

F. Wayne MacLeod

1

Corinthians

Light To My Path Bible Notes

INTRODUCTION

The first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians was written by Paul, possibly from Ephesus in response to a letter brought to him from the church of Corinth (1 Corinthians 7:1). It is immensely practical and addresses many questions the Corinthians were asking about, such as marriage, divorce (1 Corinthians 7), whether a believer should eat food sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 8), the use of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 9), and the doctrine of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15).

The apostle also addresses several problems in the church of Corinth,

including division among believers (1 Corinthians 3), resistance to his apostolic authority (1 Corinthians 4), sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 5), lawsuits among believers (1 Corinthians 6), and disorderly worship services (1 Corinthians 11, 12).

In this letter, Paul challenges the Corinthian believers to learn to draw upon the wisdom of God and shun the flesh (1 Corinthians 1:18-31). He teaches them how love ought to motivate their actions and attitudes (1 Corinthians 13), gives them insight into how to regain order in their corporate worship, and encourages them to stand behind faithful Christian workers and set apart an offering for the suffering saints in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 1

Verse 1

The epistle begins with the name of the author. He identifies himself as Paul. Notice his qualification to write this letter. He is an apostle of Christ Jesus. As an apostle, he has been given authority to speak on behalf of Christ. Paul makes it clear, however, that he did not choose this title himself, nor was it a result of human achievement or skill. He had been called by the will of Almighty God to perform this duty. Paul knew that he was undeserving of this role in the body of Christ. He had been a great

persecutor of the church and its worst enemy until he met the Lord Jesus. This letter shows us that the apostle took his role as a leader in the church seriously. He wrote this letter as an apostle and church leader to deal with issues that had arisen in the church.

Notice that the letter is also from "our brother Sosthenes." [Acts 18](#) describes Paul's time in Corinth. While there, Paul went to the synagogue every Sabbath and reasoned with the Jews seeking to persuade them about Jesus ([Acts 18:3](#)). When opposition to his message arose, the apostle was forced to leave the synagogue and went to the home of Titius Justus next door to the temple. Here he continued his preaching and teaching. This resulted in the conversion of some Jews to Christ, including Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue ([Acts 18:8](#)). When the Jews saw that people were turning to Christ, they seized a man by the name of Sosthenes, a ruler of the synagogue and beat him ([Acts 18:17](#)). We are not told in [Acts 18:17](#) whether Sosthenes was a

believer in Christ at the time of his beating. What is clear, however, are the words of the apostle in verse 1 – “our brother Sosthenes.” The implication is that Sosthenes was certainly now a believer in Jesus Christ.

It is unclear what role Sosthenes played in the writing of this epistle. We have no evidence that he wrote any part of it. It may be that he acted as a scribe for the apostle. What is also clear is that Sosthenes does not seem to be in Corinth at the time of writing, for the letter is from both Paul and Sosthenes.

Verse 2

Verse 1 tells us that the letter is from Paul and Sosthenes. We discover here for whom the letter was intended.

First, it is addressed to *“the church of God that is in Corinth.”* Paul had spent a year and a half in Corinth, according to [Acts 18:11](#). During his time there, a number of Jews accepted the Lord

Jesus as their Messiah and Saviour. This resulted in the establishment of the church in Corinth.

Second, the letter is addressed "to those sanctified in Christ Jesus." The word sanctified is ἁγιάζω (hagiázō) and refers to being made pure and clean. This cleansing was through "Christ Jesus" and His forgiveness and cleansing work on the cross of Calvary. In other words, the individuals to whom the apostle writes have experienced the transforming work of Christ in their lives, cleansing and forgiving them from sin and making them new creatures.

Third, the letter was written to those who were "*called to be saints*." In saying this, Paul reminds the believers in Corinth that they had a particular calling on their lives to be holy and to live for Christ and His purpose. They were to rise above the depravity of their culture and its ungodly ways to live a godly and Christ-honouring life.

Finally, notice that the letter was to *"all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."* In other words, the letter was not to stay in Corinth but to be shared with believers in every place who called on the Lord Jesus. This implies that the letter is for us as well. Its principles are not intended for one culture and one time period only. What Paul wrote would transcend time and culture and speak to everyone who called on the name of the Lord.

Verse 3

As was customary, Paul offered his blessing to those who would read his letter. His desire for these believers is that they would experience two great benefits from the Lord Jesus.

First, the apostle prays that the believers who read this letter would experience the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. From verse 2, we see that these

believers had already experienced grace in their salvation and calling to Christ Jesus. The grace of Christ is not a one-time event. We who know the Lord experience His grace over and over again in life. Forgiveness, cleansing, empowering and renewal are all evidences of this grace. All who want to be useful to the Lord and His purpose must experience this daily grace and unmerited favour of the Lord.

Second, Paul prays that those who read his epistle would also experience the peace of God in their lives. This peace has many facets. There is, first, peace with God through the Lord Jesus and His work on the cross. There is, secondly, peace with brothers and sisters in Christ. This, in particular, was an issue for the church in Corinth. Then there was peace amid opposition for their faith and the trials of life. This

peace came as the fruit of knowing Christ and the comfort of His promises.

Verse 4

The apostle begins his letter to the Corinthians with a note of thanks – “I give thanks to my God always for you.” Understand here that Paul spent a year and a half in Corinth. There had been much opposition to his ministry there. He had been kicked out of the synagogue. Despite this, the Lord God worked and brought a number of Jews to Himself. A church was established in the region of Corinth, and the message of the gospel continued to move out from there. Paul was grateful to the Lord for the wonderful grace of God extended to the Corinthians, many of whom lived in immorality and sin. This grace transformed their lives and made them children of God.

Though Paul reasoned daily in the synagogue and the home of Titius Justus, he understood fully that it was not his persuasive words that brought about this change but the grace of God. For this, he was truly grateful.

Verse 5

The grace of God extended to the Corinthians was truly wonderful in Paul's mind. He tells us that this grace *enriched* the believers in every way. The word "enriched" in the original language is πλουτίζω (ploutízō). It comes from the word ploutos referring to wealth. The idea is that they had been made rich and abundantly supplied. Notice four details about this enriching here.

First, the Corinthians were enriched "in every way." That is to say, their lives were radically changed. The grace of God touched every aspect of their lives.

Just as light penetrates the darkness and sheds its beams to every dark corner, so the grace of God broke through and transformed every aspect of their lives. Nothing escaped the transforming work of God. They were not the same people they had been.

Second, this enrichment was "in Him." That is to say, the lives of these believers could not be the same after their encounter with the Lord Jesus. Christ Jesus was the source of this grace and transforming work in their lives. He extended His unmerited favour to them, and they could never be the same again.

Third, the enrichment the Corinthians experienced was "in all speech." The word translated speech is λόγος (lógos). It relates to intelligent and wise words spoken. It is used to refer, for example, to the Word of God. John declared Jesus to be the λόγος (lógos) Word. Paul seems to be telling

the Corinthians that they had been given a message of great hope and comfort through the person of the Lord Jesus. With this great message came an obligation to share what Christ had done for them. The implication of the word λόγος (lógos) is that the word is spoken and shared with someone else.

Finally, the believers of Corinth were also enriched in "all knowledge." The Greek word Paul uses here is γνῶσις (gnōsis). The Corinthians had their eyes opened to the truth in Jesus Christ. Admittedly, that knowledge was not complete. They would grow daily and mature in their understanding. Still, the daily grace of Christ was enriching their experience and knowledge of God, His Son, and His purpose.

Verse 6

Paul tells the Corinthians that the testimony about Christ was confirmed

among them. This brings up two questions. First, what was the testimony about Christ? Second, how was the testimony confirmed among the Corinthians?

First, what was the testimony about Christ? The word testimony is derived from the Greek word μαρτύριον (martúrion). It refers to a witness who confirms a particular truth. What were the witnesses of Christ saying? They declared Him to be the Messiah, the Son of God. They testified to His healing and miraculous work and the power of His words as proof of His divinity.

Second, how was this testimony about Christ confirmed among the Corinthians? They had personally experienced the power of Christ in their church and personal lives. They had been enriched in every way by Christ, in word, knowledge and spiritual gifts. What others testified about Christ, they

were personally experiencing in their lives as well.

Verse 7

The testimony of Christ and His divine power was confirmed among the Corinthians. Notice how that testimony was established here — “you are not lacking in any gift.”

The believers in Corinth had received many spiritual gifts from God. These gifts demonstrated the power and testimony about Christ as the Messiah and Son of God. As a church, they were experiencing the power of God in their midst in many wonderful ways.

What is important for us to see here is that these powerful gifts were being poured out on the church of Corinth “as they waited for the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ.” All too often, we wait for the return of Christ to experience the powerful working of His

grace and gifts. The reality is the power of God, and His gifts are not for a future time but for us today. This is what the Corinthians were experiencing. The power of God was at work in their midst as they waited for the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Verse 8

From verse 7, we learn that the Lord gave the Corinthians every spiritual gift for the service of the kingdom. In verse 8, Paul tells his readers about two more blessings they had received from the Lord Jesus.

First, Paul tells the Corinthians that the Lord God would sustain them to the end. The word used for sustain is βεβαιῶ (bebaiō) which means to be strengthened, sure, reliable or firm. In other words, their salvation was assured and guaranteed. Of course, this did not mean that the enemy

would not be active in their midst. They would face persecution and trials in life, but the Lord would not abandon them in those times. He would keep them as His children and ensure their place at His side forever.

Second, not only would God sustain the Corinthians, but He would preserve them guiltless on the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is to say, there would be no sin that kept them from the salvation He had promised. Understand here that the Corinthians would certainly fall short of God's standard. Being guiltless does not mean that we do not sin. To be found guiltless implies that no sin would be held against them. That is because the work of Jesus on the cross paid the penalty for every sin they had or would commit so that no transgression would stand between them and the Father. All of this resulted from the work of the Son Jesus on the cross of Calvary.

Verse 9

The apostle reminds the Corinthians that God was faithful. This could not always be said of the believers in Corinth. They would fail their Lord. They would wander from His purpose at times. They would sin in word, attitude and deed. Their unfaithfulness did not change the faithfulness of God. He would patiently bear with them when they fell. His love and forgiveness were guaranteed. Nothing would change His commitment to them.

This faithful God had called them into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ, their Lord. That fellowship implied a relationship and participation in His salvation with all its blessings.

Verse 10

Paul moves now to speak to the believers in Corinth about some matters of concern. He reminded them that God

would be faithful to them but shows us that the Corinthians had fallen short of His purpose for their lives.

Paul pleads with his readers in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The request he was about to make of them was not his own idea. He speaks on behalf of Christ and in His authority. This was something the Corinthians needed to take seriously. Notice the threefold request of Paul here.

Paul's first request was that the Corinthians all agree. The apostle speaks here about the essentials of faith and Christian practice. To agree does not imply that I am in complete accord with a brother or sister. It does mean, however, that I am willing to work with them by putting aside my preferences for the greater good.

Second, Paul requests that there be no divisions among them in the church. The Corinthians were to work together

as one body. They were to put aside their differences and work with their brothers and sisters in Christ. They were to accept the diversity of the body of Christ and learn to work with this diversity for the sake of the kingdom of God. Each was to contribute to the whole so that the body moved forward as one for the sake of the Lord Jesus and His kingdom.

Finally, Paul requests that the Corinthian believers be united in the same mind and judgement. This would require submission and sacrifice. They were to strive for harmony of the body in its decisions. Instead of thinking only of themselves and their ideas, they were to think of the body and what would serve to advance the kingdom. Unity requires sacrificing individuality for the good of the whole.

Verse 11

We discover one of the reasons why Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians. A report had come to the apostle that there was quarrelling among them in the church. Believers were digging in and holding their ground, refusing to work with others of different opinions.

Paul tells the Corinthians the source of the information he had received. It was from "Chloe's people." This is the only mention of this individual in the Bible, so we cannot be certain of her identity. As Paul was likely in Ephesus when he wrote this letter (see [1 Corinthians 16:8](#)), it is possible that Chloe's people had returned from a trip to Corinth and informed Paul of the condition of the Corinthian church.

Verse 12

Paul had discovered from Chloe's people that the church of Corinth was experiencing division. He explains this

division here in verse 12. The church had divided over its preferred leaders. Some chose to follow Paul, others, Apollos, Cephas or Christ.

The fact of the matter is that this division was not theological, for Paul, Apollos, Cephas and Christ all taught the same truth. Each of these leaders, however, had their unique personality and differences that appealed to certain Corinthians. This then became a source of division for the body of Christ.

We all relate to different personalities, preaching styles, or leadership styles. The challenge for us as believers is to accept these differences, submit and learn from our leaders. It is easy to criticize and compare, but God calls us to learn to respect, love and grow under the leadership He places in our midst. The Corinthians had not been successful in doing this.

Verse 13

It is easy for leaders to soak up the praise and adoration of those who appreciate them. Paul did not fall into this trap. He challenged the Corinthian church to address the matter by showing them how foolish they were to divide over it. Notice how he handles the issue here.

First, the apostle asked the Corinthians if Christ was divided. While He was on this earth, the Lord Jesus presented one truth and one way to the Father. He challenged believers to unify under that truth and to hold fast to the work He accomplished on the cross. He gathered all believers under that cross, their only hope of forgiveness and a relationship with the Father. There was only one way to God. There was only one work that brought forgiveness. There was only one Saviour. There was

only one church and one truth it was to defend.

Second, Paul asked the Corinthians if he had been crucified for them. In other words, was Paul their Saviour, or did he preach Christ crucified? Paul shows the believers here that it was foolish to cling to him, for he could not save them from sin. He was not worthy of their worship or praise. All he could do was point them to Christ.

Finally, the apostle points the Corinthians to their baptism. When they were baptized, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. They declared by their baptism their commitment to Him as their Lord and Saviour. They had not been baptized in the name of Paul. They were not Paul's disciples but disciples of the Lord Jesus. They had never pledged their allegiance to Paul but to Christ.

The apostle shows the Corinthians that all praise was for the Lord Jesus. He alone was their Master and Lord. They were to unify under His name. They were not to allow their preferences to divide them. As leaders in the body of Christ, we focus on Christ. Like Paul, we are to point people to Him. We are not to desire the attention that ought to go to Christ. We are not to crave the praise that is due to Him alone.

Verse 14

Paul reprimanded the Corinthians for their division over their preferred leaders. He was grieved that anyone would focus on Him when they should devote their attention to Christ. The apostle concluded the last verse by reminding the church of Corinth that they had not been baptized in his name but in the name of the Lord Jesus, and He was to be their only Lord and Master.

Notice how this brings the apostle to a place of gratitude that he had not baptized any of them except Crispus and Gaius. Had he baptized them, they may have felt an undue allegiance to Paul. Paul does not crave the attention of the Corinthians. If anything, he wants them to take their focus off him and give it all to Christ.

Verse 15

The apostle was grateful that he had not baptized the believers in Corinth. While baptism is a command of Jesus Christ, even what Jesus commands can become an obstacle if misunderstood or misused. Paul understood that baptizing the Corinthians could have caused them to focus on Him rather than Christ. It is easy to get distracted even by good things. We can focus on the preacher rather than the message. We can become so focused on our ministry's success that we fail to give

glory to the Saviour. We can so desire praise that we strip Christ of what is due His name alone.

Verse 16

Paul told the Corinthians that he had not baptized any of them except Crispus and Gaius. Here in verse 16, he seems to correct himself. He remembered that he did also baptize the household of Stephanus. He concludes the verse by saying: "Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else."

Significantly, this error is not corrected in the letter. Paul forgot for a moment that he had baptized the household of Stephanus. This shows the humanity of Paul. He was prone to forgetfulness, just like any human being. He was not Christ. He was a simple person like the Corinthians who made mistakes, forgot and fell short of God's perfect standard.

He was not worthy of praise, and certainly, it was not worth dividing the church over him. He allows those who said "I am of Paul" to see his shortcomings in this forgetfulness.

Verse 17

The apostle understood his calling from Christ. He told the Corinthians that he had not been sent to baptize but to preach the gospel. While baptism was a command of God, Paul did not generally baptize those who came to Christ under his ministry. He left that for others to do. It is easy for us to become sidetracked by good things in our ministry. Paul clearly understood his calling and chose to focus on it. He knew he could not do everything. He had to leave some things undone if he was going to do what Christ had called him to do. The apostle knew that God had asked him to preach the gospel. This would be what took up his time

and effort. He would not allow other things, however good they were, to distract him from this calling. He knew that God would call others to do what he could not do or was not called to do.

Notice also that while called to preach the gospel, Paul did not do so with eloquent wisdom. He did not focus on preaching messages that would attract a crowd but distract them from the gospel. Paul consciously chose not to be eloquent or to impress people with great wisdom. It was not his desire to impress the people who heard him. He believed that by doing so, he would empty the cross of its power.

To empty the cross of its power is to fail to recognize the power of the message of the cross in itself and to supplement it with our efforts to convince and persuade people. The message of the cross alone is sufficient to change a life. It does not need our eloquence to make it more appealing or

powerful. It does not require our human wisdom to make it effective. The simple message preached in the power of the Spirit of God alone can save a soul. Our efforts to make it more appealing and powerful will only stand in the way and demonstrate our lack of confidence in its power. Paul believed that the simple message of the cross of Jesus Christ was sufficient to bring people into the kingdom.

Verse 18

In verse 17, Paul told the Corinthians that he did not preach the message of the cross with eloquence lest the power of the cross be emptied. He believed the simple message of the cross was sufficient to save a soul from sin. That did not mean, however, that everyone who heard it would be converted to Christ and receive new life. There were two types of people, according to Paul.

Their response to the gospel message was quite different.

First, some are “perishing.” The reality of the matter is that we were all perishing in sin. Paul, however, seems to be speaking much more specifically here. Those who are perishing are living under the consequences of sin and do not have eyes or ears to hear or understand the gospel’s message. To these individuals, the word of truth is folly. These individuals will continue on this path of rejection and die without Christ.

The second group Paul speaks of is those who “are being saved.” These individuals have been given ears to hear the gospel, hearts to receive it and minds to understand it. For these people, the gospel is the power of God. It is changing their lives and gives them hope of forgiveness and eternal life in the presence of Christ.

While we were all dead in our sins, some of us were rescued from that predicament. What is the difference between those who are perishing and those who are being saved? Ultimately it is the work of God that softens our hearts and gives us eyes to see. I could not heal my spiritual blindness myself. My spiritual deafness was not something I could cure with my willpower. This was a gift to me from God. It is a mystery why God opened my eyes and gave me understanding. But for the grace of God, I could still be among those who are perishing.

Verse 19

Paul quotes [Isaiah 29:14](#) here in the context of the response of two different groups to the message of the gospel. The Lord, speaking through Isaiah, tells us that He would destroy the wisdom of the wise and thwart the discernment of the discerning.

The wise and discerning Paul refers to are those with worldly wisdom and discernment. To these individuals, the simple message of the gospel preached in all simplicity is pure foolishness. These people have a great understanding of worldly ways but will perish in their sins because they reject the basic truth of the gospel.

Verse 20

Paul addresses three groups here in this verse. He speaks of the wise, the scribe and the debater of this age. These individuals were the great intellects of the day, teaching the wisdom of the world and debating great theories and principles.

The context of this verse is the preaching of the gospel and the response of various people to that message. The problem we are dealing with is sin. The simple message of the

gospel brings a solution to this issue. The question goes out, where are the wise? What do they propose for sin and evil? Where is the scribe who searched the law and interpreted it for the people? What is their solution to the problem of death and eternal life? Were are the great debaters of this world? How do they propose to change the heart of humankind? What alludes these great intellects of the world is resolved in the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

With all their scholarly debates and proposals, the great intellects of this world have still not found a solution to the problem of sin and evil. They have never been able to bridge the gap between God and humankind. They have never been able to transform their sinful nature into one that is holy and pleasing to God. The simple message of the gospel of Jesus Christ surpasses the

wisdom of this world. It proposes a solution that defies human logic.

Verse 21

Paul reminds his readers that God, in His wisdom, chose the “folly of what we preach to save those who believe.”

Knowing God is not a privilege reserved for those with great intellect and knowledge. Even a young child can know God.

Notice in particular here that Paul tells us that the “world did not know God through wisdom.” What Paul is telling us is that the way to God is not through human wisdom, study and reasoning. I have met individuals whose intellect kept them from accepting the gospel message by faith. The fact of the matter is that the message of the cross does not make sense to the human mind. Salvation is not an intellectual understanding but a miraculous rebirth

through the work of Christ on the cross and His Spirit in us.

Verse 22

Many kinds of people hear the message of the gospel. The offer of new life, forgiveness and a relationship with God is an incredible message. Many who hear such a message want proof of its validity. These people tend to fall into one of two categories.

First, there are those, like the Jews, who demand a sign. Before accepting the gospel, they want proof that it is everything it claims to be. The Jews of the New Testament wanted Jesus to heal them or perform a miracle to show that He was who He said He was. The problem is that they were impressed by the miracles and believed in him for a time but quickly turned their back on Him when He was crucified.

The gospel does not promise a trouble-free life or one that gives us everything we desire. It will lead to rejection, mockery and persecution at times. Those looking for a sign often fall when trouble comes, and they do not get the signs they want. These individuals ask for signs because they do not believe. They struggle with doubt and are in constant need of confirmation. Jesus asks us to trust Him even when there is no evidence of His presence and work and when everything seems to be falling apart in our lives.

The second category of person is the one who seeks wisdom. These individuals elevate human reason and intellect above all else. They need to understand and be able to prove things rationally. If something does not make sense, they are unable to accept it. Everything must pass through the filter of human reason.

The reality of the matter is that human wisdom is seriously limited. It is pure arrogance to assume that we can understand the mind of God. God is not limited to working in a way that makes sense to us. His ways are beyond our ability to understand. There will be times in our lives when all we can do is trust God when we can't understand what He is doing. If we only accept what we can fully understand, we will miss out on the incredible plan and purpose of a God whose ways are much higher than ours.

Verse 23

While Jews demanded a sign and the Greeks required an intellectual understanding, the apostle Paul preached the simple message of Christ. This message was a stumbling block to the Jews. It was an offence to their faith, tradition and law. They could not accept that Jesus was who

He said He was. As for the Gentiles, the message Paul spoke did not make sense to them. It seemed like Paul was out of his mind and preached pure “folly.”

Despite the opposition of the Jews and Gentiles, the apostle Paul continued to preach the simple message of Christ crucified and risen from the dead. It did not matter to him that some were offended by his word. Nor did it matter that others considered him a fool for preaching this message. The apostle continued to share the good news of Jesus Christ, trusting God to apply it to the lives of those who were being saved ([1 Corinthians 1:18](#)).

Verse 24

Notice the impact of the preaching of the gospel. Paul told the Corinthians that God was calling both Jews and Gentiles. The calling Paul refers to here

is the call of the Spirit of God to salvation and new life. This inner work of the Spirit was opening eyes, ears and hearts to the purpose of God in saving a people for Himself.

Those who responded to this inner call of God's Spirit experienced the power and wisdom of God. That is to say, they saw the sign the Jews requested and the wisdom the Greeks demanded in the person of Jesus Christ.

Verse 25

Paul was an intelligent man. In the simple gospel message, however, he saw wisdom that surpassed the greatest understanding of humankind. The Gospel revealed the purpose, power and character of God. It provided a solution to the problem of sin and death. It resolved the conflict between God and humanity and transformed the hearts of those

trapped in sin and rebellion. This was something that not even the greatest worldly intellects could accomplish with all their scholarship and achievements. The “foolishness of the gospel” accomplishes more than all the great scientific, medical, and technological advances our age could ever hope to achieve – peace, forgiveness, healing, eternal life and a relationship with God.

