exhortation he uses elsewhere as well -

"Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober."

-1 Thessalonians 5:6

Next he tells them to "stand fast in the faith." Five other times Paul uses the term "stand fast" for various reasons. One of them parallels his thought here which is concerning doctrine -

"Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle." 2 Thessalonians 2:15

After this, he tells them to "be brave." This is the Greek word *andrizó*. It means, "Act like men!" It is its only use in the New Testament, but the Greek translation of the OT does use it. Notably it is seen in Joshua 1 several times such as in this verse -

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God *is* with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9

These and similar exhortations are found all around the Bible. They implore us to always be alert and careful. Jesus gives quite a few of them to the seven churches of Revelation and towards the end of Revelation. For those in Corinth, like many churches today, they are especially important because of the spiritual lethargy which permeates the church. As John Chrysostom notes, in Christian matters the church is "drowsy, unstable, effeminate, and factious." Only by being on constant guard will we steer clear of disaster as we await the return of our righteous Lord.

Life application: As a church, when we think we have it made, we should probably step back and evaluate where we really stand. Reading and taking to heart the seven letters to the seven churches of Revelation is a good way of making a personal evaluation of where any individual congregation stands at any time. Let us heed the words of the Lord and be watchful concerning our spiritual state.

*Heavenly Father, a large comfy church with lots of donations coming in, coffee going out, and great light shows at every service does not necessarily indicate either a healthy church, or one which is safe from falling. I know that what You cherish is adherence to Your word, a right explanation of it, and congregants willing to place sound doctrine above ease and comfort. Help me to be such a person and to be an example of such a*

*person to others. My hope and desire is not to be comfortable on Sunday morning, but to have Your approval when I face You for judgment. Amen.*

**Let all *that you do* be done with love.** 1 Corinthians 16:14

Paul wrote extensively in 1 Corinthians 13 about love. In 1 Corinthians 14:1, he admonished us to "follow the way of love." Now his words expand on our relationships once again by commanding us to "Let all *that you do* be done with love." In whatever we do, we should consider love first. But this isn't the sappy love that is carelessly tossed around by the world at large. Sometimes love involves punishment. It is unloving to allow people to follow paths of self-destruction, to abuse themselves or others, or to leave crimes unpunished.

Love, first and foremost, must be a love of God and of His commandments. If these are followed, then it would be unloving to condone immorality. An example of this is the modern concept of accommodating homosexual behavior and calling it "loving." This is exactly the opposite of true love. Such behavior results in mental disorders, broken lives, and separation from God which will lead to eternal hell. Therefore, it cannot be "loving" to open the church to this behavior as if it is morally acceptable.

It is unloving towards God to allow capital crimes to go unpunished or to reduce the sentence which is deserved according to His standard. Such actions will only cause others to see and not fear. Society will then inevitably grow more and more brazen, and crime will inevitably become worse and more common; such is seen in our society in ever-increasing amounts because we fail to offer godly love which is based on obedience to His commands.

On the positive side of this commandment, we are to show mercy, be gracious, be willing to forgive when asked of it, etc. These are considered loving actions because they are attributes which God also displays. All of who we are should be directed towards godly love as is portrayed in Scripture.

Finally, Paul's words are above all a note to believers about their relationships with other believers. This then is in line with Peter's similar thought found in this verse -  
"Above all, love each other deeply..." 1 Peter 4:8

Life application: Our command to do everything in love must be taken in a biblical context or our actions will often be anything less than truly loving. Let us abhor sin, not allowing it to enter into our congregations. And at the same time, let us direct our

affections towards building others up and being kind and gracious in our dealings with them.

*Heavenly Father, Your word tells us that we are to be loving in everything we do. And yet, society has taken this to unintended extremes. It is unloving to allow others to continue to live in depraved or morally wicked ways. What society calls "loving" is often contrary to Your word and can only lead to sadness, death, and hell. Help eyes to open up to the truth of Your love. It is a love which asks us to be holy and to conduct ourselves in a manner which leads to life and an eternity in Your presence. Turn our hearts to true love, O Lord. Amen.*

**I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and *that* they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints—**  
1 Corinthians 16:15

Paul now makes a firm request to "the brethren" concerning "the household of Stephanas." They are mentioned as having been baptized by Paul in 1 Corinthians 16. His thought here begins with an urging and then it gives the "who" and the "why" concerning the urging. Only in the next verse will the "what" of the urging detail.

But there is also an unstated possible reason for Paul's words. It seems from verse 17 that Stephanas was one of the ones who carried the ill-report of what was going on in Corinth to Paul. The circumstances of that report is seen in 1 Corinthians 1:11 -

"For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's *household*, that there are contentions among you."

If this is so, then Paul's words are intended to look at the devotion of Stephanas to the Corinthians and not to any supposed back-biting or tattling. The issues Paul has been discussing have needed to be addressed to maintain right doctrine and also purity within the congregation. There is nothing out of order in reporting such infractions. If Stephanas was a part of this, Paul's words make all the more sense.

He notes now that "the household of Stephanas" were "the firstfruits of Achaia." This alone shows a dedicated soul. The first to come forward is always the one who steps into the unknown. After the first, the others will often naturally follow. And so, he set an example which was emulated by others. But he didn't stop there. He and his family "devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints."

The work of this noble family was with the heart of others within the faith. If he was a member of Chloe's household who carried the news of the failings of the Corinthians to Paul, it was for their benefit, not their condemnation. Because of this, Paul is urging that they be so recognized for their efforts.

Life application: Those who minister to the saints are often those who aren't even in leadership positions. It is good and proper to recognize such people and to return the favor when possible. Such actions should never be just a one-way street.

*Lord God, it is pretty wonderful that there are people in the church I attend who quietly minister to others. They help out with things that need to be done, they bring things for others to enjoy, they provide a hug when necessary, and they quietly work to keep others happy. They have their own little ministry that is often overlooked and yet it is a great asset to the overall congregation. Look into their deeds and reward them abundantly O God. Thank You for such caring people. Amen!*

**...that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us.**

1 Corinthians 16:16

Taken together along with the previous verse, we will get a better sense of Paul's intent-

"I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and *that* they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints—<sup>16</sup> that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with *us*."

He wants those in Corinth to see their necessary duty because of the voluntary duty of another. Just as the household of Stephanas has "devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints" they should likewise "submit to such." Even though Stephanas was probably a slave belonging to Chloe's household, he was a free man in Christ. In this status, Paul is asking those free Corinthians to submit themselves to him. In Christ, there are truly no distinctions which the world notices. Hence, we get a better sense of Paul's words in Galatians 3 -

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28

This is the reality which is found in this new life in which we live. Those who minister in the Lord are to be given the honor of that ministry, regardless of their worldly position.

This includes slaves such as Stephanas "and to everyone who works and labors" in the service of Christ.

Life application: There are some very fine Bible teachers who have day jobs that might seem lowly - janitors, electricians, farmers, or grocery baggers may be great theologians willing to share their knowledge with others. If so, they should be given both respect and gratitude for their efforts.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for those regular folks who have day jobs and busy schedules and yet who are willing to take on the additional work of Bible teaching. I would pray that those who learn under them would give them an additional touch of respect and a sharing of their own blessings in acknowledgement of their faithful service. It is good and proper that they are recognized for their service to You and their careful attention to Your word. Thank You for blessing them. Amen.*

**I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied. 1 Corinthians 16:17**

These three who came to Paul at Ephesus were probably the ones chosen to carry the letter referenced in 1 Corinthians 7:1. They traveled together until they reached Paul and probably had a good discussion as they reviewed the words of the letter. They also must have included discussions concerning the "divisions" of the church mentioned so often by Paul. At the same time, the fellowship with Paul, and their ability to accept his counsel, would have encouraged him.

He knew he had to travel to Corinth, and he knew that problems existed there. This probably caused him to anguish, as a father would over a child that had such problems. With their arrival and their working together over these issues, he was given a sense of comfort. The words "for what was lacking on your part they supplied" seem to show a rebuke and are probably better rendered as the ESV states - "because they have made up for your absence."