Verse 26

The power of the gospel was evident in the church of Corinth. Paul challenged the believers to consider their calling to Christ in light of who they were. These Corinthian believers were simple, ordinary people. Many of them were not wise according to worldly standards. The phrase “not many” implies that there were some intelligent people among them. These intellects, however, fellowshiped with these

simple folk and shared with them a common salvation.

The church was not comprised of powerful people with great authority in their community. Not many of the members of the church were born into rich families. Those who were powerful and rich had no advantage in the church over those who weren't. An intelligent mind, authority in the community or noble birth was not a requirement for salvation. The wise and the simple, the master and the servant, and the rich and poor all experienced the power of the gospel to save.

Verse 27

The majority of the church in Corinth were simple folk. They were not considered wise according to the world's standard, nor were they rich and powerful people who would deserve or merit special treatment and

respect. The believers of Corinth, for the most part, were simple people touched by God and brought into His kingdom. Their “foolishness” shamed the wise and brought change and transformation to their community. Their weakness achieved what the power of the rich and influential could not. The simple gospel accomplished, in a short time, what decades of wealth and human government could not.

Verse 28

Paul tells the Corinthians that God’s ways were not human ways. He chooses those low in status and despised by the world to build His kingdom. He uses people and things the world despises to accomplish His purpose. You don’t have to be influential and powerful for God to use. You don’t need great intelligence and experience. God can use you just as you are. The work He wants to

accomplish does not depend on human wisdom and strength. He wants the humble and obedient. He uses those who rely on Him and His leading regardless of social standing or intellectual and physical ability. Our poverty and weakness do not limit God.

Verse 29

The apostle reminds the Corinthians that God uses the weak and humble to accomplish His purpose. According to Paul, this rules out boasting. The work of God is not achieved in human wisdom and strength. God fills empty jars and uses them to quench the thirst of human hearts. He empowers the weak and helpless to do mighty things in His name. He gives words to the dumb to speak on His behalf. He gives grace to the poor to extend to those who have nothing. The strength and wisdom to do the work is from God. He deserves all the credit.

Notice here how Paul tells us that no human being can boast in the presence of God. It is the presence of God that enables us to accomplish the work of the kingdom. Without His presence, we would be helpless. We do not even merit that presence. God moves as He sees fit. Paul, who persecuted the church, did not earn that presence and calling of God in His life. He could not boast of God's presence on Him, nor could he boast of the great things God chose to do through Him as a believer.

Verse 30

Paul reminded the Corinthians that God did not choose them because of their social standing or qualifications. They were very simple and ordinary people who did not deserve His grace. He begins verse 30 with the statement, "And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus."

Notice first the phrase "in Christ Jesus." Imagine a great storm raging, and you rush to your house and close the door. Now that you are in the house, you are protected and secure. Being in Christ Jesus is our security. It is our forgiveness and hope. I could never approach the father on my own. The work of Jesus alone is my security. That work covers me and assures my salvation and right standing with the Father.

How did the Corinthians obtain this assurance if not because they were good or worthy? Paul answers this with the words "because of Him." That is to say, it was because of God and His gracious and unmerited favour. There is no other explanation. These Corinthians received what they did not deserve because God chose to bless and draw them to Himself through the work of His Son.

Paul lists four blessings attached to being in Christ here in verse 30.

First, being in Christ means that we have wisdom from God. That wisdom relates to the great purpose and plan of God for the salvation of a people through the death and resurrection of His Son. That purpose was being worked out personally in the lives of the Corinthians. They were experiencing firsthand the results of that incredible purpose.

Second, the believers in Corinth experienced righteousness. Righteousness is a right standing with God. That right standing was the result of pardon and not their good behaviour. These believers, as we will see, were not perfect. They were, however, forgiven to such an extent that no sin would keep them from the Father. This was the result of the work of Jesus on the cross.

Third, the Corinthians were experiencing sanctification. This is the process of making us more and more like Jesus. It is not the result of human effort so much as it is the inner work of God's Spirit transforming our character.

Finally, the believers to whom Paul writes experienced redemption. To redeem something is to buy it back. It is released to us when a certain price is paid. This is what the Lord Jesus did. We receive these many blessings from God because Jesus paid the price by laying down His life to restore us to the Father. All these privileges are ours, not because we deserve, earned or paid for them ourselves but because the Lord Jesus purchased them for us at the cost of His life on the cross.

Verse 31

Paul concludes the chapter by quoting words from the prophecy of

Jeremiah: "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (see [Jeremiah 9:23,24](#)). Our salvation, righteousness, sanctification and redemption were not the results of our efforts. We became children of God only because God chose to give us life, pardon and accept us as His own. The only thing we can boast about is the wonderful grace of God that chose to work in us. Our salvation, sanctification, right standing and eternal life are the result of what Christ Jesus has done. He alone deserves all the glory. Anyone who truly understands the nature of their salvation will realize there is nothing to boast about but the grace of Christ.

CHAPTER 2

Verse 1

Paul begins chapter 2 with a statement about his preaching in Corinth. The apostle spent a year and a half teaching and reasoning in Corinth. He reminded his readers that he did not come proclaiming the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.

By lofty speech, Paul speaks of eloquence and finely polished messages designed to impress and persuade. This was a common practice of the day. Paul chose, however, not to spend time polishing His messages to impress. He

spoke the truth, believing that the truth of God had the power to save. It is easy to think that how we say something will strengthen it. I have often fallen into this error while preaching. The ability to save is not in the person but in the message. That message can be proclaimed in faltering and frail words and transform those who hear it. It can be preached with great eloquence and have no impact. Paul believed the message did not need to be polished by human effort to be effective. That human polish might very well hide the message and render it ineffective in the lives of those who heard it.

Second, Paul told the Corinthians that he did not proclaim the word of God to them with wisdom. We need to understand here that the message Paul proclaimed was the wisdom of God. The wisdom Paul speaks about here, however, is not the wisdom of God but

human wisdom. That is to say, he did not proclaim the word of God as an intellectual with big words and overly complicated thoughts. Paul was an intelligent person, and if any of the apostles could have presented themselves as scholars, it would have been him. The apostle could have impressed the Corinthians with his deep and scholarly insights into the Scriptures, but he chose not to do so. The message he preached was simple and easy for the Corinthians to understand. Paul had no desire to impress these believers with his intellect and insight. To do so would have focused the attention on himself and not on the person of Christ.

Verse 2

Notice how verse 2 begins with the word “for.” This connects it to what Paul has just told the Corinthians in verse 1. He chose not to speak with lofty words

and great human wisdom because he had decided to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. There are several details we need to gather from Paul's statement here.

Understand first that Paul did not want to get in the way of what Christ wanted to do. Had he come to Corinth pushing his weight and demonstrating his eloquence and wisdom, he would have distracted the people from Christ and focused them on Himself. He chose, therefore, to adjust the presentation of his message so that it gave all glory to Christ.

Consider second the phrase, "I decided." This shows us that it was a conscious decision on Paul's part to elevate the message and the person of Christ over his own abilities.

Third, Paul tells us that he decided to know nothing among them, but Jesus Christ crucified. In other words, Paul

wanted to get out of the way so the people could see Jesus. He wanted them to experience the power of the crucifixion of Christ. He wanted Christ to be the centre of attention and the focus of the Corinthians' thoughts. When He left Corinth, he wanted them to give all glory and praise to Christ for what He had done among them. How easy it is to desire some of that glory for ourselves.

Verse 3

Paul confesses that when he was in Corinth, he felt weak and fearful. He does not go into great detail here. Suffice it to say that opposition to Paul's ministry arose in Corinth. [Acts 18:6](#) describes how Paul symbolically shook out his garments and left the synagogue when its members opposed and reviled him:

6 And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." – [Ac 18:6](#)

The passage goes on to share the words of God to a discouraged and frightened apostle:

9 And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, 10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." – [Ac 18:9-10](#)

The opposition of the Jews in Corinth shook Paul. He felt that his preaching and teaching in the synagogue were accomplishing nothing. He felt weak and was afraid of the opposition he was experiencing, but God strengthened him so that he remained a year and a

half in the city seeing fruit for his perseverance.

Verse 4

Paul told the Corinthians that he was fully aware that his message was not delivered with “plausible words of wisdom.” Paul did not attempt to convince people with human wisdom and reasoning. Instead, the message was delivered with a demonstration of the Spirit and power.

Notice the phrase “demonstration of the Spirit and power.” What is being demonstrated here is the Spirit of God and his power. The focus is on the Spirit and what He is doing. The Holy Spirit of God was taking simple words and using them to bring people into the kingdom of God. He confirmed the truth of what Paul preached by setting people free from sin and its effects.

The power behind the preaching of Paul was not in his words and carefully prepared messages but in the Spirit of God, who was pleased to use simple words to transform lives.

Verse 5

Because the Corinthians saw that the power to change their lives was not in Paul, they trusted in the power of God and not in human strength and wisdom.

I have been in churches that know a lot about human scholarship in Biblical theology but nothing of the power of God's Spirit. I have met believers whose Christian life is all about doctrine and practice but who understand very little of the inner sanctifying work of God to transform and empower. If what I preach and write does not move people beyond doctrines and lifestyle to the person of Jesus Christ, His Father

and His Holy Spirit, then I have failed. The Christian life is not about an intellectual understanding of doctrines and human effort to walk right. It is about the power of God to transform, change and empower a sinner to live in victory and intimate fellowship with God.

Verse 6

Paul has been speaking about the simple message of the gospel and its power to change a life. He has been downplaying human wisdom and intellect in the proclamation of that gospel. The apostle does not want to be misunderstood, however, and clarifies his position here in this next section.

Paul tells the Corinthians that he is not against wisdom. As an apostle, he did "impart wisdom." The wisdom he imparted, however, was not the wisdom

of this age. The wisdom Paul preached confounded the intellect of this world. The message of the gospel did not make sense to the human mind. It could not be proven by science.

Paul's understanding of human wisdom was that it would all pass away. Consider this for a moment. In our age, we have seen great technological and medical advances. Computers can do things once thought impossible. We can heal diseases that once were fatal. These great achievements are amazing, but where are they all heading? What will happen to our technology when the world comes to an end? Will our medical advances spare us from the judgment to come? All this wisdom will amount to nothing in the end. Scripture tells us that the world as we know it will be destroyed, and we will all stand before a holy God. Human wisdom and achievements will count for very little on that day. We will not take our

technology with us into the life to come. Paul tells us that all our human wisdom will pass away.

Verse 7

The wisdom that Paul preached was the "secret and hidden wisdom of God." It is secret and hidden not because it is inaccessible but because the human mind has been blinded. Sin broke fellowship with God and destroyed our spiritual life. Though we were created as spiritual beings, that aspect of our lives was tarnished by sin. We were blinded by sin to the things of God. Fellowship with God was broken, and we could no longer see His purpose or understand His ways. As a result, we think only in fleshly ways. Our reasoning is limited to what we can see with our physical eyes and understand with our human mind.

There is a purpose beyond human comprehension. There is wisdom that transcends human intelligence and reasoning. This is the wisdom of which Paul speaks –the wisdom of God “decreed before the ages for our glory.”

Paul declares here that God has a greater purpose for us than we can see with our human eyes.

Verse 8

The wisdom of God declared before the ages was found in the person of Jesus Christ and His work on the cross. This wisdom conquered the effect of sin and restored our relationship with God.

According to Paul, the rulers of this age did not understand this wisdom. Had they understood it, they would not have crucified the Son of God who came to set them free. Had they comprehended this wisdom of God they

would have seen Jesus as the Lord of glory sent from the Father to release a fallen creation from the curse. This escaped human understanding, however, because it did not make sense. Human eyes were blinded to the person of Christ. Human minds could not grasp how the wisdom of God was given flesh in Christ Jesus.

Verse 9

According to Peter, the wisdom of God is beyond our understanding and imagination. Quoting [Isaiah 64:4](#), Peter tells us that our eyes have never seen anything like what God has prepared for those who love Him. That is to say, we have no reference point to compare what God has in store for those who belong to Him.

Our ears have never heard tell of the things God is preparing for us. In all of human history, there has never been a record of anything like God's purpose

for His children. Never has the story of such grace and mercy been told.

Isaiah, in his prophecy, goes on to say that it is not even in the possibility of imagination to conceive of the wonders God has in store for His loved ones.

This purpose of God relates to the work of Jesus Christ on the cross and the implications of that work, not only in the present but throughout all eternity. In wisdom beyond human understanding, the Lord God has broken the bondage of sin, redeemed a people for Himself and blessed them beyond what they deserved for all eternity.

Verse 10

How can we understand the wisdom of God if human ears have never heard anything like it? How can we see what eyes have never before seen? If it is impossible to imagine such knowledge,

how can we speak of it or know it? Peter answers this question by telling us that God has revealed it through His Spirit. Such wisdom cannot be grasped through human intellect; it must be shown and taught by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God alone understands the depths of the Father's wisdom and teaches those who belong to Him.

It is important to note here that while this wisdom of God is revealed to us by the Spirit through the Word of God, our human understanding is still baffled by it. Why would a holy God pardon and bless a sinner? Why would a just God sacrifice His own Son for an unworthy human? What would make God choose me to be His child? How does God take sinners and transform their lives into His image? How do you explain the power behind eternal life? Not one of us has a real answer to these questions. The wisdom of God is beyond us. We accept by faith what the

Spirit of God reveals, but our minds cannot conceive or grasp such understanding.

Verse 11

Do you know what someone else is thinking? You may be married to a person for many years and spend each day of your life with them, but their thoughts are hidden from you. They alone know what they are thinking at any given moment. If this is the case for those closest to us, how can we ever pretend to understand the mind of God, who is so much greater than us? How does a finite human being grasp the mighty thoughts of an infinite God? How can a sinner comprehend the mind of a sinless and holy God?

The only way we can understand the purpose and mind of God is by means of His Spirit. He teaches us the purpose of the Father. He instructs us in His plan

through His Son. He reveals the heart of God for us as His children. God's ways are not our ways. He does not think like us. We cannot know His heart unless His Spirit reveals it to us. God has given us His Word to instruct us, but He has also placed His Holy Spirit in us to teach us the heart and mind of the Father. He must be our instructor and guide if we are to understand anything of the great wisdom and purpose of God.

Verse 12

Those who know the Lord, according to Peter, have received the Holy Spirit from God. The Holy Spirit is different from the spirit of this world. He reveals the thoughts and purpose of God to those in whom He dwells.

Peter tells us that the reason God has given us His Holy Spirit is so that "we

might understand the things freely given us by God.”

When God makes us His children, things begin to happen in us that do not make sense to our human intellect. Our attitudes and passions change. Our hearts are renewed and transformed. We desire to walk with God and in His purpose. God freely forgives and pours His grace and favour upon us. He also places His Holy Spirit in us who belong to Him to help us understand and live this new life. Those who belong to Christ are no longer guided by human wisdom and insight but by the wisdom of the Spirit of God in them.

Understand here that it is still possible for the believer to walk in human wisdom. All too many believers are not guided by the Spirit of Christ but by their own insight and understanding. This is not how it should be for the believer. We will never reach our full potential unless we walk in the leading

and empowering of the Spirit God has given us. Human wisdom and the wisdom of God are not the same.

Verse 13

Peter tells his readers that as apostles, they imparted the wisdom of God in words taught by the Spirit. That is to say, the apostles did not teach their own opinions and understanding. They spoke and wrote what the Spirit of God gave them. This is why we can have confidence in the truths they recorded in the pages of Scripture. Each of the writers of Scripture conveys the same message without conflict or diversity of opinion because they all drew from the same source. The Spirit of God inspired them and gave them what they were to speak.

Notice also, however, that not only did the apostles communicate the truth given to them by the Spirit, but they

shared these spiritual truths with those who were “spiritual.” In other words, they spoke to those in whom the Spirit of God also dwelt. The Holy Spirit in these individuals confirmed the facts the apostles taught. Not only was the truth spoken as led by the Spirit, but it was also received and confirmed by the Spirit in the lives of those who heard it.

It is significant to see here that God’s Spirit chose to reveal truth through His apostles and others gifted to convey it. While the Spirit of God resides in every true believer, He reveals that truth in different ways. To some, He speaks directly and to others indirectly through His servants. What is important to note is that to all, He gives the ability to receive and confirm by the same Spirit the truth of the word spoken.

Verse 14

Peter tells his readers that the Spirit of God reveals truth and gives believers the grace to receive and confirm that truth through the Holy Spirit. This, however, is not the case for the "natural person." The natural person is contrasted with "those who are spiritual" in verse 13. The natural person is one in whom the Spirit of God does not reside. These individuals do not have the Spirit to convince and teach them. They rely on their understanding and reasoning to interpret truth.

The apostle tells his readers that the natural person does not accept the things taught by the Spirit of God because they are "folly." The purpose of God through Jesus Christ does not make sense to the human mind. How can the death of Jesus so many years ago forgive sin? How can God die? How can something be true if it cannot be proven scientifically? The natural

person does not see anything beyond the physical. They cannot accept spiritual matters that are beyond reason and understanding. To them, spiritual things are superstitions and imaginary hopes not based on human intellect and reason.

Peter speaks here about things that are spiritually discerned. In other words, Peter believed in a reality beyond the physical. He experienced this in His time with Jesus. He saw Jesus perform miracles that denied logic and science. He saw a reality as real as the physical, which could only be understood spiritually. Those who do not have the Spirit of God cannot truly discern or understand the spiritual things of God.

Verse 15

The spiritual person judges all things, according to Peter. The word Peter uses here for “judges” is ἀνακρίνω

(anacrínō). It can refer to passing a sentence or to discerning or examining a matter carefully to know the truth. The idea here seems to be that as believers in whom the Spirit of God dwells, we are to carefully examine and discern everything in light of the truth of God's Word and the leading of the Spirit of God in us. If we are not discerning and seeking the direction and leading of the Spirit, we can easily be distracted by the things of this world. We must submit all things to the judgement of the Spirit and the Truth of God's Word.

The apostle goes on to say that the spiritual person was to be judged by no one. Notice first that the individual not to be judged was a "spiritual person." In other words, the individual the apostle speaks of here is one in whom the Spirit of God resides. More than this, however, this individual follows the

leading and direction of the Spirit of God.

What judgement can we bring against those in whom the Spirit of God dwells if they are walking in obedience? What they speak may not make sense to our natural minds. The path the Spirit of God takes them may defy our human logic. The apostles left everything to follow the Lord Jesus. They preached a message that people mocked and ridiculed. They willingly sacrificed their lives to die for the truth revealed to them by the Spirit of God. What judgement can we bring against these men who faithfully followed the leading of God's Spirit?

Those who are spiritual live on a different plain. They do not think as mere humans. They are not guided by natural reason and logic. They are led by the truth of God's Word and the Spirit of God. They may appear to preach "folly." They may not live like

the natural man, but they cannot be found judged guilty in any human court for the truth they believe and the life they live.

Verse 16

Peter tells us that the spiritual person cannot be judged in any human court. That is not to say that human courts will not condemn believers. The spiritual person will be judged on earth by the unbeliever, but that judgement holds no authority in heaven.

God's ways are not human ways. Who can understand His purpose in His children? Can the natural man understand the work of God in those who belong to Him? Can any human court make a valid judgement against the leading and purpose of God in the life of the believer?

On the other hand, as believers, the Holy Spirit lives in us, teaching and

instructing us in the mind of God. We live and walk as those who know the truth of God. We live according to a higher law –the law of the Spirit of truth who guides us through His Word. We may be judged by human courts and found guilty of a higher allegiance, but that judgment means nothing to those who are coming to understand the mind of God through the indwelling Spirit who leads them into truth.

CHAPTER 3

Verse 1

In chapter 2, the apostle Paul spoke about the wisdom of God that has been given by revelation of the Spirit. He compared the “natural person,” who does not accept the things of the Spirit ([1 Corinthians 2:14](#)), with the “spiritual person” ([1 Corinthians 2:15](#)). Paul begins verse 1 with the word “but.” This brings us back to chapter 2 and Paul’s discussion of the spiritual person.

The apostle hesitates to address the Corinthians as “spiritual people.” Instead, he tells them they are “people

of the flesh.” That is to say they were not being directed by the Spirit of God but by their fleshly wisdom and nature. Paul does not question their salvation here. He calls them “infants in Christ.” They were believers who had never learned to walk as spiritual people. Instead, they were living as the natural person lived, according to their own wisdom and strength.

Paul shows us here that the believer can live like the unbeliever and not tap into the leading and empowering of God’s Spirit. I would venture to say that many believers live in this way, and although they have known the Lord for many years would still be classified as “infants in Christ,” for they have never come to understand or tap into their authority and power as believers.

Verse 2

Paul reminds the Corinthians that when he was with them, he fed them with milk and not solid food. The apostle does not clarify in the verse what he means by milk or solid food. Milk is the first food an infant can digest and represents the basic truths of the Christian life. The context of the chapter indicates that Paul was very concerned about the division he had heard about among believers in Corinth. Like little children, these believers were divided over petty and insignificant matters. This demonstrated to Paul that they did not have the maturity to handle or resolve their differences. Division over minor issues is an indication of immaturity and pride. Paul tells the Corinthians that these things demonstrated that they were not ready to advance in their Christian walk. The Corinthians needed to mature before they could handle "solid food." If the church of Corinth wanted to experience more of what

God had for them, they would need to accept and address their immaturity.

Verse 3

The apostle reprimanded the Corinthian church by telling them they were “still of the flesh.” That is to say, they had never learned to walk in the Spirit and His enabling. They were not led by God’s Spirit but by their old sinful nature. This was evident to Paul by the jealousy and strife that existed between members of the church.

Notice the words of Paul here in verse 3: “Are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?” The apostle accuses the Corinthians of being in the flesh and behaving as humans. He expected more from them. As believers in Jesus Christ, they were to be above their human nature. As those in whom the Spirit of God dwelt, they were to live in a new way. While

jealousy and division may be human, they are not godly. Resentment and bitterness are fleshly but are not spiritual. The believer is called to live above the flesh and its natural tendencies. We are not to live as mere humans; there is a higher standard for those who belong to Jesus Christ. We can only live above our human nature because of the indwelling Spirit of God.

Verse 4

Paul gets to the heart of the matter here in verse 4. He speaks to the division between believers in the church. One believer said: "I follow Paul." Another responded: "I follow Apollos." While both Paul and Apollos preached the same message, they did so in their own style. The believers in the Corinthian church began to focus on their preferred leadership style. This caused division among them. Paul

rebukes them for being “merely human.”

How often have we heard the phrase, “I’m human.” It is generally in the context of some failure in the Christian life. The phrase is intended to excuse or diminish the significance of sin. According to the apostle Paul, being human was no excuse for sin. Believers are called to live above their humanness. We are called to walk in the Spirit and victory over our natural passions, desires and tendencies. We are not to live as “mere humans.”

Verse 5

Paul shows the Corinthians how foolish it was to divide the church over leadership styles. He tells them that he and Apollos were mere servants through whom they had come to believe in the Lord Jesus. What these leaders did was something the Lord had

assigned them to do. They were obedient to the Lord by preaching the gospel in their city.

Consider this for a moment. Shall we elevate someone who is obedient as if they had gone above and beyond the call of duty? Should we see obedience as something extraordinary in a believer? Shall we lift up those who walk faithfully with the Lord and see them as special saints? What army gives medals to soldiers for simply obeying orders? Something is wrong with a faith that treats obedience and faithfulness as extraordinary. These qualities are the bare minimum requirements for not just the elite but for every believer. Paul and Apollos were elevated in Corinth because they obeyed God's call on their lives as if they had gone above and beyond what was required.

God indeed used Paul and Apollos in the church of Corinth. The Corinthians

were grateful to them for bringing that message of the Gospel, but by dividing over these men who were merely servants of God, the church was proving its immaturity.

Verse 6

The apostle Paul tells the Corinthians that he had planted the Word of God in Corinth. The message of the gospel first came to their city through Paul. Later Apollos came and watered that seed by teaching and helping these young believers to grow in their faith.

Notice what Paul says about these efforts: "But God gave the growth." Paul and Apollos were obedient to plant and water the seed of the gospel, but neither of them had the power of life. Paul could not convert a soul, nor could Apollos make that soul grow. Only God could save and mature. All glory goes to God for salvation and spiritual

growth. He alone gives life and maturity. Paul took no credit for these things. He encouraged the Corinthians to see likewise. By dividing over Paul and Apollos, the church was ultimately dividing over the work of God in their midst through these servants.

Verse 7

The one who plants or waters, according to Paul, does not deserve credit for the fruit. God alone gives life and growth. Indeed, Paul worked hard in Corinth, but all that effort would be useless if the Lord did not bless it. You can plant a garden and see no fruit for your labours. Unless the Lord blesses what we do, there is no hope of an increase from our labour.

This is a lesson we would do well to learn as servants of God. It is all too easy to believe that the fruit we see results from our hard efforts, but this is

not the case. The fruit we see before us is the result of the blessing of God and His choice to use what we have done in obedience to Him. He does not have to bless what we do. We could spend a lifetime working and see no fruit. But for the grace of God and His choice to bless our work, there would be no harvest. He deserves all the glory.

Verse 8

When it comes to the work of the kingdom, those who walk in obedience work as one. The one who waters the seed is not competing with the planter but supporting his efforts for the kingdom. This was especially true regarding the ministries of Paul and Apollos. They preached the same message, and the Lord, who led Paul to plant the seed, also directed Apollos to water it. Paul and Apollos were both concerned about the church's spiritual growth in Corinth.

Paul told the Corinthians that each labourer would receive wages according to his labour. While the labourer does not have the power to make the seed grow and mature, he is nonetheless required to work for the sake of the harvest and will be rewarded for his efforts. This is a call to faithfulness. As servants of God, our responsibility is to be dutiful servants devoted to the purpose of God's kingdom. We walk obediently, trusting that He will bless what we do for the sake of His kingdom. Whether He chooses to bless what we do or not, God will reward our faithfulness.

Verse 9

The apostle reminds the Corinthians that he and Apollos were "God's fellow workers." God had called Paul and Apollos to work as a team to build the church in Corinth. By speaking of himself as a "fellow worker" with

Apollos, Paul is telling the Corinthians that there was no division between them. They served God together.

The field to which God had called Paul and Apollos as “fellow workers” was the city of Corinth and, in particular, the believers in that city. Paul compares the church to a building God had asked them to build and maintain as fellow workers in Christ.

The apostle shows the Corinthians here that both he and Apollos worked together under the call of God for the good of the church in their city. As servants of the same God, devoted to a common purpose, it grieved them that the church should divide over their leadership.

Verse 10

In verse 6, Paul compared the work of God in Corinth to a garden that he had planted, and Apollos watered. In verse

10, he compares it to the construction of a great building. Notice several details in this illustration.

First, Paul was a “skilled master builder.” He describes himself as a master of his trade, very skilled in his work. The apostle does not hesitate to recognize his abilities.

Second, while Paul knew his abilities, he was also careful to recognize the source of these skills – “the grace of God given to me.” The apostle understood that these great skills and abilities were not in himself but in the Lord. It was only because of God that he had this potential.

Third, Paul laid a foundation, but someone else was “building upon it.” That is to say, the apostle understood that though God had called him to be a master builder, he still needed to walk in obedience. It was not God’s purpose for Paul to build the entire structure

himself. He was to lay the foundation and leave the rest for others to complete.

Our spiritual gifts do not diminish the need to seek the Lord's leading and walk in obedience. Our gifts must always be exercised under the direction of the Lord. We dare not assume that because God has gifted us that we are to take on every task that requires such a gift. Paul was to use his God-given ability to build a foundation only. God would choose someone else to build on that foundation.

Finally, notice Paul's concern that those who built on the foundation do so with great care. The apostle did not want to see his efforts be to no avail. Not all buildings constructed on a solid foundation are worthy of that foundation. It was Paul's passion to see great structures arise, to the glory of God, from the foundations he laid.

Verse 11

Paul challenged the Corinthians to take great care as to how they built on the foundation he had laid for them. Notice what he tells them here about this.

The foundation the apostle laid was Jesus Christ. That is to say, Paul instructed the believers in Corinth about the person and work of Jesus Christ. It was on Christ that the church was to build their lives. Jesus was their hope of forgiveness and eternal life. He was to be their Lord and Master. They were to do all things to His glory. They were to make it their life goal and ambition to serve and honour Him.

Notice here that, according to Paul, no foundation could be laid other than Jesus Christ and His work. There was no other way to God. There was no other Saviour. Jesus alone was a sure foundation. A life constructed on any

other base would come crashing down in the end.

Verse 12

The apostle reminded the Corinthians that it was possible to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ with different materials. Not every Christian is the same. Our lives do not unfold in the same way. We have different personalities and gifts. We serve God in various ways. There is great diversity in the body of Christ. Though all lives must be built on the firm foundation of Christ and His work, my life will not resemble my brother's or sister's.

Paul lists different materials that could be used to construct a building on the sure foundation – “gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay and straw. The materials Paul lists here can be placed in two categories, those that withstand fire and those that don't.

Verse 13

A day is coming when each person's work will be "disclosed." That it so say, we will all stand before our Judge to give an account of what we built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and His work on our behalf.

The quality of our work, according to Paul, will be revealed by fire. This fire represents the judgement of God. The Father expects us to respond to what His Son has done for us. Paul makes it clear in this verse that we will all give an account of that response to God. What does the work of Jesus mean to you? How is this evident in your life? How will you demonstrate your gratitude for Christ's work to the Father?

Verse 14

The apostle tells the Corinthians that if the building they constructed on the

foundation of Jesus Christ survived God's judgement, they would receive a reward.

Understand here that the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf rescued us from hell and eternal separation from God. This, in and of itself, is a great reward. We owe every waking moment and every grain of strength we have to Him for this salvation. Paul tells us, however, that the Father will reward those who build a worthy structure upon the foundation of Christ's work in their lives. We are not told what this reward is, but it is beyond the overflowing blessing of salvation and eternal life. God is pleased with those who honour His Son and what He has done and will reward all who do so.

Verse 15

The fire of God's judgement will consume some of the structures built

on the foundation of Christ's work. Not all buildings erected on a sure and solid foundation are worthy of that foundation. Some believers waste their lives in frivolous and worldly endeavours. Some children of God never seem to mature in their faith but continue to be overcome by sin. Others never seem to use the gifts God has given them. They have a bad testimony in their community and bring reproach to the name of Jesus Christ. Consider what the apostle Paul told the Romans:

24 For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." – [Ro 2:24](#)

The works of these believers will not pass the judgment of God. They have not lived worthily. They have failed their Lord and brought reproach to His name. They have not advanced the kingdom or matured in their faith. Paul

has two things to say to these individuals.

First, they will “suffer loss.” He does not explain what he means by suffering loss. If we take this phrase in the context of the previous verse, we could assume that these unfaithful children of God will suffer the loss of their reward. We cannot underestimate the significance of this fact. We can only imagine the shame experienced by those who fail the test of God’s judgement. Standing before Christ, they will have to acknowledge that they lived as ungrateful servants. Their lives on earth did not demonstrate that they even belonged to Him.

Second, Paul assures these unfaithful children that God would not abandon them. They met the basic requirements for salvation — the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, a work for which they had not demonstrated gratitude by how they lived.

Paul reminds us here that the grace of Jesus Christ is sufficient to save believers who live ungrateful and unfaithful lives. How much more blessed it is, however, to stand before the Father, having built a fruitful and holy life to the honour of His Son. What great joy shall fill the hearts of the faithful to see the Father's smile of approval for a life well lived to the glory of His Son?

Verse 16

Continuing with the illustration of a building, Paul explained that the Corinthians were God's temple. The temple was where God was worshipped and manifested His presence to Israel. In this case, the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelt in the believers of Corinth.

It is the presence of the Spirit of God in us that gives us life. Without Him, we would have no spiritual life, for our life

is in Him. He sets us apart by His presence as children of God and empowers us to serve and honour Christ. He is the power behind our Christian walk and maturity.

It is a sad reality that we do not grasp the significance of the fact that God's Spirit lives in us. All too many believers continue to live as they did prior to His indwelling. They trust their human wisdom and ability and not that of the Spirit who has been given to them. The presence of God's Spirit ought to change everything. He is our guide, leader and enabler, but we often fail to hear and walk in this power. The question Paul asks here is very important:

16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? – 1Co 3:16

We are without excuse as we stand before God. He has given us His Holy Spirit to enable and guide us. We are not limited by human wisdom and ability. We have a power in us that can transform the world. Why would we rely on ourselves when the almighty power and knowledge of God are at our disposal?

Verse 17

Having stated that the Corinthian believers were temples of the Holy Spirit, Paul moves to issue a warning — *"If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him."*

The word translated "destroy" here is φθειρώ (phtheíró), meaning to corrupt, destroy or spoil. The same word refers to God's response to those who "*destroy*" the temple. In other words, God will do to them what they have done to His temple.

What is Paul telling the Corinthians here? The temple to which Paul is referring is the individual believers of Corinth in whom the Spirit of God dwelt. How can one destroy, defile, or spoil the believer?

Believers can be destroyed by death. In other words, some might be forced to lay down their lives for the sake of the Lord. In this case, Paul tells them that God would take up their case and bring their persecutors to justice.

The temple of God might also be defiled by falsehood and error. There were many false teachers in the region in Paul's day. We have all met believers distracted from the gospel because of such teachers. God has strong words to speak to false teachers throughout Scripture. They will be severely judged for misleading His children into error.

The temple of God might also be defiled by sin and evil done to it or in it.

Even the believer may defile his own body through sin, disobedience and resistance to the Spirit. As Paul told the Corinthians, the fire of God's judgement would test the quality of each person's works and lives.

Paul seems to be telling the Corinthians here that God treasured each temple, and anyone who defiled, mistreated or destroyed even the least of His children would answer to Him for their actions.

The temple of God is holy. That is to say, it is set apart for God and His service. We are those temples and, as such, are highly regarded in the eyes of God.

Verse 18

We live in an age of great technological achievement and education. We sometimes wonder what is not possible for humans to accomplish. How would the apostle Paul respond to these great

advances in medicine, science and technology? He tells the Corinthians that they were not to deceive themselves. Instead of boasting of great human wisdom, they were to become fools in the eyes of the world. This foolishness Paul speaks about involves accepting God's purpose and understanding. True wisdom is found in God. His ways confound the worldly mind.

Verse 19

The apostle reminds the Corinthians that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. Our great technological achievements do not impress Him. Our advances in medicine and science do not threaten him. He is above all of our human wisdom and accomplishments. We are merely scratching the surface of the vastness of God's infinite wisdom.

Quoting from [Job 5:13](#), Paul says: "*He catches the wise in their craftiness,*" The word translated "catches" here is δράσσομαι (drássomai) and means to grasp, seize or take. Imagine a nuisance insect bothering you. How do you deal with it? You grab it with your hand and get rid of it. This insect is no match for you. You seize it as if its life had no value and dispose of it as you wish. So it is with God. As great as we believe our accomplishments and wisdom are, God, can seize us with His hand and do with us as He pleases. Humankind and its ultimate destiny are in God's hands.

Verse 20

Paul quotes [Psalm 94:11](#) here when he says: "*The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.*" What will happen to all our great achievements? When the Lord returns, of what benefit will these advances be? The New

Testament teaches that on the day of the Lord, the heavens and earth will be destroyed. All we have accomplished will vanish in those days. All of our ambitions and goals will come to an end, and we will stand before God. Our technology will seem so small as we stand before true greatness and wisdom.

Verse 21

According to Paul, we are not to boast in men. The idea is that we are not to put our hope and confidence in humankind. Only Christ can save and forgive. Eternal life is in Him. The truth of God is what counts. His purpose alone is eternal. The apostle challenges the Corinthians to seek the wisdom of God and not human wisdom. He encourages them to trust in the strength and purpose of God and not in human ability.

Notice the phrase: "*For all things are yours.*" Consider this for a moment. As believers, we have become children of God through the work of Jesus Christ. As children of God, we have inherited eternal life. When the Lord returns, we will dwell on a new heaven and earth. We will live forever with the Lord, free from sin and its consequences. What have we not inherited in Christ? All things will be for us to enjoy. What will the insignificant advances and futile wisdom of humankind mean to us in eternity when the whole world will be ours to enjoy? We will not give these things another thought.

Verse 22

In the last verse, Paul told the Corinthians they were not to boast in man. This is what had been happening in Corinth. Consider what the apostle wrote earlier in this chapter:

4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? – 1Co 3:4

Paul tells the church of Corinth that boasting in Paul, Apollos, or Cephas was foolish. Imagine a billionaire boasting about the loose change in his pocket. This loose change is nothing compared to the vast wealth of his bank account. What were the differences between Apollos, Paul and Cephas compared to the vast resources of heaven reserved for these believers?

God blessed the Corinthian believers in many ways. He had sent Paul and Apollos to them to minister to their spiritual needs. As an apostle, Peter (Cephas) also blessed them. The world as they knew it was a gift from God for them to enjoy. Life on this earth and life eternal were from God. They could face death with certainty, knowing that

it was only the beginning of an eternity in the presence of Jesus, their Saviour. The present was filled with the knowledge of God's blessing, and the future was a glorious one. As believers, they were blessed on every level. All of these things were theirs in Christ Jesus.

Verse 23

Beyond all the physical blessings God had bestowed on the Corinthians was the greatest blessing of all – the knowledge they belonged to Christ. If they had nothing else, this alone was sufficient.

Notice also that Paul told the Corinthians that Christ was God's. In other words, Jesus Christ was from God and was God. Every blessing they received through Christ was also from God. Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Father acted as one, reaching down to forgive and redeem the Corinthians

for Himself. God, in the person of Jesus Christ, had a purpose for their lives. They were His chosen and dear children and inheritors of His infinite resources.

What were the great achievements of their age compared to the knowledge of God? They had everything they needed in Christ. This world could add nothing to what they did not already have in Christ.

CHAPTER 4

Verse 1

One of the issues Paul addresses here in this epistle is the division in the church over their spiritual leaders. Some declared their allegiance to Paul, and others to Apollos. Paul reminded them that they were not to boast in men.

As he begins chapter 4, the apostle tells the Corinthians how they were to see their leaders. Notice two details here.

First, the Corinthians were to see their spiritual leaders as “*servants of Christ.*” They were servants called by

Jesus Christ to minister to them. A servant is not greater than his or her master. Their role was to obey the Master and advance His purpose.

Second, their spiritual leaders were stewards of the mysteries of God. A steward is entrusted with a resource and is tasked to administer it on behalf of its owner. In this case, their spiritual leaders had been entrusted with the mysteries of God.

What are the mysteries of God? These mysteries are found in the purpose of the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ, for the salvation of humankind. The gospel message was given to Paul and Apollos to share with the Corinthians. It was through this message that they would know the forgiveness of sin and eternal life in the presence of God. As stewards of this wonderful message, Paul and Apollos were to faithfully proclaim that truth in its purity to all who would listen.

The Corinthians were not to elevate their spiritual leaders beyond these facts. They were merely servants of Christ entrusted with a precious and life-changing message. Paul had no sense of being a great saint. He was a servant of God with a responsibility to share the simple message of the gospel. As fellow servants, we would do well to maintain this humble perspective in our ministries as well.

Verse 2

The apostle Paul did not take his calling lightly. He understood that it was the responsibility of those entrusted with a stewardship to be faithful.

All too many leaders lose this perspective. It is easy to see our calling as a means to respect and admiration. Paul tells us here that our primary role as stewards of the mysteries of God is

to be faithful. Faithfulness has many implications in the life of the steward.

If we are to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God, we will make it our priority to maintain the purity and integrity of the message entrusted to us. We will not compromise that message or water it down in any way.

As stewards, we are to represent the Lord and His interests. This means that we must place His interests above our own. The faithful steward is willing to sacrifice his own desires for those of his or her master. They will not seek to use their master's resources for their own selfish purpose. The mysteries entrusted to them will be for the glory of the Master alone. They will serve to advance His purpose alone.

Verse 3

In [1 Corinthians 3:4](#), Paul addressed a matter that had been dividing the

church in Corinth when he wrote:

4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? – [1Co 3:4](#)

It appears that the church was divided over its spiritual leaders. This division brought with it a certain amount of criticism and judgment. Paul speaks to this matter here in verse 3.

Notice first that he did not take the criticisms and judgements of those who preferred Apollos to him very seriously – *"it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you."* In saying that their judgement was *"a very small thing,"* the apostle told them that what they thought about him, his personality, or his ministry style had little importance to him. Paul did not need to impress the people with whom he was working. He was not bound by what people

thought about him. While this is a real temptation for many leaders today, Paul seemed to have victory over this in his life and ministry.

Notice also that Paul considered it a small thing to be judged by "*any human court.*" As an apostle, he had stood before such courts. The Jews had accused him of blasphemy and sought to kill him. He had faced believers in Jerusalem who judged him for his past persecution of the church. Paul had come to a place where what these individuals said held little weight. He would not allow what people said about him to hinder the work God had called him to do. He would not let any need to please people change the message God had given him to proclaim. He would obey God rather than human courts.

Notice, finally, that Paul chooses not even to judge himself. Now there is a time when we need to examine ourselves to see if we are right with

God. Paul is not speaking about this kind of judgment here.

There have been times when the Lord has revealed attitudes or sins that I did not see in my life. It is very easy to justify our actions, and we can see ourselves as being right with God when in reality, we are living in rebellion. Unconscious sins and attitudes must be addressed, but we do not always see them. God sees what we do not see. If I were to judge myself, my judgment would not be the same as God's. Paul had learned that God alone is Judge. He submitted to His judgement rather than his own ideas.

Verse 4

Having stated that he did not judge himself, Paul tells the Corinthians that he was unaware of anything against him. Not judging himself did not mean that Paul did not examine his life. From

the words of this verse, it seems clear that the apostle had searched his heart to see if it was right with God. That search revealed no obvious sin or offence.

Notice, however, that Paul did not consider himself to be the final judge of whether he was right with God or not. There was a higher Court to which Paul submitted. God alone was the true searcher of the heart. The all-seeing eye of God would search Paul and reveal any hidden iniquity. It would expose any buried evil attitude. The apostle's heart was open to what God would reveal. He would not make himself the final judge.

It is easy to claim innocence when we judge ourselves. We can justify our actions and attitudes. But when we submit to God's judgement, we may find that we are not as innocent as we thought. Like Paul, we must surrender all judgment to God.

Verse 5

The apostle determined that because God alone was the final judge, he would not pronounce any judgment before its time. It is easy to judge a brother or sister without knowing all the facts. We cannot even truly judge ourselves, for there are many things hidden to our own eyes.

Paul told the Corinthians that they were not to pronounce judgment on anyone. Instead, they were to wait for the Lord to "*bring to light the things now hidden.*" Imagine judging a brother or sister for making a public nuisance of themselves in their apartment building, only to realize later that they were doing so to warn people of a fire in the building. That one piece of information, unknown to you then, makes the difference between being a public nuisance and a lifesaver. We do not have all the information. Only God

knows all things. He will reveal what is hidden and expose the true intention of the heart. It is only in light of these intentions and purposes that any judgment can be made.

Verse 6

Paul writes very directly in chapter 4. He points particularly to the division in the church over himself and Apollos. Notice how he tells the Corinthians that he used this example for their benefit – *"I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers."* The apostle wants the Corinthians to learn two very important lessons from this.

The first lesson Paul wanted the Corinthians to learn was not to *"go beyond what is written."* The King James Version translates this phrase as follows:

6 *that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written – 1Co 4:6, KJV*

It is important to note, however, that the words “*of men*” are in italics which means that these words are not in the original text but implied. The text reads, “*that you may not think above what is written.*”

The word translated “think” in the King James Version and “go beyond” in the English Standard Version is φρονέω (phronéō) which speaks of a mindset or opinion. The idea here is that they were not to have a mindset that overstepped the truth of God’s word or went beyond its intention. These believers had opinions of what a good Christian leader needs to be, but those opinions, while possibly legitimate, were not commanded by God in His Word. Having an entertaining preacher might draw a crowd, but this qualification is

nowhere found in the Bible. It is too easy for us to impose our preferences on others, not realizing that those preferences are not Biblical qualifications. Paul challenges the church not to confuse their preferences with Biblical truth.

Second, notice the consequence of elevating our preferences to the level of Bible truth. According to Paul, we become "*puffed up in favour of one against another.*" Instead of submitting to truth and giving freedom of opinion, we begin to push our preferences and divide the church. When we cannot distinguish Bible truth from personal preferences and beliefs, we undermine the authority of the Scriptures alone to be our guide into all truth and practice. This will bring great harm to the church.

Verse 7

The division in the church over Paul and Apollos caused the believers to become proud, lifting themselves above each other. We see this in our day as well. The denominations and orders in the church of our day resulted from the preaching and ministries of key leaders in history. People began to follow the example and teaching of these leaders, and denominations or orders were established. One group sees itself as maintaining the truth better than another. This is what was happening in Corinth. Paul challenges this idea here in this verse on three levels.

First, consider the question, "For who sees anything different in you?" How were those who followed Apollos any different from those who followed Paul? The differences between these believers were so minuscule as to be unnoticed by the average person. Both Paul and Apollos preached the same message. They followed the same Lord.

In the eyes of God, they were all His children. According to Paul, there was no cause to be divided over something so insignificant as the name of their preferred leader.

Paul's second question is, "*What do you have that you did not receive?*" It would be one thing if the believers in Corinth could boast of their efforts. For example, if one group merited more favour by their actions than another, there might be cause to boast. The question, "What do you have that you did not receive?" makes all boasting fruitless. The followers of Paul and Apollos received their salvation as a gift from God. They were dependent on God for their life and breath. The spiritual gifting they enjoyed was also a blessing from God. Their maturity was the fruit of submission to the work of God's spirit. Both the followers of Paul and Apollos were dependent on God for everything. They were equally as

bankrupt spiritually without God and His work in them.

Paul's final question is, "*If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*" The apostle is asking the Corinthians what they had to boast about. Are you, as a follower of Paul, any better than the follower of Apollos when both of you owe everything to God? Do you have anything to boast about as a follower of Apollos that a follower of Paul does not have in equal measure? Are we not all dependent on God? Should all boasting not be in Christ and what He has done for unworthy sinners?

Verse 8

There is some question in this verse as to Paul's intention. Many commentators believe he is speaking ironically here. In other words, he talks about the Corinthians as they see themselves but

not as how they really were. Notice this on several levels.