In other words, Paul felt the absence and the miles between them which kept him from providing the sound counsel they needed. With the coming of these three, the miles melted away and with them went the frustrations that he had felt. Rather than a rebuke, this is a grateful and filling comment made by Paul to his beloved church.

Life application: Sometimes only the presence of another can cut through one's loneliness and frustration. If you perceive someone is having difficult times and you can

personally visit them then this is often the preferred option. Surely nothing can replace human contact and a smile from a friend.

*Lord, some people just seem to know when to reach out to others and fill the voids that they are facing. Nothing can replace a friendly voice and a welcome smile. I know this, and so I would ask that You would fill me with this type of wisdom. Help me to know when to step in and offer that special touch to those in need. I know that they will benefit from it and that I will always learn from it as well. Amen.*

**For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.**

1 Corinthians 16:18

Still speaking of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus who had come to Paul with the news of those in Corinth, he notes that "they refreshed my spirit." Paul carried with him the thoughts of the churches he had established and those he had come to know. He certainly wondered how they fared, grieved when they strayed, and rejoiced as they pursued the Lord. Hearing about those in Corinth was therefore a refreshing thing, even if much of the news was less than wonderful.

By knowing where there were trials or dysfunctions, he could set them on the right course. This is exactly the purpose of writing this letter. But this wasn't just a one-way street. Not only was he refreshed by their coming, but their spirit was as well. He would carry the letter back which would answer their questions, tell them of how he was, and direct them in how to handle the divisions which had arisen within the church. The anxieties and suspicions that were felt on both sides would be quelled through this encounter.

And because these three were willing to leave their home and travel to Paul to have these things come about, Paul asks them to "therefore acknowledge such men." Missionaries travel to places others don't. They carry a message which is there for the refreshing of spirits. Musicians often travel with gospel songs intended to uplift the churches they encounter. Evangelists travel spreading their message as they go. These and others should be acknowledged for their efforts.

Life application: In the church, there are a host of duties which need to be accomplished in order to get the message of Jesus Christ out. Each person can do something, but those who bear the heaviest of burdens should be given the highest of praise. Be sure to thank those who minister in various ways, acknowledging them for their efforts.

*Lord, I really am grateful for those who step out and carry the message which needs to be proclaimed. Missionaries, musicians, evangelists, and even street preachers are all doing something in hopes of increasing Your kingdom and spreading Your word. I pray for them today, asking that You give them an extra blessing and a hand of comfort as they continue with their most notable of efforts. Amen.*

**The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. 1 Corinthians 16:19**

"Asia" here is the general area of Asia Minor. The churches that were in that region obviously communicated with one another often. In their communications, they remembered those in Corinth with fraternal thoughts. As Paul traveled, he certainly brought up the many areas he had visited in conversation, remembering their needs and speaking of their strengths.

Along with the churches, Aquila and Priscilla wanted to make sure those in Corinth knew they were still on their hearts and minds. They had previously been members of the church in Corinth and moved with Paul as he traveled. Together "with the church that is in their house" they sent on their hearty greetings.

Paul's final salutations are careful to include such heartfelt thoughts, knowing that such remembrances add a personal touch to the communication. In the case of this letter, it would help those in Corinth to assimilate all his advice and instruction in a welcoming manner. The issues he addressed were many and very sensitive in nature. For him to add these thoughts from other churches and people shows that they were held in a positive light during his conversations with them. It is a tactful way of closing out this important epistle.

Life application: Speaking well of others when they aren't around is always a favorable way of ensuring that they know they are loved. Such words of favor inevitably will get back to the one being spoken of. Let our words about others always be salted with grace and charity.