First, consider the phrase: “*Already you have all you want!*” The church in Corinth was not very old. Paul, who wrote this letter, had planted it. Listen to what he told them in 1 Corinthians 3:1:

1 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. – 1Co 3:1

The reality is that the Corinthians were still immature in their spiritual walk. Paul speaks here in verse 8 about them having all they wanted. That is to say, these believers though still infants in the Lord, believed they had reached maturity. They couldn't imagine needing anything beyond what they had.

The word "*already*" is significant here. It implies that they believed themselves to have attained fullness and growth and required nothing more.

Notice secondly that Paul speaks of the believers as having become rich. There is a sense that the Corinthians were indeed rich in Christ. The word "*already*," however, seems to bring finality to the matter. The implication is that they had realized the fullness of everything they had in Christ, and there was no more to discover. The division among believers in Corinth, however, demonstrated that they had not tapped into the fullness of Christ's work and purpose for their lives as believers.

Next, Paul tells the church that they had become kings without them. There were those in Corinth who questioned their need for the apostles, their teaching and their authority. They had the Holy Spirit, and that was all they needed. I have met individuals like this.

These individuals do not understand that the Spirit of God has given gifts to the body of Christ and that no one has all the gifts in themselves. The Spirit of God has purposely created a need in the body for interdependence. That is to say, every part of the body must work together for the common good of the whole. Some Corinthian believers failed to see their need for authority and submission in the body. They lived as if they were their own authority and did not need anyone to tell them what to do. This, of course, would only lead to division and pride in the end.

Notice as Paul concludes the verse that though he declared them to be kings, he also says: *"And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!"* This phrase implies that while there were Corinthians who believed themselves to be kings, this was not the case. Paul seems to be saying something like this: "I wish that

you were truly reigning kings so that we could partner with you in the advancing of the kingdom of God.” The reality, however, was very different.

Instead of reigning as kings, the Corinthians were divided and confused. They were falling prey to the flesh and living as “mere humans” but not in victory over their fleshly desires and passions. They were still slaves to their worldly passions.

Verse 9

Having described how the Corinthians saw themselves as rich kings, Paul now addresses how he saw himself and the apostles. Notice the contrast here.

First, Paul tells the Corinthians that God had “*exhibited us apostles as last of all.*” He does not say this from any sense of false pride or inferiority. Paul was fully aware of the immense privilege he had to be chosen by God

for the role of apostle. He was, however, aware of the suffering he had to endure for the cause he represented. He had been stoned and left for dead in cities where he preached. He had been ridiculed, mocked and imprisoned for the cause he represented. The privilege of being an apostle brought much suffering for the Lord Jesus. Unlike great worldly leaders, the apostles did not have big homes or live in luxury. Like their Master, they often had very little to call their own. As far as social status was concerned, they were near the bottom.

Second, the apostle describes himself and the other apostles as "*like men sentenced to death.*" How does our community treat a man sentenced to death for a great crime against humanity? This man is often hated, scorned and despised. This was how the apostles often felt. Their message was rejected. They were forcibly

removed from cities, beaten and ridiculed. They were also constantly threatened with death for the truth they proclaimed.

Third, Paul tells the Corinthians that as apostles, they had become a "*spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.*" The word "spectacle" comes from the Greek word θέατρον (théatron), from which we get the English word theatre. The Roman theatre was a place of entertainment for the people, but it was also where the criminal would be fed alive to the wild beasts for the crowd's amusement but to the shock and horror of the angels of heaven.

Verse 10

The apostle calls himself and the other apostles fools, for Christ's sake. He speaks here from a worldly perspective. Who in their right mind would choose a

profession that would see them being mocked, beaten, imprisoned or even killed? From a worldly perspective, they were fools to accept such a role.

Notice, however, the phrase “for Christ’s sake.” These three words make all the difference. They give the profession a genuine purpose. They were willing to become fools in the eyes of the world for the sake of Jesus Christ and the expansion of His kingdom.

In contrast, the Corinthians were “wise in Christ.” Paul uses the phrase “wise in Christ” with sarcasm. They were wise in the world and its ways and wanted to be in Christ. They wanted the best of both worlds. They wanted worldly respect and honour but also the assurance of forgiveness and a relationship with Christ. They had not died completely to the world for the Lord Jesus.

While the apostles were beaten, ridiculed, hungry and sometimes destitute, the Corinthians were strong and lacked nothing. They enjoyed the world's blessings and privileges.

While the apostles were rejected and imprisoned for their preaching, the Corinthians were highly regarded in the community as well-respected citizens.

These words of Paul to the Corinthians are striking. Why would anyone want to leave their reputation, respect, riches and worldly privilege if they could have these things and be Christians as well? While we do not have time in this verse to examine this question, could it not be that this is the cause for weakened believers and great worldliness in the church? Until we are willing to give up everything for Christ, our faith will be tainted with worldliness.

Verse 11

While the Corinthians enjoyed riches and worldly blessings, the apostle Paul tells us that the apostles were hungry and thirsty, poorly dressed, buffeted and homeless. They had given up the privileges of this world for a cause that was greater than this world. They were willing to suffer for that cause and refused to be distracted by the pursuit of things here below. The apostle seems to be using the apostles' example to teach the Corinthians that their love for this world was only hindering the cause of Christ.

Verse 12

The apostles, according to Paul, financed their ministries by working with their hands. It is true that from time to time, these men did receive gifts from churches, but often they did have to resort to physical work to supply the funds they needed for the

ministry to which Christ had called them.

Though they offered their service freely to all who would listen, these men, who worked with their hands, were often reviled and ridiculed. When this happened, they did not retaliate but blessed those who cursed them. When persecuted, they did not give up but endured for the sake of Christ.

Understand here that these apostles offered their services freely. They worked hard with their hands to be able to do this. They received no earthly remuneration for the hard work freely provided. Despite this, they were reviled and ridiculed.

Verse 13

How did the apostles respond when they were slandered? Paul told the Corinthians: "We entreat." Understand here that the church of Corinth was

divided over its spiritual leaders. It is easy to see how the apostle could have been slandered even in the church of Corinth.

When slandered, however, the apostle responded by entreating. The word translated "entreat" in the original Greek is παρακαλέω (parakaléō). It comes from two words. The first is pará, meaning to the side of. The second word is kaléō meaning to call. When these two words are put together, we have the idea of being called to someone else's side. It speaks of bringing comfort and support. In this case, it refers to bringing a word of encouragement, support or comfort. So when they were slandered, the apostles came alongside those who slandered them and brought them comfort and encouragement.

The apostles did not retaliate even though they were considered the "scum of the world" and the "refuse of all

things.” While not everyone felt this way toward the apostles, these men often suffered much abuse and slander for the Name they represented. This did not keep them from completing the Lord’s task. They overcame their humanness and continued demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit with a heart of perseverant humility.

Verse 14

Paul states why he took the time in this letter to reveal how he and the other apostles were being treated.

First, it was not to make them feel ashamed. Have you ever been in a church service where the speaker attempts to make you feel ashamed or guilty? Shame and guilt are techniques often used to manipulate. Paul did not resort to human manipulation in his preaching. Paul refused to do this as he saw it as shameful in itself.

Second, Paul tells the Corinthians that his goal was to admonish them as children. The word Paul uses here is νοουθετέω (nouthetéō). This Greek word is derived from nous meaning mind, and tithēmi meaning to place. Together they have the sense of putting something on someone's mind. In other words, to warn them, exhort them, or challenge them as his beloved children.

It is not always easy to distinguish between shaming and admonishing, but in part, it has to do with the attitude of the heart. Paul intends not to belittle here so much as to warn and inspire believers to new growth. It is not to manipulate but to teach and instruct them in what is right.

Verse 15

Notice that Paul speaks to the Corinthians here as a father. The

believers in Corinth exhorted and encouraged each other. They did not lack fellowship, support, and advice. What they did not have, however, was a spiritual father who had greater maturity and insight. It is one thing to listen to your friends struggling with the same questions you are wrestling through, but quite another to listen to one who has not only been through what you are facing but has come through it successfully. As a spiritual father, Paul had seen these Corinthians come to faith, but he also had the experience and insight they needed to help them mature. These spiritual fathers and mothers in Christ are a valuable asset to any church.

Verse 16

Paul urges the Corinthians to imitate his life. This comes in the context of the apostle being a spiritual father to the Corinthians. He has no hesitation in

encouraging them to follow his example. The context of the chapter indicates that Paul was a model of humility, harmony and self-sacrificing faithfulness to the cause of the gospel.

Verse 17

Paul sent Timothy to Corinth to support the Corinthians in their spiritual walk. Notice that Paul addresses Timothy as his “faithful child in the Lord.” The apostle sends Timothy because, although he considered him a child, he had proven his maturity and giftedness. He commissioned Timothy to remind the Corinthians of his ways in Christ.

It may seem strange for the apostle to send Timothy to speak about how Paul lived and what He believed. Paul, however, did not just preach with words but his life as well. Would it seem strange to send someone to teach the truth the apostle had received from

Christ? Neither should it seem odd for Timothy to speak of how the apostle lived his life in humility, sacrifice, holiness, integrity and perseverance. The gospel Paul preached was in both word and life. He lived out what he preached and sent Timothy to the Corinthians to teach the Corinthians to do likewise.

The words of Timothy may also have silenced those speaking out against Paul in favour of Apollos. It may be that Timothy would have been able to address any slanderous lies spreading about the apostle in Corinth.

Paul's commitment to live out the gospel in word and deed was not just before the Corinthians but "*everywhere in every church*." Wherever he went, Paul was the same. He demonstrated by life and word the truth of Jesus Christ and his power in him.

Verse 18

Paul appears to have every intention of going to see the Corinthians. As an apostle, he took church problems very seriously and would demand an accounting from those who caused disturbances and hindered the work of the church.

Notice, however, that these individuals did not seem to be concerned about Paul coming to Corinth. They continued their divisive talk and actions as if they never had to give an accounting.

Verse 19

Paul assures the Corinthians that he would come to them soon. The division and problems in the church were too big to ignore and had to be addressed.

Notice that while the apostle intended to go to Corinth, he added the words "*if the Lord wills.*" Even Paul's righteous

desire to address the problems in the church of Corinth was held in submission to God's greater purpose. Many good things need to be done for the kingdom, but not all of them are for us to do. We must discern the Lord's purpose for our lives and walk in obedience.

Notice the intention of Paul for this trip to Corinth in the words, "*I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power.*" Talk is quite easy. We can make bold claims, but those claims mean nothing if not backed up by actions and power.

Understand that the apostle Paul would go to Corinth under the authority of God and in His power. He would stand before those who brought division to the church and confront them in the name of Jesus Christ. During this time, Paul would determine the source of their bold claims. Were these bold claims backed up by the power of God

or the flesh? He would expose the evil and fleshly intentions of these ungodly individuals.

Verse 20

Much of the work of Paul for the sake of the kingdom required teaching, preaching and discussing the things of the Lord with those who would listen. Notice, however, that Paul told the Corinthians that the kingdom of God was not about words alone but also power.

What is the nature of that power? It is the power to give spiritual life to those dead in their sin. It is the power of God to transform those lives into the image of His Son. It is the power to push back the forces of flesh and the devil so that righteousness will reign. Anyone can preach and teach. The kingdom of God is advanced and demonstrated, however, when the power of God

reveals itself through those words and actions to the glory of God.

Verse 21

Paul offers the Corinthians a choice here. He could come to them with a rod to discipline them, or he could come in love with a spirit of gentleness. Understand that whether he came with a rod or gentleness, Paul was going in love. Discipline is no less an act of love than gentleness.

How Paul responded to the Corinthians depended on their choice. If they repented of their division and sin, he would be gentle with them. If, on the other hand, they persisted, he could be forced to discipline them harshly for the sake of the church. Paul writes the letter to prepare them for his arrival. He desired that the Corinthians would amend their ways and correct their

actions so that he would not have to be harsh with them.

CHAPTER 5

Verse 1

We have already seen the division in the church over the leadership of Paul, Apollos and Cephas. The apostle addresses a second matter here in verse 1. It had been reported that there was sexual immorality among the church members in Corinth. Paul does not reveal the source of this information but deals with the matter in this chapter.

Notice that while sexual immorality is not to be permitted in the church, this particular matter was not even

tolerated among the pagans. That is, even the unbeliever would be shocked at such deviant behaviour.

The immorality described here is related to a man in the church who “had” his father’s wife. The word had, is translated from the Greek word ἔχω (échō), meaning to have and to hold. The words remind us of the promises we made in our wedding vows. Because Paul addressed this matter as a sexual sin, it is clear that the man had a sexual relationship with this woman.

This was a sin on two levels. First, it was adultery. The man had been sleeping with another man’s wife. Second, it was also the sin of not honouring one’s father. The fact that this woman belonged to his father showed tremendous disrespect.

It should be understood here that the fact that this woman was his father’s

wife did not imply that she was his mother. It is quite possible that the father had either more than one wife or had taken a second wife.

Some believe that the father may have been dead at this time, leaving his wife a widow and thus opening the door for the son to marry her. There is no evidence of this, however, in the passage. Paul clearly speaks of a man having an immoral relationship with a woman who belonged to his father.

Verse 2

The apostle returns to how the Corinthians felt about themselves. In [1 Corinthians 4:8](#), Paul, speaking sarcastically about them, said:

*8 Already you have all you want!
Already you have become rich!
Without us you have become kings!
And would that you did reign, so*

that we might share the rule with you! – 1Co 4:8

Here was a church that believed that they had arrived. They felt good about themselves and thought they were rich kings living in the fullness of God's blessing. Paul accused them of arrogance. They were not what they thought they were. They were still very immature and needed victory over their sins and shortcomings.

Instead of boasting about their spiritual walk and blessing, Paul tells the Corinthians that they really ought to be mourning over the state of their church. It was a divided church with people practising sexual immorality that shocked even the pagans.

Paul rebuked the Corinthian believers for not addressing these matters and removing the rebellious sinners from their midst. Instead, they allowed them to continue to pollute the church with

their despicable behaviour. This not only hindered the blessing and work of God but was a bad testimony in their community for Christ.

Paul believed that the purity of the church needed to be maintained. Rebuking its members, he challenged them to open their eyes to the ungodliness, tarnishing the name of Jesus in their community. Those who engaged in willful and sinful behaviour without repenting were to be removed from their assembly.

Verse 3

Paul speaks here about the man having a sexual relationship with his father's wife. The apostle reminds the church that even though he was not physically with them, he was with them in spirit. That is to say, he was with them in his thoughts, prayers and concerns. He agonized over the divisions and

immorality he had heard about in the church.

Notice that the apostle tells the church that he had already pronounced judgment on this man who was guilty of such a despicable sin. The evidence, in this case, appears so clear that Paul can make a determination of this man's guilt, and even though he was far away from the circumstance, he was able to determine not only his guilt but also his sentence.

Verse 4

Paul advises the church on how they were to deal with the sexual immorality in their midst. The apostle expected that the Corinthians would follow through with this advice when they met together. Notice a few details here.

First, the believers were to deal with this matter of sexual immorality when they assembled. This matter was very

public and was to be addressed in public. The whole assembly was to be present to see the church's response to this sinful and very public behaviour.

Second, notice that the matter was to be addressed when they assembled in the name of the Lord. These believers not only gathered in the name of the Lord to worship, but they had the authority in His name to judge this believer and pronounce a sentence upon Him for His actions.

Third, Paul tells them that when they assembled, his spirit would be present with them. In other words, the church would have his support and approval as an apostle to pronounce a judgment on this man.

Finally, not only did the Corinthians gather in the name of Jesus and with the approval of Paul as an apostle, but the power of Jesus Christ was with them as they took this difficult step.

The Lord himself would stand with them in this matter. They would have not only his authority, but the very power of heaven would stand behind them to exercise this judgement.

Verse 5

Paul now tells the Corinthian church what they were to do about this man caught up in sexual immorality.

First, the church was to deliver the man to Satan. The best way to understand this is likely through the Old Testament story of Job. God handed Job over to Satan for him to do as he pleased. Satan killed Job's children, afflicted his body with horrible sores, and stripped him of his friends and support. During that time, it seemed that God turned his face from him, and his prayers were not being answered. The protection of God was removed, and His blessings

were taken away. Job is left in the hands of Satan for a time.

Notice second, the purpose of handing this man over to Satan — “for the destruction of the flesh.” We are not told what the result of this handing over was in this man’s life. Did he ultimately die under the cruel abuse of Satan? We do not know. What is clear is that Satan physically and emotionally afflicted him in those days. The affliction is not at the hands of the church. When this man was removed from the fellowship of the church, however, Satan was free to do his damage.

Notice finally, the desired outcome of this handing over to Satan — “so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” Was this man a believer who refused to repent and leave his immoral relationship? He was certainly a member of the church in Corinth. Was he a nominal Christian who needed to

come to an understanding of salvation? We are not told. Paul desired, however, that his eternal spirit be saved and that he would get right with God. This sinner's resistance to God's work, however, seemed so strong that it required an equally strong judgment to bring him into submission and surrender.

Verse 6

The church of Corinth seemed to believe that they were doing very well. They were experiencing the work of God among them, and there was likely good attendance at their weekly meetings.

Paul tells them, however. The division among them, particularly this incident with sexual immorality, revealed that things were not as good as the Corinthians believed. They did not have cause to boast in their church. While

this man was only one among many, Paul reminded the church that even a little yeast would spread throughout the dough. In other words, it only takes one person to hinder the work of God in a church. All sin must be addressed to experience God's fullest blessing.

Verse 7

Leaven or yeast, in the Bible, is often used as a symbol of sin because it tends to spread throughout the bread and cause it to puff up. This is what sin does. It spreads and causes us to become proud and not see our need for God and His ways. The apostle encourages the Corinthians to cleanse out the old leaven so that they could become a new and fresh lump of dough.

The picture here is quite important. How do you remove the yeast from bread once it has spread? It is quite

impossible to do. It would take a miracle to remove yeast from bread when it has spread throughout. While it was impossible to remove the sin that has spread in our flesh, God can do the impossible. He alone can remove sin and heal the sinner. The only way the Corinthians could be cleansed was through "Christ our Passover lamb," sacrificed for us. He alone can not only pardon but remove the consequences and power of sin in us so that we can become a new lump of unleavened dough in His hands.

Verse 8

In verse 7, Paul spoke of Jesus the Passover lamb. He continues here with this theme. He encouraged the Corinthians to celebrate this festival not with old leaven but with unleavened bread. Let's break this down.

First, the Corinthians were to “celebrate the festival.” We should not see this celebration as referring to the Old Testament Passover. The festival Paul refers to here has to do with “Christ our Passover lamb.” While the Passover did point to Jesus, the celebration was not a looking forward to Jesus as the old festival did, but rather a celebration of Jesus, who had already been sacrificed as the lamb who took away the world’s sin. The celebration referred to here is a celebration of victory over sin through Christ, our Passover lamb.

Second, Paul tells the Corinthians that they were to celebrate this great event not with old leaven but with unleavened bread. He explains this more fully in the verse.

The old leaven Paul speaks of here refers to “malice and evil.” This was the fruit of sin in the life of the individual. It caused that person to wander from God and hindered fellowship with God.

On the other hand, the unleavened bread that the Corinthians were to bring to Christ in celebration of His victory was the unleavened bread of "sincerity and truth." How could the old leaven be replaced by 'sincerity and truth?' This was a work of God's Spirit in the surrendered believer. The Holy Spirit would strip away malice and evil and replace it with sincerity and truth.

Sincerity and truth imply a genuine and godly heart. It is a heart surrendered to God and an ambition to honour Him. This is not the fruit of human effort but the inner transforming power of God's Spirit at work in the life of yielded believers.

Verse 9

The apostle speaks of a letter in which he told believers not to associate with sexually immoral people. He does not specify anything more about it. The

letter to which he refers was read by the Corinthians and predated the epistle of 1 Corinthians. Paul wrote to many other believers, but these works, however, have been lost.

While we may not have the letter to which Paul refers here in this verse, it spoke about sexual immorality. This was not the first time the apostle addressed this sin with the Corinthians. The culture in which they lived had many temptations, and believers needed to learn the purpose of God for their sexuality.

Paul writes to clarify a point made in this former letter. It appears that there were different opinions about what he meant about their association with sexually immoral people.

Verse 10

It appears that some believers misinterpreted the words of Paul's

former letter about associating with sexually immoral people (see verse 9). Notice how Paul begins this verse:

10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters,

The apostle clarifies his comments from the former letter here. Some believers took Paul's command to separate from sexually immoral people to imply even unbelievers. That is to say, they would not associate with anyone who was sexually immoral, greedy, swindler or idol worshipper. This required living in a small bubble, refusing to communicate or work with anyone who did not live as Christ commanded.

Paul tells them this was not what he intended in his letter. If they were to maintain strict separation from sinners, they would need to leave this world. We need to associate with people of all

kinds. This will mean eating with sinners and working with Judas betrayers as Jesus did. We cannot expect to live a life free from anyone who sins. As believers, we must learn how to rub shoulders and work with people who do not know the Lord or follow His path.

Verse 11

Paul explains that there was a difference between associating with an unbeliever who lived an ungodly life and associating with someone who claimed to be a believer and lived in sin. While sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, drunkenness and swindling are sinful for both the believer and the unbeliever, Paul makes a distinction here. The world in which we live tolerates these sins to a certain point. The unbeliever does not claim to be a follower of Christ or His ways. They live by another standard.

The one who names the name of Jesus, however, claims to submit to Him and walk as His follower. When they commit sexual immorality, are greedy, or fall into idolatry, they do so as His representatives. They blaspheme the name they represent when they live in their sin.

Paul speaks here of a person who bears the name of Christ but is guilty of sexual immorality, greed, drunkenness, idolatry, reviling and swindling. It is one thing to fall into sin, repent and be restored. Paul seems to be speaking here, however, about those who make this a practice and do not repent. This appears to be the case for the man with his father's wife in this chapter. He continued in sin without repentance. It was this refusal to make things right with Christ that needed to be addressed. Such a person not only blasphemed the name of Christ but greatly harmed the church. The church,

therefore, needed to make a clear break from this kind of lifestyle. This was not how a believer ought to live, and as such, they needed to separate from any brand of Christianity that refused to walk in the way of Christ and honour His name and purpose among them.

Verse 12

Paul does not feel obligated to judge the outsider. This was not his responsibility. Certainly, he was to point them to Christ and warn them of a coming judgment, but he would not be the one to judge them.

Unbelievers do not have the mind of Christ. The Spirit of God does not live in them to enable them to walk in His path. Until they become God's children, we cannot expect them to understand the purpose of Christ.

On the other hand, however, those who know the Lord and His indwelling Spirit are without excuse. God gave apostles and leaders to teach, instruct, reprimand and encourage the church in godly living. He has given his gifts to the body to edify. We who know the salvation of Christ and the new life He offers have a greater obligation. We are called to live a godly life. Believers must stimulate each other to greater maturity. We have a duty to warn each other of pitfalls along the way. God requires that we care for each other, and that may, at times, require making judgements for the mutual benefit of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Verse 13

Paul reminds the Corinthians that God will judge the unbeliever. We have no authority to judge them ourselves. I believe that if unbelievers walked in the ways of God, there would be great

blessings for our society. I am also convinced that we are to be lights in this world, revealing the purposes of God's kingdom and the character of His Son. We cannot expect, however, that an unbeliever can live just like the believer when their fleshly nature has never been transformed, nor do they have the Spirit of God in them. There will always be a difference between the believer and the unbeliever. This is a reality we must accept in this world. It is hard to judge someone for something they have no power to do anything about. Until the unbeliever accepts Christ, they will never be able to live as He expects.

Having said this, when it comes to believers, the question is very different. The believer has the Spirit of Christ to empower and the mind of Christ to understand. The Spirit of God convicts the believer of sin and judgment. He gives us a new heart that seeks after

God. There is no excuse for the believer to continue in sin. We have everything we need in Christ to live in victory. That is not to say that this victory will always be easy. But God will stand with us in this battle.

Understanding the nature of the battle before us should encourage us to deal with sin. Believers desire the glory of God and will purge evil from their midst. The apostle calls upon the church of Corinth to expel the man who was having an immoral sexual relationship with his father's wife. That required judging his actions to determine if they were worthy behaviour for one who called upon the name of the Lord.

CHAPTER 6

Verse 1

To this point, we have seen that the church of Corinth has been experiencing sexual immorality and division. Chapter 6 introduces a third significant issue Paul needed to address. This is related to believers taking each other to court over personal grievances. We can only imagine the atmosphere in a church where its members were battling each other in secular courts.

Notice what Paul has to say about this here:

*"does he dare go to law before the
unrighteous instead of the saints?"*

The word translated as "dare" in this verse is *τολμάω* (*tolmáō*). It speaks of courage, boldness, and confidence. There may be two aspects to what Paul is saying here.

First, the apostle may be using the word "dare" in the sense that these believers were doing something unthinkable wrong. He is saying something like: How could you even think of taking a fellow believer to court? How could you have the audacity to treat a brother or sister in this way?

Second, the emphasis may also be upon trusting an unbeliever to make a proper judgment for the believer. In this case, the apostle may be saying something like this: How could you bring your problems to unbelievers to resolve? How could you trust someone

who does not have the mind of Christ to address this matter? However we understand what Paul is saying here, it is clear that the church in Corinth had internal problems that they trusted unbelievers to resolve.

Paul believed that problems between believers needed to be addressed between them.

Verse 2

Paul reminds the Corinthians that the day was coming when saints would judge the world. The word Paul uses here for judge is κρίνω (krínō). It means to separate, distinguish, discern a matter, or to form an opinion. It also carries with it a legal sense of passing a sentence.

Consider the words of Jesus to the apostles in [Matthew 19:28](#):

28 Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. – Mt 19:28

The Lord tells his disciples here that the day was coming when they would sit on "glorious thrones" in "the new world," judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus refers here to a future time in a new world where His disciples would rule as judges discerning cases in His name.

Writing to the church of Thyatira, the Lord says:

26 The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, 27 and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen

pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. – [Rev 2:26-27](#)

The Lord promises the church of Thyatira that they would be given authority over the nations and rule them with a rod of iron. In other words, He would give them His authority in the world as His representatives.

Consider also the words of Jesus to the church in [Matthew 18](#):

17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it

*will be done for them by my Father
in heaven. – Mt 18:17-19*

Our Lord tells us here that when it came to judging cases between brothers and sisters, the church had the authority of God on this earth.

As Paul writes to the Corinthians here, he reminds them of the authority they had to judge in Jesus' name on this earth and in the "new world." If this is the case, why would these believers go to unbelievers to try their "trivial cases?"

Verse 3

The apostle tells the Corinthians they had been given authority to judge angels. Understand here that not all angels are good. The demons of hell were cast out of heaven to this earth and seek to deter the work of the kingdom of God. While on this earth,

the Lord Jesus demonstrated His power over these spirits, casting them out of those they oppressed. He gave His church authority over these forces of hell.

Paul felt so strongly about the message he preached that he told the Galatians:

8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. – [Ga 1:8](#)

Notice how the apostle cursed any angel that would declare a different gospel from the one he preached.

If we have authority on this earth to judge, cast out evil spirits, and curse any who declare another gospel, surely, according to Paul, we should be able to consider matters between believers in this life.

Verse 4

Paul gets to the point he is trying to make here. He understands that there will be issues between believers. Those issues, however, should be judged between believers. They should not be taken to a secular court to be considered by those with "*no standing in the church.*"

The phrase "*no standing in the church*" is important. The implication is that it is those who have a standing who should be judging. That is to say, those who are mature and walking with the Lord. Consider Paul's advice to the Galatians in this matter:

1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. –

Ga 6:1

Paul tells the Galatians that it was those who were spiritual who were to restore the wanderer. These individuals, in good standing with the church, could make appropriate judgementcides.

Understand that the world's ways are not God's ways.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. – [Isa 55:9](#)

Believers are to submit to the purpose of God. This is not a purpose the unbeliever can truly determine. I would dare say that it is not even a purpose the immature Christian can easily decide. It would be easy to condemn what God has called to bless (see [Luke 6:28](#)) or to demand compensation when God requires the believer to go the second mile (see [Matthew 5:41](#)). It

should be the heart of every believer to seek the will of God in their struggle with a brother or sister in Christ. This is best determined by those who know His Word and can discern the leading and purpose of God.

Verse 5

The apostle has just pointed out that believers will judge both this world and angels. He moves now to the trivial matters the Corinthians were dealing with in the church. According to Paul, it was a shameful thing that they were not able to address these conflicts among themselves. Notice how he expressed this here:

*Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, –
1Co 6:5*

Consider this for a moment. Paul speaks here about the wisdom to settle a dispute between believers. Christian brothers chose to go to unbelievers to resolve their disputes. These unbelievers did not have the mind of Christ. God's Holy Spirit had not renewed their heart. They did not follow the purpose of God for their lives. The wisdom of this world is not the same as the wisdom of God. God's ways are often foolish to the unbeliever.

It was a source of great shame to the church in Corinth that they did not seek the will of the Lord in the resolution of their problems. Instead, they went to the unbeliever to get their wisdom. In doing so, they rejected the wisdom of God.

The apostle found it hard to believe that no one in their midst had enough insight into the heart and purpose of God that they could have advised

believers on how to settle their disputes in a godly way.

How easy it is for our flesh to long for swift justice. Sometimes, we have been so hurt that the flesh seeks revenge. We know deep down inside that God will require forgiveness and reconciliation, and we are not ready for this, so we seek justification by means of worldly judgment. In these cases, we demonstrate the true condition of our hearts.

Paul understood that there would be problems between believers, but he taught that these matters should not have to be settled by unbelievers. As children of God, we should be able to resolve our differences without taking a brother or sister to a secular court.

Verse 6

In Corinth, Christian brothers were taking legal action against each other.

This legal action demonstrated that they could not resolve matters between themselves. They fought for their rights and refused to yield anything to a brother.

Consider the teaching of Jesus in this regard, as recorded for us in [Matthew 5](#):

39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. – [Mt 5:39-41](#)

These Corinthian brothers were not willing to turn the cheek. They were unwilling to surrender their cloak or go the second mile. As a result, they took each other to court, fighting over trivial

matters. This demonstrated their immaturity in the faith and was a bad testimony for Christ.

These conflicts and clashes were brought before unbelievers to resolve. In the mind of Paul, it was a sad state of affairs that the church was so immature that it needed the wisdom of the world to resolve its conflicts.

Verse 7

The fact that brothers in the church of Corinth had lawsuits against each other was a sign of defeat. In other words, they should have been able to resolve their differences between themselves. They could not demonstrate, however, they could walk in victory over their sin and worldliness.

For Paul, these believers should have been willing to “suffer wrong” or “be defrauded” rather than take the matter to a secular court. We must consider

this principle in greater detail here. Paul is not telling believers that they should not seek justice. He is teaching, however, that some principles are of greater significance than getting what is rightfully mine.

The glory of God is of greater significance than any individual believer getting what is rightfully theirs. As believers, we need to be willing to surrender what is ours for the glory of God. If by my actions I defame the name of Christ, I should surrender what is mine so that my actions do not tarnish His glory. If by asserting my rights, I break my relationship with a brother and harm the church's reputation, is it not better to sacrifice my right? As important as justice is in this world, it is often better to suffer injustice rather than cast reproach on the name and kingdom of God.

Verse 8

Instead of being wronged, the Corinthians were wronging each other. The harmony of the church was hindered by their selfish and worldly mindset. Their Saviour suffered great injustice for them but they were unwilling to suffer for their brothers and sisters. Instead they demanded their rights at their brother's expense.

Verse 9

The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. The word used for unrighteous here is ἀδίκος (ádikos) meaning, without justice or falling short of the requirements of God. Paul lists several examples of the fruit of unrighteousness here. Sexual immorality, idolatry, adultery, and the practice of homosexuality are all listed as the fruit of unrighteousness.

Understand that the apostle is not telling the Corinthian believers that they would go to hell because they took their brothers to court. He is telling them, however, that what they were doing was just like the unbeliever. They lived like those who did not know the Lord by practicing unrighteous deeds.

Verse 10

Paul continues his list of unrighteous deeds here from verse 9. He adds theft, greed, drunkenness, reviling, and swindling here. These ungodly practices did not come from a heart in tune with God.

Paul shows the Corinthians the fruit of unrighteousness to demonstrate that they were walking on this same path. They were not walking in the Spirit, and in the victory, He wanted to give them in Christ. There ought to be a difference between unbelievers and

those who know the Lord. The believer has the power of the Spirit of Christ to overcome the world and its unrighteous fruit. The Corinthians were not living in this victory.

Verse 11

Paul comes to the point he is trying to make in the past few verses. He listed the fruit of unrighteousness to remind the Corinthians that many among them had been caught up in these sins. The day came, however, when they met the Lord Jesus, and everything changed. Paul made it clear that even though the church had fallen into sin and immorality, he still recognized them as believers. Notice what he tells us about them in this verse.

First, they had been washed. The idea here is that they were dirty and unpresentable to God. The Lord Jesus forgave the offence of their sin by His

death on the cross of Calvary. The guilt and shame were removed when he brought pardon and forgiveness by His sacrificial death on their behalf.

Second, the Corinthians had also been sanctified. The word sanctified is ἁγιάζω (hagiázō), meaning to make holy. That is to say, God had set them apart to be His. This does not mean that we are perfect, but rather that we are God's, set apart for His glory and purpose on this earth and in the life to come.

Third, the Corinthians were also justified in the name of Jesus and by the Spirit. The word justified is the Greek word δικαιόω (dikaiōō). It comes from *díkaios*, meaning righteous or just. The ending *ōō* implies that this righteousness and justice are bought out or declared. In other words, justification is a declaration of justice or right standing with God. This right standing is not because the Corinthians

were without sin but because Christ had pardoned their sin and declared them to be right with God through his sacrificial death on their behalf.

Paul reminds the believers of their standing with Christ for an important reason. If we have been cleansed, set apart for God and declared just and right in His sight, why would we return to the world and its evil ways? Shouldn't those pardoned at great cost be willing to walk as God intends? Shouldn't they be willing to sacrifice their rights and freedoms for a brother or sister in Christ? Those who have been cleansed, sanctified and justified need to live in victory over sin and the world.

Verse 12

The apostle begins verse 12 with the phrase, "*All things are lawful for me.*" The word lawful is ἐξέστι

(éxesti), meaning possible or permitted. In other words, Paul had the freedom to do many things. He was no longer under the Old Testament law. Being free from the law of Moses did not mean, however, that Paul should do whatever he wanted. I may be free to step out in front of a car, but doing so will bring disastrous consequences.

In the case of the Corinthians, they divided over their leaders. They practiced sexual immorality and took fellow believers to court. God did not stop them from doing these things. The reality of the matter, however, is that there were serious consequences for their actions. They grieved the heart of God and hindered their relationship with Him. They hurt their brothers and sisters by their deeds. The blessing of God was removed from their midst, and their testimony in the community was damaged. They would also have to

answer to God for their actions even though their salvation was assured.

How does a society function if there are no laws? It has to consider what is helpful. Will what I do benefit me, my brother and sister, and society? If it is not helpful, I need to refrain from its practice. I do this whether there is a law against it or not.

Beyond this, Paul told the Corinthians that he would not be dominated or controlled by anything. Will my action put me in a situation where I will be trapped? Will I let myself be controlled or manipulated into doing something that is not for my good or the good of the kingdom of God? For example, if by refusing to forgive my brother or sister, will I find myself trapped by bitterness and anger for the rest of my life? Will I allow my lust or greed to control my actions and cause me to do something I will regret?

Paul made it his ambition to do only what was helpful to bring glory to God and His kingdom. He refused to allow himself to be controlled or manipulated by the flesh to do anything contrary to the purpose of God.

Verse 13

Paul begins the verse with a common saying of the day: *"Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food."* Notice how he then moves on to speak about sexual immorality. These two thoughts are directly connected in the mind of the apostle. The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary has this to say about Paul's reasoning here:

Wealthy banquets could cater to both gluttony and sexual desire. "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food" was an acceptable Greek way of arguing by analogy that the body was for sex

and sex for the body. – The IVP Bible Background Commentary". Marion, IA: Laridian, Inc., 2021. OT: © 2000 by John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas; NT: © 2014 by Craig S. Keener. All Rights Reserved.

The phrase "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food" was an argument used to justify sexual immorality. You satisfy your sexual appetite just as you would satisfy your physical hunger. You feel no guilt eating when hungry, and neither should you feel shame when you satisfy your sexual appetite. God gave us both of these needs. Notice how the apostle responds to this kind of reasoning.

First, God will destroy both food and the stomach. These appetites are worldly and temporary. The day is coming when physical and sexual appetites will be no more. Shall we

spend our lives pleasing these temporal appetites and give no thought to eternity?

Second, while it is true that the stomach was made for food, the body was not meant for sexual immorality. The first allegiance of the body was to God and His purpose. God had a purpose for human sexuality, and He made that purpose clear in His law. To disregard the purpose of God for our sexuality is to disobey God and walk in rebellion against Him.

Verse 14

The apostle points the Corinthians to the fact that the Father raised Christ from the dead, and He will also raise us by that same power. The insinuation here is that there is life after death. Those who belong to Jesus Christ will be raised to stand before Him. On that day, they will be judged. More than

this, however, they will live with Him forever, enjoying the blessing of His presence and fellowship. What is the pleasing of these physical and sexual appetites compared to eternal life in the presence of Christ? This ought to be the passion of the believer. The joy of what is before us should be our greatest delight and focus.

Verse 15

The apostle adds another argument against sexual immorality here when he tells the Corinthians that their bodies were members of Christ. The Spirit of Christ dwelt in these believers. He had claimed them body, soul and spirit for Himself. They were His church, devoted to Him and the advancement of His kingdom on earth, and fellow heirs with Him in the eternal joys of heaven.

If our earthly bodies belong to Christ and we to Him, is it reasonable to take

what belongs to Christ and join them to a prostitute? If our bodies are the temple where the Spirit of Christ dwells, shall we defile that temple by sexual immorality? The call upon every believer is to keep their body pure and undefiled because it belongs to Christ and His Spirit dwells in it.

Verse 16

Some individuals argued that by having a relationship with a prostitute, they were merely satisfying a fleshly appetite and nothing more. These individuals were proponents of the saying, "*Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food*" (see verse 13 for explanation). In their mind, they were satisfying the sexual appetite that God had given them. There was no long-term commitment to the prostitute. They had no love or desire for her apart from addressing their sexual need.

Paul reminds these individuals, however, that "*he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her.*" The idea here is that they were not merely dealing with a sexual appetite, they were taking what belonged to Jesus Christ and giving it to a prostitute. Paul quotes from [Genesis 2:24](#) and reminds the Corinthians of God's words when he gave Eve to Adam: "*The two will become one flesh.*" It is important, therefore, that what we join to ourselves is from God and honours Him.

Verse 17

Paul tells the Corinthians two things here about their relationship with the Lord.

First, they had been joined to the Lord. This union is a legal matter. Just as a husband takes a wife and is legally

bound to her, so it is in my relationship with Christ. This joining together places obligations and boundaries on me. I am not free to do as I please. I must consider my partner in everything I do. I am committed to her for life. Everything I have is hers. If I am unfaithful to her, I defile my relationship. Being joined with Christ has the same implication. I must live now as one who is joined in every way to Christ. I must consider Him and His desire in all that I do. Understand also, however, that what belongs to Christ is mine because I am joined to Him.

Second, Paul tells the Corinthians that those who have been joined to Christ become one spirit with Him. To become one spirit on the surface implies a single heart and mind. That is to say, the Holy Spirit gives me the mind of Christ. The old sinful passions and desires fade, and I find myself in tune with Him and His desires. Beyond this,

however, is that my spirit is so joined with Christ that my salvation is secure, and nothing can separate me from Him. I am completely hidden in Him. His spirit covers my shame and guilt. I belong so completely to Him that our spirits are one –Christ in me and I in Christ.

Verse 18

The church in Corinth had to deal with sexual immorality. They lived in a culture where sexual sins were quite common. Paul commands the church, however, to flee from this particular sin.

The word flee comes from the Greek word φεύγω (pheúgō). It carries the idea of escaping or running from danger. Sexual immorality is not innocent entertainment or harmless satisfaction of fleshly appetites. According to Paul, those who engage in sexual immorality are playing with fire.

Consider the words of the writer of Proverbs in this regard:

20 Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress? 21 For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all his paths. 22 The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. 23 He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray. – [Pr 5:20-23](#)

Sexual immorality ensnares those who are entrapped by it. Scripture repeatedly warns of the dangers of illicit sexual relations. For this reason, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to escape this trap by fleeing.

The apostle shows the Corinthians that sexual sins are sins against the

individual's own body. By committing sexual immorality, we defile ourselves. We belittle and shame ourselves when we engage in impure sexual activity. No one looks up to someone who has a sexual relationship with a prostitute or another person's wife. We dishonour not only ourselves by such relationships but also the Lord with whom we are one.

Verse 19

The apostle reminds the Corinthian believers that their bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has come to live in each believer. He desires to transform us into the image of Jesus Christ. All who belong to Christ have His Spirit in them. The life we have in Christ is the life this Spirit gives. Without the Spirit of Christ, we would have no spiritual life or insight. He is our life.

Notice, second, that Paul reminds the Corinthians that they were not their own. Christ had purchased their lives on the cross. The Spirit of God then took up residence in them, claiming what Christ had purchased for Himself. There is a new master in the house. The Spirit of Christ is my guide, counsellor, and teacher. I now walk in obedience to Him. He claims all I have as His to do with as He pleases. My responsibility is to surrender and walk in His purpose.

Verse 20

Because the Corinthians were bought with a price, they were to glorify God in their body. They had been lost in sin and under God's judgement. The sentence for their sin was death and eternal condemnation. Jesus' death paid the penalty for their sin in full. They owed their lives to Him. They now belonged to Jesus. He had full right

over them and all they had. Their great responsibility and privilege was now to honour him in their body as long as they had life and breath. The implication of this in the context was that they were to flee from sexual immorality. The outworking of this principle, however, would go beyond their sexual lives to everything they did.

CHAPTER 7

Verse 1

We have seen in this epistle that sexual immorality was a problem in the region of Corinth and had to be addressed in the church. We have an example of this in [1 Corinthians 5:1](#), where a man had a sexual relationship with his father's wife.

In a culture filled with immorality, the Corinthian church wrestled with the place of sex in the believer's life. They wrote to Paul for clarification on this delicate matter.

Paul begins verse 1 by referencing the letter the Corinthians had written to him – “*Now concerning the matters about which you wrote.*” Notice that Paul not only referenced the letter the Corinthians had written to him, but he also quoted directly from that letter. In their correspondence with Paul, the Corinthians wrote: “*It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.*”

It is unclear whether the church had come to this conclusion or they were quoting a view held by some in the region who believed that men should abstain from sexual relations. Paul responds to this statement in this section of his letter.

Verse 2

While Paul himself was never married, he tells the Corinthians that because of the strong temptation to satisfy the

sexual appetite in ungodly ways, each man should have a wife, and each woman should have a husband. The implication here is that sexual need was to be fulfilled in the context of Christian marriage. Paul recognizes sexual need in this verse and taught that it should be addressed in the context of a committed relationship between a husband and wife. According to the apostle, this was God's intention for sexual desire.

Verse 3

Paul told the Corinthian church that sexual needs should be met in a committed relationship between a husband and wife. He takes this matter a step further here in verse 3.

According to Paul, the husband was to give his wife her conjugal rights, and the wife was to do likewise. Let's take a

moment to consider the Greek words Paul uses to express this point.

First, notice that Paul speaks here about the right of the husband and wife. The word the apostle Paul uses here is ὀφειλή (opheilḗ). It refers to a debt, an obligation or a service due. The idea is that the husband and wife have legitimate expectations of a sexual relationship in which their needs will be satisfied. Beyond this, however, is the sense that the husband and wife have an obligation and responsibility toward each other to meet those needs.

Note second that in light of this obligation, the husband or wife is to give their partner what is owed or what is their right. The Greek word for give here is ἀποδίδωμι (apodídōmi). The term conveys the meaning of not just giving but giving what is necessary to fulfill an obligation.

What Paul is telling the Corinthians is that the husband and wife need to see it as their obligation in marriage to satisfy each other's sexual desires. It is in the context of a healthy marital relationship that these needs are to be fulfilled so that there is no temptation to look elsewhere or to find satisfaction in ungodly ways.

Verse 4

Paul's understanding of marriage was that by joining together, the husband gave himself and all he had to his wife. The wife did likewise. The husband's body belonged to his wife. The wife's body belonged to her husband. Let me make a few points here.

First, the fact that the husband's body belonged to his wife stripped him of the right to any other woman. He could not do whatever he wanted with his body. By marrying his wife, he gave her

exclusive rights. He was hers, and he could not give himself to another.

Second, because his body belonged to his wife, she had a reasonable expectation that it would be available to meet her need. While Paul speaks particularly about sexual needs, it is not stretching his point to assume that her husband would be available for her physical, practical and emotional needs as well.

Third, the fact that the husband's body belonged to his wife placed her under a burden of care. She was to care for her husband as she cared for herself. She could not see her need above his. When he suffered, she was not to ignore his pain. She was to learn how to care for him as she would care for herself. His need was her obligation and duty.

In a day of individualism, it is often hard for even Christians to understand

this kind of relationship. It is a relationship where the husband and wife give themselves so completely to each other that their needs are one.

Verse 5

Paul makes it clear that the Christian husband and wife were not to deprive each other of a sexual relationship. The word deprive here in the Greek language is ἀποστερέω (aposteréō). It carries the sense of withholding something that belongs to another. In other words, the person depriving their partner is acting improperly by withholding what rightfully belongs to the other. Paul's words, "*Do not deprive one another*," are issued as a command. In other words, this should not happen in a Christian marriage.

The apostle makes an exception here to this rule. He allows a couple to stop having sex for a brief time by mutual

consent to devote themselves to prayer. Just as a believer might abstain from food to fast and pray, the Christian couple might decide to abstain from sex to seek God in a particular matter.

Notice, however, that Paul tells the Corinthians that this abstinence was only to be for a "limited time." In other words, sexual abstinence was not to be the norm. Christian couples were to be meeting each other's sexual needs regularly. This was because Satan could tempt a needy partner to sin through a lack of self-control because their needs were unmet. Christian couples are to be faithful to each other and minister to each other's needs so that the devil is given no opportunity to cause them to fall into sin.

Let me add one more detail here. It is easy to assume that the temptation of Satan here is sexual immorality. We need to understand that a sexual relationship is not just about satisfying

a sexual appetite. A sexual relationship in marriage has a much deeper meaning than this. It demonstrates passion and love for each other. It reassures the partner of its devotion and commitment. The intimacy of the sexual relationship is a picture of oneness and concern. When a partner is deprived of a sexual relationship, it is easy to assume that the one depriving them no longer cares or is no longer concerned. This is fertile soil for sinful attitudes and behaviours in the marriage relationship. God has designed sex to be a means of reaffirming each other and the relationship.