*Lord, how easy it is for misunderstandings to come up between people when conversations are misconstrued. Help my words to be filled with grace and charity and with thoughtful consideration as I speak or write. Because misunderstandings arise, feelings are inevitably going to be hurt unless intent is clear and the words are spoken in love. And should my words be taken in a wrong way, give me the ability to correct the*

*confusion in a manner which will bring restoration to the relationship. Help me in this Lord. Amen.*

**All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. 1 Corinthians 16:20**

Paul has completed his short list of those he singled out for personal greetings. Now, in the same thought to promote the general good of the congregation, as well as a deep-seated display of love, he tells them to "Greet one another with a holy kiss." This was, and still is, the custom in many parts of the world. The kiss is intended as a greeting just as western nations today shake hands or possibly hug, depending on familiarity. In the Far East, a deep and respectful bow is given in substitute of this.

Although Paul's letters are prescriptive, intent must always be considered. Is Paul mandating that all people in all churches meet one another "with a holy kiss?" The answer is "No." The reason why this is important is because there are small pockets of churches that mandate this even today and even in western societies. However, the intent of the kiss of greeting is cultural, not merely biblical. Proof of this follows from the first kiss noted in the Bible in Genesis 27:26 when Isaac blessed his son Jacob before he departed to Padan Aram.

From that point, the kiss is seen among the covenant people and among those who aren't yet in the covenant, thus demonstrating the cultural nature of the greeting. It is used in the same way we use a handshake. When Jacob met Rachel, without knowing her in any familiar way yet, he kissed her. In 2 Samuel 20, the following exchange begins with a kiss of greeting and ends in death -

"Then Joab said to Amasa, 'Are you in health, my brother?' And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not notice the sword that *was* in Joab's hand. And he struck him with it in the stomach, and his entrails poured out on the ground; and he did not *strike* him again. Thus he died."

-2 Samuel 20:9, 10

In 1 Samuel 20:41, David and Jonathan, close male friends, gave a fraternal kiss in accord with the culture before departing. And Proverbs 27:6 notes the following -

"Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend,  
But the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful." Proverbs 27:6

This demonstrates clearly that the kiss is cultural because even enemies will kiss rather than shake hands. This is seen in these parts of the world today when leaders who are at war still greet each other with a kiss. Exchanging "kisses" with "shaking of hands" in this Proverb would hold exactly the same meaning and intent.

And as a premier example of this, read the following exchange between Jesus and Simon the Pharisee -

"And He said to him, 'You have rightly judged.' Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped *them* with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which *are* many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loves little.'" Luke 7:43-47

And of course, the most famous kiss in history is recorded concerning Judas' betrayal of Jesus and reflects the sentiments of Proverbs 27:6 (above) perfectly.

It is important then to understand the cultural nature of this admonition by Paul lest we get swept up into legalism over something which is not intended for all cultures and in all situations. If a person with an immune deficiency were to use this verse in a prescriptive manner, he could soon die from receiving the germs of others.

Finally, the kisses in these and other verses throughout the Bible which are between men and men (such as David and Jonathan noted above) are not in any way intended to convey the perverse sin of homosexuality as modern liberals often imply. They are merely cultural and welcoming displays just as handshakes are today. To imply this in their writings shows a disregard for God's order in the natural world.

Life application: If you are in Rome, do as the Romans do. If you are in Japan, do as they do. It wouldn't be appropriate to go to church in the Far East and attempt to hug, kiss, or even shake the hands of another unless they first offered. If you are in a mid-eastern area, a fraternal kiss may accompany a greeting. In America, a hearty handshake and maybe a friendly hug is the custom. The intent of Paul's words is promoting warmth and harmony between believers, not causing offense.

*Lord God, how grateful I am to travel the world and to see so many different cultures that worship You in their own way. And yet, each still exalts the wondrous work of Jesus. You truly are the God of the nations, and He is Lord over all people. The songs differ, layout of the meeting places varies, and the way prayers are conducted are unique, but when the Son is exalted, You O God are glorified! How good it is for brothers of all nations to dwell together in harmony. Amen.*

### **The salutation with my own hand—Paul's. 1 Corinthians 16:21**

It is evident from Paul's letters that he used what is known as an amanuensis, a scribe, to write his letters for him. What seems likely is that he had extremely poor vision, possibly from his encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus. Because of this, a scribe would write as he dictated and then he would authenticate the epistle with his own greeting. That a scribe is used is seen, for example, in Romans 16:22 -

"I, Tertius, who wrote *this* epistle, greet you in the Lord."