Verse 6

Paul makes a distinction here between a concession and a command.

A command is not debatable. It is a requirement of God, and those who

disregard it are guilty of sin.

The word Paul uses for concession (ESV) is συγγνώμη (suggnōmē). It could also be translated as permission. The idea is that Paul gives his permission to the Corinthians, but they are under no obligation before God to take advantage of this permission.

Verse 7

The permission Paul offers the Corinthians relates to the question they had asked him in verse 1:

1 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." – 1Co 7:1

Some individuals in Corinth wondered if it was better for them not to have a sexual relationship. In other words,

they were considering whether they should marry or not.

Paul has already spoken to married couples about this by telling them that they were not to deprive each other of sex. He takes the time now to address the unmarried.

The apostle begins by stating that he wished that everyone was like him. Paul was unmarried. He found freedom in this kind of lifestyle. He did not need a wife, and in his mind, marriage would only have hindered his ministry.

Having stated that he wished that more people could remain unmarried to devote themselves to the cause of Christ, Paul adds to his statement by saying that each person had his gift from God. Celibacy, according to Paul, was a gift from God. Some people could remain single all their lives. Unhindered by marriage and family, they had more time to devote to the

work of the kingdom of God. Such was the case for Paul, but he also understood that it was not an ability that every man or woman had.

By telling the Corinthians that he was permitting them to remain single, Paul is telling them that nowhere in Scripture is this singleness a command from God. It is not a sin to be single, nor is it a sin to have a sexual relationship with one's marriage partner.

Verse 8

The apostle tells the unmarried that it was good for them to remain single just as he was. The apostle did not see his singleness as a curse. He believed it was a gift from God to enable him to minister unhindered by worldly concerns and burdens of family and wife. In his mind this was a good thing.

Verse 9

Having stated that singleness was good, Paul qualifies this by reminding the Corinthians that not everyone could exercise self-control. Understand that the self-control Paul speaks about is not just an ability to control the actions of the body but also the thoughts and passions of the mind and heart.

It is quite possible for an individual not to have a sexual relationship outside of marriage but still burn with lust in the heart and mind. Notice how Paul speaks here about individuals who are burning with passion. That is to say, they have a strong desire for a sexual relationship and find themselves struggling with thoughts and feelings that can only be legitimately satisfied by a healthy sexual relationship with a husband or wife.

The apostle tells those who have a strong need to satisfy their sexual

passions that they are to get married and fulfill this need in a healthy and godly way with their life-long partner.

Verse 10

Paul issued a charge to those who were married in Corinth. The word charge used here is παραγγέλλω (paraggéllō). It is derived from two words. The first is *pará*, meaning to the side of. The second is *aggéllō* which means to tell or declare. The idea is that Paul is passing on a message given to him by the Lord. For example, a military commander may issue a command to an inferior officer to relay to the soldiers under his authority. In speaking to the married, Paul passes on an order from the Lord. This command or charge is not from Paul but from Christ Himself.

What is the command of the Lord Paul passes on here? He tells the wife that

she is not to separate from her husband.

The word separate here is χωρίζω (chorízō), meaning without or to sever. The wife was not to be without her husband or to sever her tie to him.

The context speaks of a lifetime relationship where problems are worked out, the relationship restored, and marital commitments are honoured. Speaking directly to wives, Paul reminds them they are not to break any of these commitments with their husbands or sever themselves emotionally or physically from him.

Verse 11

Paul knew that not all marital problems could be easily worked out. There would be times when a wife separated herself from her husband. This separation might be for various reasons. It might be that the husband

became abusive, and the wife's life was at stake. Possibly the husband was unfaithful, which was too much for the wife to endure. It may be that the wife lost interest in her husband or wanted more out of the relationship. We are not given the reason for the wife separating. Whatever the reason for the separation, Paul tells the wife that if she did separate, she had one of two options.

The first option was to remain separate and unmarried. That is to say, she was not to divorce her husband to find another. As long as he lived, she was not to pursue another man.

The second option was for the husband and wife to resolve their problems and be reconciled.

Speaking to husbands, Paul tells them that they were not to divorce their wives. The woman they had was the only one for them. It was not God's

intention that she be disposed of when she lost her appeal. The husband was to learn to love and respect his wife as she was. She might not be as exciting as she once was. She may have changed over the years in her personality. She may have lost interest in him. These, however, were not reasons to divorce her. The husband was to seek the Lord for grace to be faithful, no matter what. He was to love his wife and remain loyal to her. This was the heart of God for each marriage.

Verse 12

Paul's comments so far in this passage relate to Christian marriage and the purpose of God for believers. Couples who love the Lord and seek to walk in His purpose have two things working to their advantage.

First, they have the assurance that a healthy and holy marriage is the purpose of their heavenly Father for them. This being the case, they know that when they struggle, it is the heart of God that they find a solution.

Second, they also have the power and authority of God working for them and the health of their marriage. The Spirit of God will stand with them and enable them to be faithful or resolve their issues.

In Corinth, however, there was another group Paul needed to address. This was those who were married to unbelievers. Imagine an unbelieving family where one of the partners accepts the Lord and becomes a Christian. In some cultures, that would create a serious problem for the believing partner. At the very minimum, it created a division in the marriage that could not be resolved until the other partner came to faith in Christ.

Paul has a command from the Lord for the couples in such a relationship. If the unbelieving partner is willing to live with the believer, they are not to separate or divorce. The believer was to remain faithful to the unbelieving partner, understanding that this might bring conflict and there may be times when they had to choose between the desire of their partner and the purpose of God.

Verse 13

If a Christian wife had an unbelieving husband who consented to live with her, she was not to divorce him. She was to remain faithful to him despite their differences in faith.

The word translated consent in this verse is συνευδοκέω (suneudokéō) which is derived from σύν, meaning together and eudokéō meaning to think well. In this context, it implies that the

couple takes pleasure with each other, and the husband is willing to remain with His wife despite her faith.

Differences in faith are not a reason for divorce. It may cause heartbreak and struggle for the couple, but the Christian wife (or husband) is to remain faithful and not divorce or separate from a loving partner, even if that partner is not a believer.

Verse 14

The apostle Paul has just encouraged the believer to remain with an unbelieving partner if that partner is willing to live with them. Marriage vows were to be upheld even if the partner did not accept the Lord or walk with Him.

Paul takes this matter a step further in this verse. He tells the Corinthians that the unbelieving partner is made holy because of the believing partner. What

is the apostle telling the Corinthians here?

Consider the word holy. It comes from the Greek word ἁγιάζω (hagiázō). The term refers to making something clean or pure. Paul tells us that the unbeliever in an unequal yoke has been declared clean by God.

We generally think of holiness to refer to someone having a right relationship with God. In this case, however, the individual concerned remains a believer. How can an unbeliever be holy or clean before God?

The context of this statement is a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. In this case, the union has already taken place, and the believer wants to know whether they should separate from their unbelieving partner who wants to remain with them. Paul addressed this question by telling the believer that God declared the

relationship clean and holy. The unbelieving partner was not unclean to them, nor did being married to this unbeliever render their marriage illegitimate before God. God accepted their partner as a legitimate partner.

Notice that Paul tells the Corinthians that the unbeliever in this partnership was “made holy” because of the believer. We should not see this to mean that the unbeliever is right with God. This unbeliever has never become a Christian, nor have they accepted the work of Christ on the cross. The word holy should be seen in the sense of being accepted by God as the legitimate partner for the believer. Because of the believing partner, the blessing of God would not be withheld from this marriage.

As the apostle concludes the verse, he reminds the Corinthians, who found themselves in this unequal yoke, that their children were not illegitimate.

They were the legitimate children of a marriage God accepted, even though one of the partners was not a believer.

Verse 15

Not all unbelievers would want to remain with their Christian partners. There may be a variety of reasons for this. Sometimes, the social or religious stigma of being married to a Christian would be too much. In other cases, there may be an incompatibility between the partners because of the Christian faith. In this case, the unbeliever may no longer be willing to remain in the marriage.

Paul tells Christians here that if their unbelieving husband or wife wants to leave, let them do so. Notice the reason for this – “the brother or sister is not enslaved,” and “God has called you to peace.”

First, “the brother or sister is not enslaved.” Imagine an unbeliever wanting to leave a marriage because of social stigma or deep incompatibility. If the believer refused to allow the unbeliever to go, this would cause great enslavement. Unbelievers would be trapped in a marriage they did not want, and believers would bind themselves to a partner who no longer wanted them because of their faith in Jesus Christ. This, in turn, would create a hostile environment not only between the partners but also between the children who were caught in the middle.

Second, Paul tells the Corinthians that God has called us to peace. The peace he refers to here is peace in the marriage. A marriage that has become a battleground between the believer and the unbeliever is an unhealthy marriage. It is not the intention of God for a relationship between husband and

wife. This unceasing battle creates fertile soil for sin in attitudes, actions and thoughts. God's desire for marriage is that there would be peace between the partners. Where there is no peace, problems or conflicts cannot be resolved.

As important as it is to be true to our marriage vows, Paul tells the unequally yoked that if the unbeliever wanted to leave, the believer was not to enslave them to a marriage they no longer tolerated.

Notice here that it is the unbeliever who initiates this separation. That is to say, Paul encouraged the believer to do everything possible to love their partner and make things tolerable in the marriage.

I can imagine a believer who wants to get out of a marriage, trying to make life intolerable for their unbelieving partner so that they have an excuse to

separate. This, however, is not the intention of God. Believers are to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit in even a difficult marriage. It is only when the unbeliever no longer tolerates their godly attitude and actions that the believer is to let them go of their own accord.

Verse 16

One of the great desires of a believing spouse is to see their partner come to faith in Jesus. To this end, believing partners live their lives as an example of Christ and speak to their partners about their salvation. This may be why the believer does not want to separate from their non-Christian partner. They hope that they will see them come to Christ as a result of their example, prayers and testimony.

Paul tells believers in this kind of unequal yoke that they have no way of

knowing if their lives will impact the salvation of their unbelieving partner. As important as our example is, Paul tells the Corinthians that they could not tie the unbeliever to themselves, restricting their freedom, hoping they would become believers. Salvation belonged to the Lord. Ultimately, they had to trust the Lord in this matter.

Verse 17

Paul has just told those who were married to an unbelieving partner when they came to know the Lord to remain with that partner if they were willing to live with them. Believers were to remain faithful to their marriage vows made before accepting Christ and His work on their behalf. Their new-found relationship with Christ did not excuse them from faithfulness to their prior commitments.

The apostle issues a general rule for Christians. That rule is summarized as follows: Each believer is to lead the life the Lord has assigned and called them to live.

First, consider that the Lord has assigned each believer a life to live. The word assigned is μερίζω (merízō). It refers to the act of sharing, dividing or distributing. In other words, each believer is given a role to play. This role has been assigned to them by a sovereign God who makes no mistakes. You may be given as a baby to a rich family or a poor family. You may be born with a healthy body or with a handicap. You have been given strengths and weaknesses. You have been placed in a particular family. The troubles and joys you have in life all have a purpose in the hands of a sovereign and loving God, who will use them in your life to accomplish His goal and design.

Second, Paul tells the Corinthians they were also called to live a particular life. The word call here is καλέω (kaléō). The work kaléō speaks of a command or order. It implies that God has not only orchestrated the circumstances of our lives but has determined how we live in those circumstances. He has a purpose for us in those circumstances. For example, we might accept that God has given us a handicap from birth but live with a rebellious and angry attitude toward God. The call of God, however, demands that we overcome that bitterness and live in victory. The call of God requires that we demonstrate the fruit of the spirit in the handicap we have been assigned at birth. That handicap can then become a tool in the hands of God to accomplish great good for the kingdom.

Verse 18

Paul explains his rule for Christian living in verse 17 more fully here by using the example of circumcision.

Consider, for example, that you were a circumcised Jew when you came to know the Lord Jesus. What were the implications of this on your life? Did that mean you should be ashamed of your circumcision and seek to hide it? Should a circumcised Jew undergo a medical procedure to reverse circumcision because it was no longer required as a Christian? Paul tells them that they were not to change a thing. God accepted circumcised men as His children.

Suppose, on the other hand, you were uncircumcised when you became a believer. Should an uncircumcised believer feel obliged to be circumcised to fit into a church filled with circumcised men? Paul tells them that there was no such requirement and that whether they were circumcised or

not, God accepted them just as they were. If they came to the Lord as a circumcised Jew or an uncircumcised Gentile, they were to remain as they were. God would not require any change in their status.

Verse 19

According to Paul, it did not matter if a man was circumcised or not. The requirement of the Law of Moses regarding circumcision no longer applied to the Christian.

What is striking here is that Paul tells us that the Christian man was no longer obliged to obey the commandment of God regarding circumcision, but he was required to follow the commandments of God. Paul seems, at first glance, to be contradicting himself. How can a person disregard a command of God and still obey God?

The answer lies in the fact that while Christians were no longer under the Law of Moses, this did not mean they could do as they pleased. God still had His principles and regulations. New Testament believers were to walk in tune with God and His purpose for their lives. The obligations of the New Testament were sometimes even more stringent than the Old Testament regulations.

Verse 20

Paul repeats his thought from verse 17 here. The man who came to Christ was not to be concerned about whether he was circumcised or not. God accepted both circumcised and uncircumcised men. Their circumcision or uncircumcision did not offer them any special status with God.

Verse 21

The apostle moves beyond the example of circumcision to that of a bondservant. Imagine that a servant in a family came to know the Lord Jesus. Did this conversion to Christ mean that they had to escape their bondage to become something different? Paul tells the servants they should not be overly concerned about their freedom. They were to live out their faith wherever they were. They were not to try to escape their bondage but to choose rather to let their light shine in their oppression for the glory of Christ.

Notice that Paul tells these servants that if the Lord opened a door for them to be freed from their bondage, they were to take advantage of this and be released. They were not to see their bondage as a means to gain greater favour with God and refuse freedom.

The idea behind this is that they were to shine wherever God had seen fit for them to live. They were to demonstrate

the reality of their faith in whatever situation they found themselves. They were to understand that God assigns His children to different places in life. Before seeking to change a circumstance we don't like, we must first learn how to glorify God in it.

Verse 22

The Lord was working in the lives of many different people in Corinth. He was calling both slaves and free into a relationship with Himself. The apostle reminded believers that slaves who came to the Lord were truly free. They may still be bound to their masters, but they were free from the consequences of sin. They could live with the joy of the Lord despite their earthly condition. They walked in victory and freedom over their circumstances. You may live a life of riches, freedom and luxury and be imprisoned in your mind and heart to the things of this world. You can

have nothing in this world and still enjoy the freedom of the Lord in great joy and victory.

Note that Paul goes on to say that anyone who comes to Christ is His bondservant. That is to say, they belong to Christ and do not have the freedom to do as they please. We who belong to Christ are obligated to Him and His purpose.

There is a strange combination here. True freedom is only found in bondage to Christ. Only when we surrender all our rights to Christ can we truly experience true liberty.

Verse 23

Still using the illustration of the bondservant, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they had been bought with a price. The idea is that Jesus Christ paid their debt and purchased them for Himself at the cross.

Consider this for a moment. We were bound to sin and the devil. Our destiny was an eternal separation from God in our sins. Jesus came to our rescue and died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. Not only did he release us from our debt, but He also purchased us from the enemy to be His. Never before was there such a master. He loved us and had our best interests in mind. We belong to Him as a slave belongs to their master, but the Lord Jesus, unlike any earthly master, only desires our good and eternal blessing. As a good shepherd, He commits Himself to care for us and work on our behalf. Everlasting joy, freedom, and blessing belong to all who are His.

Why would anyone who belonged to Jesus Christ want to become a bondservant of a lesser master? Why would any slave leave such a caring Lord to be abused by another? The apostle Paul challenges believers to

understand the blessing they have as servants of Christ. He encourages them here to be faithful and walk in the privileges that are theirs as servants of such a wonderful master.

Verse 24

After reminding the Corinthians that they had been bought by Christ and belonged to Him, Paul moved on to encourage them to be faithful to Him in whatever situation they found themselves. Knowing the kindness of the Lord Jesus ought to give us courage and endurance in whatever state we find ourselves.

Notice that Paul tells the believer to remain in the condition in which they had been called. In other words, if they were called to Christ as slaves, they were to remain as slaves but allow their new relationship with Christ to transform how they served their earthly

masters. They were to do this, understanding what Christ had done for them by dying on the cross. They were also to do so with the assurance that He who called them could fully strengthen them for their role and use them for His glory in even the most trying of circumstances.

Notice particularly the phrase "*remain with God.*" Consider this in the context of slavery. If these slaves were to remain in the "*condition each was called*" and "*remain with God,*" the implication is that God was with them in their slavery. He was with them in the suffering, persecution, sickness and abuse. They would know His presence in whatever circumstance they found themselves. God would go through the pain with them. He would never leave them alone.

Verse 25

This verse introduces a new section in the chapter. The apostle speaks here about the betrothed. Notice the wording: "*Now concerning the betrothed.*" Remember that Paul has been addressing several questions the Corinthians had asked him. He introduced the chapter with the following words:

1 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." – 1Co 7:1

It is quite possible that the words "*the betrothed*" may refer to a particular couple in the church about which the Corinthians had a question.

The apostle tells the Corinthians that, while he likely sought the Lord about this matter, he did not have a direct command from Him. While Paul had not heard directly from the Lord on this

matter, he did feel that he could make a “trustworthy” judgment. This judgment was a result of the Lord’s mercy. In other words, Paul is not making his decision based on his human wisdom and discernment but as a man who had been given the wisdom of God.

The apostle shows us that there are times when God will make the path clear to us by speaking to our hearts or orchestrating the circumstances of our lives in such a way that His will becomes very apparent.

We should not assume, however, that this is the only way the Lord will lead us. He will also enable us to make wise and godly decisions by mercifully directing our thoughts and judgments. These conclusions, though not accompanied by spectacular circumstances or a clear sense of the Lord’s voice, are nonetheless from Him because He has guided our reflections into His purpose.

Verse 26

Paul tells the Corinthians that in light of the "*present distress*," it was best for each person to remain as they were. He introduced this section by speaking about "the betrothed." We can assume that he is continuing in this same theme.

Notice the words "*I think*." This shows us that Paul is expressing his opinion on what to do with "*the betrothed*." While he expresses his view, the apostle believes that the wisdom he shares is from the Lord.

Paul speaks here about a "*present distress*." He does not clarify this in the verse. In verse 29, however, the apostle does tell his readers that the "*appointed time has grown very short*." The church of Corinth was divided; they struggled with sexual immorality and believers taking other believers to court. Paul also looked

forward to the return of the Lord. The question on his mind was how the Lord would find the church of Corinth when He did return. There was a great need for a purifying work of God in the region. These were times of great distress in Corinth, and believers could not afford to be distracted by the world at this time. It may be best to take what Paul tells the Corinthians about "the betrothed" in this light.

The betrothed were those who had been engaged to be married. They were about to embark on a new journey in life as a couple. The question Paul addresses seems to be related to whether these engaged couples should enter formally into marriage or remain single in these times of present distress when the return of the Lord could be at any moment.

Verse 27

Listen to the advice of Paul in light of the “*present distress*” in Corinth (and indeed in our world).

Speaking to those who are married, the apostle tells them not to seek to be free. They were to remain in their relationships and faithful to their partners. They were to demonstrate the purpose of God through their marriages.

Speaking next to the unmarried, the apostle counsels them not to seek a marriage partner. What Paul recommends here does not contradict his words in [1 Corinthians 7:8-9](#) where he encouraged those who were not in control of their sexual passions to marry:

8 To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. 9 But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry.

For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.— [1Co 7:8-9](#)

The apostle seems to be encouraging those who could to remain single in light of the needs around them. If this was not possible, they certainly did not sin by marrying. He will go on in the passage to explain this more fully.

Verse 28

If the Corinthians chose to marry, they had not sinned. Marriage may be the proper thing for them to do. If an engaged couple felt compelled to follow through with their plans for marriage, this was perfectly acceptable in the eyes of God. Having stated that marriage was a perfectly accepted practice for the Christian, Paul also feels compelled to remind the betrothed that marriage would bring its difficulties and struggles. Notice that these struggles would be “worldly” in

nature. The married couple has obligations not only to God but to each other and the children resulting from their union. The single person, however, is free from these obligations and responsibilities.

Verse 29

Paul explains to the Corinthians that "*the appointed time has grown very short.*" The reality is that we only have a certain amount of time in this world. This will be cut short either by sickness, death or the return of the Lord. The day is coming when we will stand before God to give an account of our actions and lives. How have we lived our lives? Will we stand unashamed before our Lord, or will our lives be bogged down with so many worldly obligations that we had no time to invest in the eternal kingdom?

For Paul, the work of the kingdom of God was so important that those who had wives were to live as if they had none. Imagine that your country was invaded by an enemy nation whose presence would cause great hardship, loss of life and freedom. What should be the response of the men in that community? Should they say, I can't defend my country. I have to stay home with my wife and care for her? Are there not times of intense emergency when the normal routine must be broken for the greater good? Paul speaks here of such an emergency. He challenges husbands and wives to consider their obligation to the Lord in times of deep trouble.

Verse 30

In verse 29, the apostle told the married to live as if they were not, due to the urgency of the times in which they lived. He continues this theme

here, using three more expressions to convey a sense of emergency.

First, the apostle tells those who mourn to live as if they were not mourning. The mourner withdraws for a time from work and general obligations to grieve. According to Paul, mourning was to take second place because of the urgency of the times in which the Corinthians lived. There was no time to mourn, the task ahead was so great and pressing that every person needed to be committed entirely to fulfilling the purpose of Christ in preparation for His return.

Second, those who rejoiced were to live as those who were not rejoicing. Again, Paul is conveying that while there may be a time to rejoice and celebrate, this was not that time. Believers needed to be so focused on the call of God for their lives that they could not be distracted or take the time to rejoice and celebrate. The runner of a race

cannot allow anything to distract him if he wants to win the race.

Finally, Paul tells the Corinthians that those who buy are to be like those who have no goods. Those who have no goods are not distracted by worldly things. The rich can be focused on their luxuries and pleasures. They can spend their money on frivolous things. They enjoy the fine things of life but can do so at the expense of the kingdom of God. Speaking to the rich young ruler in the gospels, the Lord Jesus told him to sell all he had, give to the poor and then come and follow Him. Paul seems to be saying the same thing here.

Those with the resources to buy the luxuries and pleasures of life were to cast this privilege aside and devote themselves to a higher cause. They were to recognize the seriousness of the days and the spiritual battle for the souls of men and women. This was where their heart was to be, and not on

the possessions and pleasures of this world.

The apostle seems to be emphasizing a point here. Do we live for this world, or is our passion for the things of God? What are we willing to sacrifice for the kingdom of Christ? Do we understand the urgency of the times in which we live?

Verse 31

Continuing from verse 30, the apostle adds another example. Here, he tells those who dealt with the world to live as those who had no dealings with it. It is difficult for us as believers to separate the secular from the spiritual, for everything we do is for the glory of God. Having said this, some things add more substantially to the building of the kingdom of God than others. Businesspeople may become so focused on making money that they neglect

greater kingdom priorities. Paul reminds the Corinthians here that this world is “passing away.” Shall we invest our resources into a losing venture? Will we devote our lives to something that will not last?

Paul challenges the Corinthian’s priorities. This same challenge goes out to us as well. Are we investing in eternal matters? Will our minds and hearts be so focused on this world that we neglect the priorities of God’s kingdom?

Verse 32

Paul returns to the question of whether a believer should marry. He has already given the Corinthians his answer (see [1 Corinthians 7:1-2](#)). Here, he reminds those who do marry, however, that they will add to their anxieties in life.

According to the apostle, the unmarried man is “anxious about the things of the

Lord” and how to please Him. The idea here is that an unmarried man or woman can focus more on the work of the kingdom of God. For the apostle, this was a priority for the believer. Anything that distracted the Christian from this task was an unnecessary hindrance. Marriage, for Paul, was one of those unnecessary hindrances.

Paul is laser-focused on the kingdom of God. Everything he did was for the kingdom. He rejected anything that distracted him and devoted his life entirely to God and the advancement of His purposes on this earth. It is from this perspective that Paul is speaking here in this chapter. Admittedly, not everyone could be as focused as Paul, but his priority on the Kingdom of God is one we should aspire to as believers.

Verse 33

While an unmarried man could devote himself to the work of God's kingdom, the married man was obliged to be anxious about "worldly things." Paul explains this by telling us that these worldly things are related to how to please his wife.

The husband was obliged before God to care for, protect and honour his wife. This obligation divided his attention. He could not devote himself to the kingdom's work as much as an unmarried man could. In saying this, Paul tells the married that they could not be so focused on ministry for God that they neglected their wives and families.

Verse 34

The married man's interests, according to Paul, were divided. On the one hand, were the matters of the kingdom of God. On the other were the concerns of

his family. The married man lived with this dual focus.

What was true for the man was also true for the woman. An unmarried woman could focus her concern on two key priorities.

First, she could focus on the things of God. That is to say, she had nothing to distract her attention from the purpose of the kingdom. She could devote her thoughts and attention fully to that purpose.

Second, the unmarried woman could devote herself to being holy in body and spirit. What frazzled mother does not wish for time to be with the Lord? The role of raising children requires huge blocks of time and emotional commitment. This, in turn, means less time with the Lord, in His Word and devoting herself to the work of His kingdom. It means much more anxiety and concern over her children's

problems. It requires time around the beds of those children who are sick. All of these things, according to Paul, distracted the Christian woman and divided her attention between children, husband and God.

Understand here that the Christian woman who raises her children in the Lord is doing what God has called her to do. Paul is not belittling the importance of raising a family to know and love the Lord. He simply reminds Christians who want to marry that they will have additional anxiety for their families

Verse 35

Paul has been expressing strong opinions about the need for men and women who can devote themselves entirely and without distraction to the work of the kingdom of God. He

qualifies what he says here in this verse.

Notice first that he tells the Corinthians that what he taught was for their benefit. That is to say, it was for their good that they could devote themselves to the Lord without distraction. It was for the church's health that workers were dedicated to its expansion. It was for the profit of their city that believers in Jesus Christ ministered to their needs and pointed them to Christ.

Paul tells the Corinthians, secondly, that what he taught was not intended to "lay any restraint" upon them. That is to say, he was not issuing a command from God to refuse to marry, sell all they had and devote themselves to the work of the kingdom. While this may have benefited the church and community, it was not something everyone could do.

Paul's intention in giving this teaching was to "promote good order." The church in Corinth was divided. Questions about leaders, marriage and other such matters were causing friction in their assembly. The apostle intended that these believers have answers to their questions and learn to walk with each other in harmony.

Finally, by writing and explaining these kingdom principles, Paul wanted to secure their "undivided devotion to the Lord." It was the apostle's passion to see these Corinthians rise above their distractions, draw near to God and be useful servants in the kingdom of God.

Verse 36

Paul has been expressing strong opinions about the need for men and women who can devote themselves entirely and without distraction to the work of the kingdom of God. He

qualifies what he says here in this verse.

Notice first that he tells the Corinthians that what he taught was for their benefit. That is to say, it was for their good that they could devote themselves to the Lord without distraction. It was for the church's health that workers were dedicated to its expansion. It was for the profit of their city that believers in Jesus Christ ministered to their needs and pointed them to Christ.

Paul tells the Corinthians, secondly, that what he taught was not intended to "lay any restraint" upon them. That is to say, he was not issuing a command from God to refuse to marry, sell all they had and devote themselves to the work of the kingdom. While this may have benefited the church and community, it was not something everyone could do.

Paul's intention in giving this teaching was to "promote good order." The church in Corinth was divided. Questions about leaders, marriage and other such matters were causing friction in their assembly. The apostle intended that these believers have answers to their questions and learn to walk with each other in harmony.

Finally, by writing and explaining these kingdom principles, Paul wanted to secure their "undivided devotion to the Lord." It was the apostle's passion to see these Corinthians rise above their distractions, draw near to God and be useful servants in the kingdom of God.

Verse 37

Paul has been answering a question about whether those who were engaged to be married were obligated to follow through with their commitment and be married. He

responded to this question in part in verse 36 when he told the Corinthians that if the couple had a strong passion for each other that needed an outlet, they were to marry.

He now speaks of a couple who, although engaged to be married, were "*under no necessity*" but had their "*desire under control*." That is to say, the couple did not need a sexual relationship.

Paul tells this couple that although they were engaged to be married, they were not obligated to follow through if they did not feel the need to do so. They could remain engaged but unmarried and were not guilty of sin.

Verse 38

In Paul's mind, the engaged couple who married each other did well. They did what pleased God and committed

themselves to a relationship that He would bless.

On the other hand, the engaged couple in control of their sexual passions and needs, who chose not to marry, did something even more honourable because they could give themselves fully to the service of God.

Understand here that Paul is not discouraging marriage. As a single man devoted to the work of the kingdom, the apostle saw the benefits of not being tied down to a wife and family. He understood, however, that this kind of life was not the purpose of God for everyone.

Verse 39

Paul concludes his reflection on celibacy and marriage by reminding the Christian couple that the wife is bound to her husband as long as he is alive. A Christian marriage is a lifetime

commitment. While Scripture allows some exceptions to this rule, Christian couples are to remain faithful through difficulty and trials to their partners as long as they are alive.

Only when the wife's husband dies is she free to marry another. Apart from some extenuating circumstances, death alone was to separate a Christian husband and wife. The implication is that they needed to support each other and work out their differences. The Christian couple, in particular, had the support and inner workings of the Spirit of God to make the changes necessary to allow the marriage to be what God intended.

Notice that Paul tells the Christian widow that while she was free to remarry if her husband died, she was to remarry "in the Lord." The idea is that she was to marry a husband who was "in the Lord." She was to marry a believing husband so that her marriage

could be founded on the Lord and His purpose for her life.

Observe also the phrase, "be married to whom she wishes." A certain freedom is given to the Christian regarding the choice of partner. There are indeed times when the Lord seems to choose a partner for us. At other times, however, He seems to give us the freedom of choice. While the Christian woman was free to marry "whom she wishes," it was to be "in the Lord" and a lifetime commitment. God would bless such a commitment.

Verse 40

The apostle concludes with his judgment or opinion on whether a wife should remarry when her husband dies. He tells the Christian woman he believes she would be happier if she remained single. The reason, from the context of this chapter, is that she

would not have as many worldly concerns but could focus on the work of God's kingdom. Her attention would not be divided in this world, but she could be focused and devoted to the cause of Christ.

Notice that Paul tells the women of Corinth that he believed he had the Spirit of God. What he appears to be saying is that he believed that his judgment in this matter of remaining single was not based on earthly reasoning but on the ministry of the Spirit in him. He reminds believers of the benefits of celibacy for those who could bear such a life.

CHAPTER 8

Verse 1

Chapter eight introduces a new subject. It appears that unbelievers in Corinth devoted their meat to idols. This meat was eaten in the pagan temples or the homes of the devotees. You could also buy it in the marketplace. If you worshipped these idols, this may be the meat you wanted to buy.

For the Jewish and Christian believers, this caused a problem. Should a believer eat meat that had been offered to pagan idols? Many believed that this kind of meat should be avoided. In fact,

in larger centres, the Jews would have their own market where they would only sell meat that was guaranteed not to have been offered to pagan idols.

The question Paul seeks to address here is whether a Christian should eat meat sacrificed to idols. Notice how he begins.

We know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. – [1Co 8:1](#)

Notice that the phrase "*all of us possess knowledge*" is in quotation marks, indicating that it is attributed to someone else. Remember that the apostle is answering questions posed by the Corinthians in a letter sent to him (see [1 Corinthians 7:1](#)). We have no indication of the source of this quotation, but it is possible to assume that it may have been in the letter written to Paul.

Consider first the phrase, "*All of us have knowledge.*" The apostle has received a letter from the believers in Corinth, and he is responding to these believers in this letter. Let's assume, therefore, that this knowledge has been given to believers. What, then, is the knowledge given to believers? It is the understanding of the person of Jesus Christ who had overcome sin and the devil. If we have this assurance as believers, what do we need to fear? Is the power of Christ not greater than that of these idols? Do they have any power at all? Do demons associated with these idols have any control over the believer? Didn't the knowledge of Jesus Christ and what He did by His death and resurrection set us free from the fear of idols, curses and superstitions?

While the apostle understood the truth this knowledge conveyed, notice what he tells the Corinthians here:

This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that this knowledge can cause problems for weaker brothers or sisters in Christ. He reminds them that their doctrines could be divisive in the church and that they needed to teach and apply the truth they knew with discernment.

According to Paul, knowledge "puffs up." That is to say, it makes people proud and insensitive to those who do not have the same understanding. How many churches have been divided over differences of opinion on some doctrinal issue? How many brothers or sisters have been offended by our freedom in Christ? Paul reminds the Corinthians that while truth is vital, Christian love is equally important. Love will be patient with a brother or sister who has not yet come to the same perspective as I have. Love will bear

with these differences of opinion. We can divide over our “knowledge” of doctrinal understanding, or we can accept each other in love, encouraging and teaching each other in the purpose of God.

Verse 2

As believers, it is easy to assume we know God and His Word. Over the years, I have written one Bible commentary after another. I have taught Bible studies and spoken to believers in different countries around the world. I have, however, yet to plunge the depth of God’s Word. I continue to discover new insights into God and His purpose through the Word He has inspired. Anyone who believes that they have come to an understanding of God and His ways has not truly grasped the vastness of God. There are many things I will never understand in this lifetime. I believe

that all of eternity will not exhaust our experience of God. Notice how Paul words this here:

2 If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. – 1Co 8:2

I am coming to the conclusion in my experience that if we believe our doctrines and creeds can define God, the God we define is too small. That is not to say we do not understand, in a general sense, who He is and His character. We know Him to be good, holy, eternal, and sovereign. Who, however, could ever expose the depths of His sovereignty? Who among us could ever understand the fullness of His eternal nature? Is it not blasphemous to assume that we can contain and define Him in our own words and thoughts? According to Paul, if you imagine you can understand God

and His ways, you don't understand Him as you ought. God can never be truly defined by human words and understood fully by our fleshly mind.

Verse 3

While no human being can truly understand God, Paul assured the Corinthians that they do not need a complete understanding of Him to love Him. He assured them that God knows those who love Him. The word translated, know, is γινώσκω (ginōskō). This knowledge is not just about being aware of someone but also about an intimate fellowship and love.

Notice the connection between being known by God and loving Him. We cannot miss this connection. God is all-knowing. He is aware of even those who do not love Him or follow His purpose. In this verse, however, Paul tells the Corinthians that if they love

God, God knows them. The knowledge he speaks about here is not the same kind of knowledge He has of those who do not love Him. This knowledge appears distinct from His general knowledge of all things. It leads us to understand that God's knowledge of those who love Him is deeper and more intimate than what He demonstrates to those who do not.

Some might interpret this to mean that if we love God, He will respond by loving us in return. Understand, however, that God took the first step in love. He pursued us before we were even aware of Him. It seems best to understand what Paul is saying here is through the words of the apostle John, who said:

19 We love because he first loved us. – 1Jn 4:19

In other words, if you love God, it is because he knew you first. He loved you enough to open your eyes and ears to Him. He loved you enough to soften your heart. The proof God knows you is in the fact that your life has been transformed and your heart is in love with Him.

Verse 4

Paul has explained that we can love God and be loved by God without a complete knowledge of Him, His character and purpose. The implication in this context is that there were believers, loved by God, who had not come to a full knowledge of their freedom in Christ and the power of God over idols.

The apostle explained to the Corinthians that "*an idol has no real existence.*" Notice again that these words are in quotation marks,

indicating that Paul may be quoting from the letter He received. The apostle agrees with those who said that idols are nothing but wood or metal. They had no power in themselves. While the people of Corinth treated them as gods, Christians knew there was only one true God.

Verse 5

While there was only one true God, the apostle recognized many “so-called gods and lords.” People from many nations, tribes and languages have worshipped gods and confessed many objects and people to be lords.

Notice, more carefully, the words of Paul here.

“There may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”

The words "*so-called gods*" show us that, in the mind of Paul, these were not true gods. Notice also that in the English Standard Version, the words "gods" and "lords" are in quotation marks, indicating that this was other people's opinion but not what Paul believed. The apostle was convinced there was a true God and many false gods. He teaches us that we can have the assurance of the true God. We can have this assurance because he first knows us and reveals Himself to us.

Verse 6

While in the world, there are many "so-called gods and lords," for the Christian, there is only one God. Notice what Paul tells the Corinthians about this one true God. He is the Father, from whom all things exist. The world as we know it and every living creature in it owe their existence to this Father.

Notice also that there is also only one Lord, Jesus Christ. If all things exist through one God and all things exist through one Lord, the only logical conclusion we can draw is that both God and the Lord are one person. Paul does not explain this further in the verse. Suffice it to say that we owe our existence to God the Father and Jesus Christ the Lord, who are one in person and work.

Verse 7

Paul is clear that there is only one God and Lord. The idols of the pagans were not real gods. They had no power or authority over the believer. The apostle understood, however, that not all believers had come to this knowledge.

Many Christians in Corinth came from a background of idol worship. As believers in Christ now, they had

different responses toward these idols and the food offered to them.

On the one hand, there were believers who had no issue with eating food sacrificed to idols. In their mind, what they ate was just food. The fact that it was offered to idols had nothing to do with them. They ate the food with no thought about idols. They thanked the Lord for it and ate with a free and clear conscience, knowing that the idols to which the food had been offered were nothing and meant nothing to them.

On the other hand, other believers felt they could not eat anything connected with an idol. They believed that by eating food offered to an idol, they were showing disrespect to God and compromising the integrity of their faith by bringing pagan food into their homes and eating it. According to Paul, the conscience of these believers was defiled by eating food offered to idols. Paul tells us here that the

conscience of this group was weak. The Greek word used here is ἀσθενής (asthenēs), which refers to something that has no strength or is sick. We should not necessarily see this in a negative sense. Paul is simply saying that the conscience of this second group did not have the strength of conviction necessary to allow them to eat food sacrificed to idols. They could not eat this food with a clear conscience and felt it best to abstain from eating to honour God.

Verse 8

According to Paul, food does not “commend” us to God. The word the apostle uses here is παρίστημι (paristēmi). Paristēmi is derived from two terms meaning to stand beside. To stand beside someone is to support them. It can also carry the sense of backing them up.

What Paul is saying here is that the food we eat will have no bearing on our relationship with God. God will not determine our status with Him based on the food we eat or choose not to eat. Our standing with God is determined completely by the work of Jesus Christ.

The apostle clarifies this by saying that we are no worse off if we eat food offered to idols, but we are no better if we do. In other words, our food will not affect our relationship with God. Those who base their relationship on the food they eat or the things they do do not understand that their acceptance with God is through the work of Jesus Christ and not by what they do or do not do in this life. We do not merit our status with God by our human efforts, it is a gift of grace through the work of Jesus Christ alone.

Verse 9

While food does not affect our status with God, the apostle challenged the believers of Corinth to accept each other in the Lord. The person who ate food offered to idols was not to place a stumbling block before a brother or sister who did not have this same freedom.

A stumbling block could come in various forms. Imagine, for example, one believer offering food sacrificed to an idol to another who did not have the freedom to eat it.

Stumbling blocks can also come in the form of rejection or belittling. One believer may not tolerate anyone who refuses to eat food sacrificed to an idol, belittling them because their faith is weak. This, in turn, could cause a believer to act against their convictions or, if that was not possible, leave the fellowship where they are no longer accepted.

What the apostle is teaching here is that believers will not all have the same opinion on how to live out the Christian life. When there is a difference of view, we must be sensitive and seek to work out our differences with gentleness and respect.

Verse 10

Believers in Corinth were to learn not to put a stumbling block before another believer when it came to eating food offered to idols. The apostle gives us an example of what that could look like in the context of Corinth.

Paul gives an extreme example of a Christian going to the temple of an idol and eating meat. Consider this for a moment. The believer Paul speaks about here sees the idols as nothing. He attributes no spiritual value to the gods associated with these idols. They are not real to him but come from the

imagination of pagan worshippers. The temple in which he eats is a human structure like any other and has no spiritual significance to him. In the mind of this Christian, eating meat at the temple was like going to a restaurant. His conscience is clear; he has no attraction to the temple's idols. He is simply satisfying the hunger in his belly and possibly conversing with those who need to hear about the Lord Jesus he has come to love.

While we cannot convict this man of sin, what we could do is remind him of how his actions could be a stumbling block for a weaker believer. A brother or sister may see him and follow his example. Because their conscience is not as free as his, they may fall back into idol worship. At the very least, his example may encourage them to go against their conscience and conviction as believers in this matter or others, causing them to fall into sin.

Because we are free to do something, it does not mean we should. Our freedom may be a stumbling block for someone else.

Verse 11

In the example Paul gives in verse 10, a believer who has come to understand that idols and false gods are nothing can be a stumbling block for another. Our freedom to eat meat offered to idols could conceivably cause a brother or sister for whom Christ died to fall or wander from their Lord.

What is true for food offered to idols is also true in many other aspects of our lives. One person's freedom may be another's failure. One person may be able to minister to alcoholics, but for another, the temptation to drink would be too strong. One person may be able to minister to people involved in the sex trade, but another would be

overwhelmed and tempted beyond their ability to resist. We need to understand our weaknesses. We also need to be careful lest our freedom becomes a stumbling block for a brother or sister who is weak in this area of their life.

Verse 12

While a brother does not sin by eating food offered to idols, he does sin if, by doing so, he wounds the conscience of another believer and causes them to fall. This brings up an important point. A single action can be sinful and not sinful at the same time, depending on the circumstances.

A believer may eat food offered to an idol without sinning if, by doing so, he is not worshipping that idol or associating it with some blessing that might be obtained through this act. In this case, the believer is just satisfying his physical hunger and enjoying the

food eaten to the glory of the one true God. The idol means nothing, nor does the fact that it has been offered to idols.

If, on the other hand, the believer's conscience bothered him, and he began to wonder if by eating this food, he might be dishonouring God, then by going ahead and eating, he was sinning. If you think you might sin against God and do so anyway, you make yourself guilty before God. In this case, the sin is not the act but the willingness to risk sinning against God in your heart by doing what you think might be sinful.

Paul tells the Corinthians here that a legitimate act can become sinful if it is done in such a way that it offends and causes a weaker brother to fall. You may be free to do something in private that would be sinful in public, where a brother or sister would see it and stumble. It is not hypocrisy to abstain

from doing what you have the freedom to do because it might harm another believer. If anything, the willingness to abstain for the benefit of a brother or sister shows maturity and sensitivity.

Verse 13

Paul concludes the chapter with a commitment on his part. He tells the Corinthian believers that if what he ate caused a brother to stumble, he would not eat the food. His commitment was to his brother's spiritual well-being. He would willingly sacrifice his freedom for the sake of that brother.

Paul shows us that we must consider whether what we do will be for the good of the body of Christ. We have all met individuals whose only concern was for themselves. Paul tells us that we must live with our brother and sister in mind.

Some people determine every act based on how it will impress people with their spirituality. They want people to think highly of them and do everything to put on a good front. This is not what we are talking about in this verse. The person Paul speaks about here is one whose passion is to support and encourage his brother or sister to greater growth and maturity in Christ. This individual does not want to do anything that would discourage a brother or sister and will willingly sacrifice freedoms and privileges they may have if, by doing so, it blesses a weaker brother or sister.

CHAPTER 9

Verse 1

Paul has been speaking about the freedom we have in Jesus Christ. In the last chapter, he reminded the Corinthians that one person might be free to eat meat offered to an idol while another did not. He personalizes this teaching here in verse 1.

The apostle begins by posing the question: "Am I not free?" The question is asked in such a way that the answer is obvious. Of course, the apostle was free. This obvious answer is based on three premises.

First, Paul was an apostle. As an apostle, Paul was a spiritual leader in the church. He spoke on behalf of Christ and walked in His authority.

Second, Paul had seen the Lord Jesus. By the time Paul appears in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus had already died and returned to the Father. We understand, however, that when Paul was on the road to Damascus, the Lord Jesus appeared to Him and spoke to Him. This encounter with the Lord Jesus was no less real than what the other apostles experienced.

Third, the Corinthians were Paul's workmanship in the Lord. This made him their spiritual father and the one through whom they had come to faith.

Paul had seen Jesus, been called as an apostle, and was a spiritual father to the church in Corinth. These qualifications gave him a certain status and authority.

The question Paul posed at the beginning of the verse was: "Am I not free?" The word free is ἐλεύθερος (eleútheros). This word implies that the apostle was free to go where he wanted. He was not under anyone else who told him what to do or where to go. No one in the church had any authority over him — he was an apostle, called by Jesus to be His representative on this earth.

Verse 2

Having stated his qualifications as an apostle, Paul recognized that some people refused to accept his status. These individuals rejected him as an apostle.

While some refused to accept his calling, Paul was confident this was not the case in the church of Corinth. This church, despite its various problems, still accepted his leadership.

For Paul, Corinth was the “seal of his apostleship.” A seal was affixed to a document to attest to its genuineness. What he seems to be saying here is that the church in Corinth was a confirmation of his calling as an apostle. The Lord blessed Paul and his leadership in Corinth. Many people came to know Christ through his ministry. The powerful demonstrations of the work of God in Corinth through Paul were proof that he was an apostle called by God to establish their church.

Verse 3

What would Paul say to those who questioned his authority and calling as an apostle? He tells us here in verse 3:

3 This is my answer to those who would examine me. – 1Co 9:3

He tells them to examine his work in Corinth. They were the seal of his

apostleship. The proof of Paul's authority and calling was in the fruit of his labours. Anyone can call themselves an apostle, but not everyone can demonstrate the genuineness of their calling by the fruit their lives produce. What Paul seems to be saying here is this: "If you want proof that I am an apostle, called by Jesus Christ, then examine my message and the fruit of my labour.

You are not a pastor because you call yourself a pastor. You are a pastor because that is what you do, whether you are called pastor or not. And it is what God chooses to bless and use for His glory in your life.

Verse 4

Once again, Paul asks a question whose answer is very obvious:

4 Do we not have the right to eat and drink? – 1Co 9:4

The work of an apostle was legitimate. They served the Lord by establishing churches in various regions. They instructed these new churches in the purpose of God and encouraged them as they grew in their faith.