And so, as in several other letters, a personal greeting from Paul is given. Other examples are found in 2 Thessalonians 3:17 and Colossians 4:18. Also, in Galatians 6:11, there is an added thought which is worthy of note –

"See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!"

Some take this to mean that he wrote all of Galatians; others that he simply signed the letter in this way. Whichever is the case, the "large letters" seems to indicate a person with weak eyes. It also gave him easily recognized writing which would authenticate his authorship. This is important because in 2 Thessalonians 2, it appears that Paul was worried that someone may try, or actually did try, to forge a letter as if from him -

"Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, <sup>2</sup> not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come." 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2

Life application: Paul bore "a thorn in the flesh" which he petitioned the Lord to remove from him. It is speculated that this is referring to his bad eyesight. The truth is that the Lord could have healed him anytime, but chose not to, stating the reason that "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." In this, there is also the truth that Paul's letters were easily identifiable and therefore forged letters

would be shown as false. If you carry a perceived deficiency of some sort, the Lord can and will work with it to His glory. Rather than mourn over your deficiencies, exalt in them, knowing that they have placed you in a particular position for reasons that He is pleased to work through!

*Heavenly Father, there are things I can't do and areas where I am weak or even completely deficient. And yet, if I didn't have these failings, I wouldn't be who I am. I may have excelled in an area which kept me from relying on You. I may have had an ability which kept me from choosing a different path in work or in volunteering my time. And then I would have missed interaction with someone who needed me at that moment. Everything I am and everything I do has been shaped for an ultimate end that I cannot yet see. And so, I will trust that Your grace is sufficient for me and that Your strength is made perfect through weakness. I will rejoice in my deficiencies if they will but exalt You! Amen.*

**If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!**

1 Corinthians 16:22

This seems like an unusually harsh sentiment for Paul to introduce as he concludes his letter, but the entire content of the letter has been of doctrine, correction, and reproof. In chapter 15, he clearly laid out the truth of Christ's ministry, from the gospel itself all the way through its implication for man. If man accepts the gospel, he moves from death to life. If not, he remains spiritually dead and he will be destroyed, just as Death and Hades will be destroyed.

As an indication of Paul's intent, the word for "love" here is *phileo* not *agape*. This is a warm sort of love spoken of rather than the deeper "godly" and "reverent" love which *agape* normally refers to. And so, to understand Paul's intent, we can first go back to verse 20 which said, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." In that verse, the word for "kiss" is *philéma*, a word with the same root as *phileo*. Paul is probably tying the two words together in an emotional way.

The body of believers is to have the same heart for the Lord as they have for one another. It is not enough to be a tightly knit group of people who work well together, but to be one that is committed to the work and love of the Lord. If believers are willing to kiss one another and yet not kiss the Son, then their love is a misdirected love. In such an instance, Paul says "let him be accursed." The word from which this is translated is *anathema*. Properly, it means "a thing devoted to God." The implication then is

something that is accursed. There is to be no association with such a person within the fellowship because he has no true part in the fellowship.

Finally, Paul closes the thought with, "O Lord, come!" It is translated from the Aramaic words *marana* and *tha*. Taken together, we say *maranatha*, meaning "Lord come!" Some translators use them in the past tense - "Our Lord has come!" Others in the future - "Our Lord is coming!" Others simply use the Aramaic to avoid choosing one over the other. The Lord has come and the Lord is coming again. Whichever Paul was thinking, he proclaimed it after pronouncing his curse. Because of this, the Geneva Bible gives this thought –

"Let him be accursed even to the coming of the Lord, that is to say, to the day of his death, even for ever."

Life application: There are times where imprecations are appropriate. Far too many Christians fail to relay the truly serious nature of the gospel. There is one path to God and only one. Without Jesus Christ, there is only death and hell ahead. For those who understand this and yet fail to love the Lord, they are to be treated as outsiders in relation to the church. Unless they change their hearts towards Him, they are accursed.

*Lord God, help me to be firm in my convictions concerning biblical truths. There are many things in the Bible which we don't want to consider because of some personal issue. Because of this, we often align our friendships with what we want rather than what the Bible says. And so, Lord, do I hold to the Bible or is it more important to be their friend? In such times, give me the resolve to place Your word above all else. I know that in this I am showing my highest love to You, and this is my desire. Thank You for being with me in this. Amen.*

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. 1 Corinthians 16:23**

As with all of his epistles, Paul adds into his closing salutation a blessing which is a petition for divine favor to be upon his audience. In the Greek, there is a definite article in front of "grace." Quite often English translations will insert "the" for clarity, but it may not be in the Greek. However, it is here.

"The grace" is different than saying something like, "May grace from the Lord Jesus be with you." Paul is asking for a divine impartation of this attribute of the Lord to rest upon those in Corinth (and thus us!) and to sustain them in their walk. It must be truly

considered that those who are not obedient to the epistle are to be excluded from this petition.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 5 he wrote concerning a disobedient congregant, saying to "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." It should be obvious that until this person is willing to adhere to the sound instruction of the epistle, this petition for divine grace is not intended for him.

And yet, at the same time, we all fall short of one precept or another. Therefore, it must be considered that it is for those who earnestly strive for adherence to it, even if they do fall short. Such is the nature of grace; undeserved merit. Paul, in one form or another, closes out every one of his epistles with such a note of request for this divine favor. And even the last words of the Bible are very closely aligned with his words here. There John writes -

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen."

Life application: The Bible, time and again, asks for an undeserved blessing to be bestowed upon those who pursue it, even if they fall short of what it states. Such is the nature of grace, and such is the nature of our gracious Lord. As you walk along life's highway, take time to contemplate the wondrous grace which has been lavished upon you. And then thank the Lord and praise the Lord for that same grace.

*Lord God, too often I take the many blessings of this life for granted and I even look at Your grace as something I deserve. The beautiful flower that I walked by could have just not been there. The jumping of the porpoise in the ocean happened just as I looked out. The sunset was adorned with ten thousand clouds which captured every color on the painter's palette. Lord, I suppose that I could go on forever, but you know already... I have been blessed beyond measure and I thank You for it. Hallelujah to my God! Amen.*

**My love *be* with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.** 1 Corinthians 16:24

After a short introduction, Paul's words in this first epistle to the Corinthians began with grace and peace -

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

-1 Corinthians 1:3

Now his words end in love. This is a beautiful example of Paul's ability to take the most difficult of issues and weave them into a letter with painstaking care to ensure that they are neither misconstrued, nor taken in an ill light. During the letter, he has gone on a walk through the dark valley of discontent. He has gone over jagged rocks of disharmony, and over rough roads of bad-doctrine. He has traversed through a jungle of immorality. There in the midst of it, the sharp and painful thorns of misconduct caused the Corinthians to stray in their thinking.

He also traveled along a highway of introduced heresy. With each step, he confidently placed his feet where the snakes of wayward thinking could not strike out and ruin him. After all of this, and much more difficult terrain, he now arrives on the quiet and peaceful shore of a tranquil ending to the epistle with words of comfort and love. Such is the nature of Paul's heart for the Corinthians. He was willing to take himself and his doctrine through all of this to bring them to that contented place with him. May we so conduct ourselves in such matters as well!

Life application: It is time-consuming and difficult to mentor people who are caught in spiritual confusion. It is so much easier to simply say, "They had it coming." But to take the time to correct others in faulty doctrine is no less important than bringing a person to Christ. The reason for this is that those with faulty doctrine may be a witness of their beliefs to another at some point. If they teach an incorrect gospel, then the hearer of their words will never come to a saving knowledge of the Lord. Therefore, correction of doctrine is as important as the saving of souls.

*Lord God, today I ask for patience in my interactions with others who have misunderstood Your word. Grant me the right approach to handling such difficult matters so that I will not be confrontational or belligerent in my attitude as their questions come forth. I know that if their doctrine is wrong and they teach it to another person, that poor soul may never come to a saving knowledge of Your gospel truth. And so, help me in this. May my words be in love and my doctrine pure. Amen.*