This was not always easy work. These apostles suffered persecution and hardship in their roles. In particular, Paul was stoned, beaten and kicked out of cities for his efforts. Did workers like this, who represented the Lord Jesus, deserve compensation for their efforts? Did they not deserve a glass of water or a meal to sustain their bodies as they suffered and toiled for the sake of the Lord?

The answer is clear. Those who serve the Lord must be sustained and supported for their good work.

Verse 5

Having established that the apostles had a right to be supported for their kingdom work, Paul moves on to speak about a second right. That is the right to take along a believing wife.

The phrase “take along” is translated from the Greek word περιάγω (periágō), which means to take as a companion or to lead about. The sense is not just to marry a wife but to take that wife with them on their travels. A married apostle had the right to take his wife on missionary journeys. He was not obliged to leave her home.

Paul lists several apostles who may have exercised that right, such as the brothers of the Lord (James and Jude) and Peter (Cephas). Wives of the apostles were free to travel with their husbands and were provided for as they stood with their husbands in ministry.

Verse 6

Paul has been speaking, in this context, of the right of the apostles to financial support for their ministry. This support was not only to travel and preach the gospel themselves but also to take a wife with them on those journies.

Paul chose not to burden the church and to support his ministry by taking a part-time job. It appears that Barnabas followed Paul's example. While both of these men had the right to expect financial support from the church, neither of them exercised that right.

Verse 7

For Paul, there was no question that the church should support Christian workers. This was not the opinion of everyone, however. To remove all doubt on this matter, Paul uses three examples in this verse.

First, Paul reminds the Corinthians that soldiers do not serve at their own expense. They do not buy their weapons, or uniforms. They do not pay for their transportation to the battle sight or the food required to sustain them in that battle. These things are all taken care of by their government.

Second, the person who plants and tends a vineyard gets to taste its fruit. If you planted a vineyard on your property, could you be accused of stealing its fruit if you tasted it when it was ripe? Do I not have the right to taste what I planted?

If I am out in the hot sun tending a flock and need to quench my thirst, would it not be preferable to have some of the milk from this flock rather than to pass out from the heat and risk the lives of the sheep?

Those who serve their country, plant a field or care for a flock have the right to

benefit from their labours. If this is the case, should the servant of Jesus Christ not also have a right to expect some support from the church?

Verse 8

Having reminded the Corinthians of the right of a Christian worker to support for their efforts, Paul moves now to speak of the commandment of God in the Old Testament. He showst them that this was the will of God for them under Jewish law.

Verse 9

To demonstrate that it was the will of God that they support their workers, Paul quotes from [Deuteronomy 25:4](#), which states:

"You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain."

The Law of Moses forbade muzzling the mouth of an ox while it tread the grain. The natural tendency of the ox would be to eat as it worked. The only reason for muzzling this ox was to keep it from eating the grain. This was forbidden. The ox who tread the grain was given free access to it so that it could eat as much as needed to do the work required.

Paul asks an important question here:

Is it for oxen that God is concerned? – [1Co 9:9](#)

While there is no doubt that God is concerned about the ox here, the question Paul asks concerns the application of this commandment. Does this law only apply to the ox, or does it have a deeper application? If God demands that the owner of the ox give it access to the grain it treads, what does this tell us about how He feels

about His servants called to minister in His name? Will we treat them with less dignity than the ox by depriving them of our support?

Verse 10

Having stated that the law of God in Deuteronomy 25:4 had a deeper application, Paul explains what he means. According to Paul, the law about not muzzling an ox while it treads the grain also had a human application. If the ox was given access to the grain it treads, the ploughman was to plough the fields with the hope of sharing the crop, and those who threshed the grain should have the right to some of the grain they threshed.

The law about not muzzling an ox while it treads the grain revealed the heart of God. By understanding the heart of

God from this law, we can see many different applications to life in general.

Verse 11

The apostle takes the principle learned from the law of [Deuteronomy 25:4](#) and applies it now to the situation in Corinth. He told the church that if the apostles had sown spiritual things among them, they should reap material blessings from them.

If God determined that an ox should have the right to eat the grain it treads, then Christian workers who devoted themselves to the spiritual good of the Corinthian church had every right to expect the church to provide for their physical needs.

While Paul believed in this principle, he did not require this from the church. The apostle worked part-time so that he would not be a burden to the people to whom he ministered. Having the

right to something does not mean we have to take advantage of that right. In some cases, demanding one's rights could be an unnecessary hardship to the believers we serve.

Verse 12

Paul reminded the Corinthians that if their Christian workers had a right to expect payment for their services, then as apostles, they had even more rights. Consider this for a moment.

The apostle Paul planted the church in Corinth. He introduced them to the Lord Jesus, and many became Christians under his ministry. He revealed the truth of Christ and His purpose for their lives in his teaching among them. These Corinthians were Paul's spiritual children. They owed him much.

While Paul had every right to expect the Corinthian church to pay him for his

services among them, he did not exercise that right. He was willing to *"endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ."*

Paul did not want the Corinthians to think that the gospel was a means of personal gain. He did not want them to believe that the only reason he was serving them was for what he could get out of them. Paul was willing to endure great hardship in Corinth because he had a heart of compassion for the people of that city. He would serve them whether they paid him or not. Such was his devotion toward them and their spiritual well-being.

Verse 13

To emphasize his point even more, Paul reminds the Corinthians that those employed in the service of the Old Testament temple received their food

from the animals and grains brought by the people as offerings. A portion of these offerings was devoted to the Lord, and the remainder was given to the priests for food. This was how the priests could minister on behalf of the people.

Paul emphasizes the point that Christian workers are worthy of support and that support ought to come from the people they serve. Those who benefit from the services of Christian workers ought to be willing to bless them in return by providing for their needs.

Verse 14

Paul clearly states that *"those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel."* Some years ago, I was serving as a missionary on the island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean. A young man left the island to study in

a Bible School and returned to serve full-time as a Christian worker. When he returned, the church had no objection to him serving the Lord, but the idea that he should expect to be paid by the church was repulsive to them. One of the church leaders told him: "If you come here expecting to be paid, we question your motivation in serving the Lord." For this leader, anyone who expected to be paid for serving the Lord was not serving with the right motivation.

I admit that I have met individuals who chose the church they would serve based on the benefits they received from that church. I, too, have had times when I wondered if these pastors would continue to serve if the church was forced to cut their salaries.

In between these two extremes, however, are those who serve with honest intention. They do not demand their right to be paid but appreciate the

church's support. The church itself gives willingly and thankfully to these sincere and devoted workers who demonstrate that they are seeking their good and spiritual well-being.

Verse 15

While the apostle Paul had every right to receive a salary for spiritual services rendered, he forfeited these rights. Notice how he reassured the Corinthians that this letter was not intended to "*secure any such provision*" from them. In other words, he was not making any financial pleas through this letter.

Paul took it as a matter of pride that he did not make pleas for money. He often spoke of how he worked hard so as not to be a burden to the church. While the apostle willingly received gifts when they were offered, Paul chose to give his time and effort freely. He tells the

Corinthians here that he would rather die than have anyone deprive him of his ground for boasting. Paul delighted in offering the message of the gospel free of charge to all who would listen. He felt so strongly about this that he told the Corinthians that he would rather die than beg them for money.

As a Christian worker myself, over the years, the Lord has shown me that I am to trust in Him and not in people for my supply. There is a very subtle but vital difference between trusting God and trusting people. It is a difference, however, that I believe every Christian worker needs to understand.

Verse 16

While Paul boasted of offering the gospel free of charge to all who would listen, he tells us that he could not boast in the work he did:

16 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast.

Notice the reason why Paul could not boast in his efforts for the gospel:

For I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! – 1Co 9:16

While Paul did have a right to receive a salary for his efforts, he did not have a right not to preach. Preaching the gospel was an obligation placed on him by God. Notice the phrase: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”

It was one thing for Paul not to be paid for the presentation of the gospel but quite another not to preach it. He did not sin by not taking a salary, but he would have sinned if he didn’t preach what God called him to preach.

The apostle could not boast about doing what was required of him. Can I

brag about the fact that I have done the bare minimum? Imagine a man going to a shop to purchase an item. When he returns home, he boasts of the fact that he paid for that item before he took it out of the store. Would you not question this man and say: "But isn't that what you must do? To take the item without paying for it would be stealing. How can you boast about doing what is demanded of you?" By preaching the gospel, Paul merely did what God demanded of him.

Verse 17

The apostle distinguishes between preaching voluntarily and preaching for a salary.

He has already established that Christian workers have a right to be paid for their efforts. If they receive a salary for doing what God has called them to do, they are "*discharging the*

trust committed to them. In other words, they are faithful to God and receive a reward for their efforts here below.

If, on the other hand, these Christian workers offer their service free of charge, while they may not be paid for their service below, God sees their efforts, knows their heart, and will reward them Himself.

Verse 18

In verse 17, Paul told the Corinthians that there was a reward for those who preached the gospel voluntarily. He explains the nature of that reward here. He begins by asking the question:

18 What then is my reward?

The apostle goes on to answer his question in the remainder of the verse by stating:

That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

The reward, according to Paul, was that he had the privilege of preaching free of charge and not demanding his right to financial remuneration.

Consider what Paul told the Ephesians in [Acts 20:35](#):

35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" – [Ac 20:35](#)

The apostle quotes the words of Jesus, who declared that it was more blessed to give than to receive. The great reward for Paul was the privilege of giving without any need of

remuneration. When we demand payment for our services, we transact a business deal. I offer you a service, and you pay me for that service. When I offer a service freely, I bless the person who receives the service, and I am blessed by not requiring anything in return. If this principle does not make sense to us, we may be holding too tightly to our worldly goods and fail to understand the blessing of sacrificing what we have for the good of another.

Verse 19

Paul declares himself to be “free from all.” The context indicates that he speaks here about people. What he appears to be saying is that he was not obligated to any human being. He was free of debt to anyone else. He was not enslaved to any human master. As an apostle, he had authority in the church and was not under anyone else. He did not feel the need to be a people

pleaser. He chose not to demand a salary from the church and was not bound to them to meet his financial needs. He had no one to tell him what he needed to do. In this, Paul had true freedom from all people and their demands.

Notice, however, that while the apostle was "free from all," he chose willingly to make himself "a servant to all" so that he might win them to the Lord.

Throughout my ministry, I have offered my services free of charge to those to whom God has called me. I have never required payment from any I have served on the mission field. While the church I serve today does offer me a sum of money, that money goes directly to the mission I am serving with to provide books free of charge to believers around the world. If the church could no longer afford to pay me, nothing would change in my ministry toward them. I am free, as a

result, to offer pastoral care from my heart without demanding a salary. The last thing I want to hear from a believer is: "You are only doing this because we pay you to do it." That would be devastating to me personally. I want to give from my heart. I want to give without any obligation to receive in return. I don't want my service for the Lord to be corrupted by the love of money, comfort or myself. There is a tremendous blessing in giving willingly and freely without any need for reward.

Verse 20

Notice how the apostle ministered. He tells us that when he ministered to the Jews, he "became as a Jew." Consider what took place in [Acts 16:3](#):

3 Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for

they all knew that his father was a Greek. – [Ac 16:3](#)

Paul did not believe that circumcision was necessary, but to use Timothy as a partner with him in the gospel, he recommended that he be circumcised so as not to offend the Jews.

Consider also what took place in [Acts 21](#). The Jews had heard that Paul had been preaching that circumcision was no longer necessary and that Gentiles could forsake the law of Moses ([Acts 21:21](#)). This would have caused a problem when he arrived in Jerusalem. Listen to the counsel of the church to avoid conflict:

22 What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. 23 Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 24 take these men and purify yourself along with them

and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. – [Ac 21:21-24](#)

Paul took their advice and paid for these four men to be purified according to Jewish customs and laws. The intention was to ease friction between him and the inhabitants of the region. To reach the Jews, Paul was willing to follow their customs and rules.

Understand here that Paul did not do this to gain any favour with God; it was merely to show respect to those he ministered to. His goal was not to change their behaviour but to win them to Christ. When they came to Christ, the Spirit of God would convince these individuals of the truth and the purpose of God for their lives.

All too often, we focus on changing behaviour and not on winning a person to Christ. Understand, however, that just because someone now lives a "Christian life" does not mean that they are true believers. We may be deceiving them into thinking that because they left their former lifestyle, they are believers.

Verse 21

When working with Jews, Paul was respectful of their laws and customs. On the other hand, while ministering to Gentiles who were not under the law of Moses, Paul "became as one outside the law." In other words, he did not concern himself with questions of circumcision, purification and sacrifices. These were unnecessary for these Gentiles to come to Christ.

Understand here that Paul did not sin in this. He did not offer sacrifices to idols

or worship pagan gods. He tells us that while He was not under the law of Moses, he was under the law of Christ. He makes a clear distinction here between these two laws. He would never compromise his commitment to Christ and the purpose of Christ for his life. When Paul preached to the Gentiles, he preached as one free in Jesus Christ from the Jewish law. He preached that acceptance in Christ had nothing to do with observing the Law of Moses.

Verse 22

Paul preached to “the weak.” The word “weak” is ἀσθενής (asthenēs) and refers to those who are without power or unable in themselves to complete the task before them. Paul understood this weakness when he went to Corinth. Consider his words in [1 Corinthians 2:3-5](#):

*3 And I was with you in weakness
and in fear and much trembling,
4 and my speech and my message
were not in plausible words of
wisdom, but in demonstration of
the Spirit and of power, 5 so that
your faith might not rest in the
wisdom of men but in the power of
God. – 1Co 2:3-5*

Paul did not trust his human abilities. He understood that the call of God on his life was more than he could handle in his strength. Were it not for the grace of God, he would not have been able to fulfil his calling in Corinth. His confidence was not in his ability but in the power of God.

Verse 23

The great passion of the apostle Paul was to share the message of the gospel so that men and women of all cultures and languages might share with him in

the blessing of knowing Jesus Christ and the benefits that come from forgiveness in His name. While that message was consistent, Paul was willing to do whatever it took to communicate it in a way that people could understand and accept.

Verse 24

As Paul concludes this chapter, he seeks to encourage the Corinthians to live a disciplined and focused life for Christ. He begins by using the illustration of an athlete running a race. In a racing competition, many racers are competing with each other. During that competition, some will drop out of the race for various reasons. Others will endure to the end but not win. Paul told the Corinthians they needed to run the race with one objective. They were to devote every effort to winning the prize.

If we are to follow the counsel of Paul, we must be focused on our walk with Christ. There must also be an intentionality to our walk. Our goal is to serve Christ, and we will reject whatever will distract us from that purpose. The purpose and will of Jesus for our lives must be front and centre in our hearts and minds. We determine the course of our lives based on that goal.

No one can win this race if they are not intentional and disciplined. Paul challenges the Corinthians to run in such a way that they will receive a prize. They were to do their best to honour the Lord in everything they did.

Verse 25

Notice how Paul tells the Corinthians that every athlete exercises self-control. Consider a runner who is competing in a great marathon. The evening before

running, he stays up late and does not get the rest he needs. Just before the race, he eats more than he should and then goes out to compete. What will be the result? Will this athlete be in top form for competing? Will not his overeating just before the race hinder his performance? Will not his lack of proper sleep the night before weaken his endurance?

What will happen if a believer does not exercise self-control? Imagine a man of God placing himself in a situation where he can be tempted. Will this not affect his testimony and tempt him to fall into sin? We must be intentional and disciplined in our Christian walk. God will give us strength to live for Him, but we must obey and draw from that strength if we are to overcome. We must actively seek the power of God and intentionally walk in obedience if we are to win the race.

Notice also that Paul reminds us that the athlete competes for a wreath. That wreath will ultimately perish and be no more. On the other hand, the believer competes for what will last forever.

Don't misunderstand what Paul is saying here. We do not exercise this discipline and self-control to guarantee our salvation and obtain eternal life. The prize is not salvation but the glory of God and the knowledge that our lives have brought Him honour.

Verse 26

It was the lifelong commitment of Paul to run the race before him with a purpose in mind. He would not run "aimlessly." That is to say, he did not run without a destination or goal. He focused on that goal and devoted all his strength and energy to reaching it.

Paul moves now to another type of athlete. He speaks next about a boxer.

Imagine a fighter flinging his arms in every direction without anything to hit. What would be the purpose of this futile waste of energy? Paul was very intentional in how he threw his punches. He was going to be sure that if he extended his clenched fist, it would contact his opponent and accomplish its purpose. He would not waste his energy in futile efforts.

Do you have a goal? Are you running toward that goal, or are you getting distracted by what you see along the way? Are you intentional in your efforts, or are you swinging your arms and beating the air? Paul challenges us to have a goal in our Christian life and strive with every effort to obtain that goal for the glory of Christ.

Verse 27

The apostle Paul told the Corinthians that he disciplined his body and kept it under control. He was very intentional

about living the Christian life. He knew that if he was not careful, he could fall into temptation and sin.

Paul did not see himself above temptation. He knew that the enemy would do all he could to cause him to fall. He also did not trust his flesh to overcome these temptations. He understood his weakness and would not allow himself to be placed in a situation where he could be tempted to fall and bring disrespect to the name of Christ.

He also understood the immense obligation that was on him to be an example of godliness to those to whom he ministered. How devastating it is when a preacher of the Gospel falls into sin. Paul did not want this to happen to him, so he did everything possible to keep his body and attitude in check. He would trust the Lord and keep his need for the Lord central in his mind, lest he

would have too high an opinion of his own ability and fall.

CHAPTER 10

Verse 1

The apostle Paul ended the last chapter with a challenge to the Corinthians about running the Christian race with intentionality and discipline. Notice that verse one of chapter ten begins with the word “for.” This links what Paul says here to the race of chapter nine and the focused efforts of the athlete.

Paul begins chapter 10 with an example for the church of Corinth. In this example, he demonstrates why he was concerned that they ran with such discipline and intentionality.

The illustration concerns the children of Israel. Paul underlines two points here in verse 1.

First, Israel's ancestors were "all under the cloud." Consider what took place when the nation of Israel left the land of Egypt for the promised land where they would become a nation under God. [Exodus 13](#) tells us that the Lord God led them daily by a cloud and fiery pillar.

21 And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. – [Ex 13:21](#)

Being under the cloud references how the Lord God led these Israelites through the wilderness. Wherever that cloud went, so would the people of God. These former slaves experienced

the miraculous leading of God each day of their wandering.

Second, the Israelites “all passed through the sea.” The story of the parting of the sea for the people of God to pass over was passed on from generation to generation. Those slaves who left Egypt experienced this event personally and marvelled at the wonderful power and provision of God for their needs. What was intended for their salvation brought great judgment on the Egyptian army following them. There, in that sea, the entire army of Pharaoh was destroyed.

Notice the word “all” in this verse. All of Israel walked under the cloud of God’s leading. All of Israel passed through the sea of God’s protection and provision. Every Israelite in those days experienced the power and reality of God in ways generations to come would never experience Him.

Verse 2

Paul tells the Corinthians that the Israelites who were under the cloud and passed through the sea "*all were baptized into Moses.*" The word used here for baptized is βαπτίζω (baptízō), which means to dip or immerse. Generally, this was done for religious purposes and initiated an individual into a certain faith or as a follower of a particular religious leader. In this case, Israel's baptism was "*into Moses.*" That is to say, they would be under his spiritual leadership. Through Moses, God gave the Law. The Jews who crossed that sea were initiated into the Law of Moses with all its regulations and blessings. The God who led them to the other side of the sea now required that they walk in His Law as revealed by Moses, the law-giver.

Verse 3

Not only were the Israelites all initiated into the Law of Moses through the crossing of the sea, but according to the apostle, they all ate the same spiritual food. This likely refers to how God fed them manna as they passed through the wilderness (see [Exodus 16:15](#)). Every day, they ate the provision of the Lord at their table. This sustained them daily for forty years.

Some commentators see a subtle reference to baptism and the Table of the Lord here. While this may certainly be the case, what is very clear is the miraculous blessings of the Lord as he sustained them and provided everything they needed during those days.

Verse 4

God not only provided food for His children but also water for them to drink in the dryness of the desert

wilderness. On more than one occasion, the people of Israel complained to Moses that they had nothing to drink. On every occasion, the Lord gave His thirsty grumblers everything they needed to quench their thirst.

Notice how Paul told the Corinthians that their ancestors drank from the spiritual Rock. He speaks of this Rock as Jesus Christ. Let me say a few things about this.

First, notice how the apostle speaks of the person of Jesus before His advent here on earth. The apostle tells the Corinthians that their ancestors drank from the Rock of Christ. Paul believed Jesus existed from the beginning. He was with the Father before He came as a child to this earth.

Second, Jesus worked with the Father before His birth on this earth. He was present with God the Father when the children of Israel crossed the sea and

entered the wilderness. He cared for these Israelites even before they knew His name. He sustained them, with the Father, providing their every need and protecting them as they walked toward the Promised Land.

Third, the apostle told the Corinthians that Jesus, the spiritual Rock, followed their ancestors. These men and women experienced the person of Christ in their wilderness wandering. He did not leave them but followed them step by step, caring for and protecting them as they made their way to the land He had been preparing for them. While this Jesus may have been hidden from their eyes, He was no less present.

Verse 5

The children of Israel had every blessing in the wilderness. God led them safely across the sea and destroyed their enemies. He provided

them with daily manna for food. He quenched their thirst and guided them by means of a fiery pillar and cloud.

Note, however, that the Lord God, despite His tender care, was not pleased with most of these Israelites. In fact, those he loved so much were "*overthrown in the wilderness.*" Apart from Caleb and Joshua, no one who left Egypt made it to the Promised Land. The Israelites angered God by their grumbling and complaining. They turned their back on the God who cared so deeply for them, incurring His wrath and judgment.

Paul is showing the Corinthians how God cared so much for His people, but because of their hard hearts, they perished in the wilderness without ever stepping foot into the land God had promised.

Verse 6

Here is the point Paul is trying to make. He tells the Corinthians that these stories of God's dealing with their ancestors were to serve as examples for them. The particular instance they were to observe was how, despite God's wonderful and miraculous blessings, their ancestors desired evil. Instead of turning to the God who provided for them, they turned away from Him. This bad example was to be noted, and God's people were to be careful not to follow it.

Verse 7

The apostle states a case in the history of Israel when wandering through the wilderness; they asked Aaron to give them another god. Aaron cast their gold into a fire, melted it down and fashioned a golden calf for them. Paul quotes directly from the Old Testament account of what happened on the day Israel bowed down to that golden calf:

6 And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. – [Ex 32:6](#)

Moses returned from the mountain that day to find the people drinking, feasting and partying. All of this was to the honour of the golden calf.

Those who had been delivered from Egypt, cared for in the desert, and protected from their enemies now turned their back on the God who had both led and followed their every step. Paul warned the Israelites that this could happen to them if they were not focused and intentional in their walk with God.

Verse 8

Paul points next to a time of great sexual immorality among those who

travelled to the promised land. When the people of God were staying in the region of Shittim, the men engaged in sexual relations with the Moabite women:

1 While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. – [Nu 25:1](#)

This matter angered the Lord so much that He told Moses to hang the chief leaders of the people:

4 And the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the chiefs of the people and hang them in the sun before the LORD, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." – [Nu 25:4](#)

The worship of Baal involved sexual fertility rights to ensure the earth's fruitfulness. This became a temptation for the men of Israel who would enter

into these sexual and religious rights. In those days, Moses commanded that anyone who had been involved in these rights was to be killed.

5 And Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you kill those of his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor." – [Nu 25:5](#)

On His part, God sent a plague to devastate Israel because of the sexual immorality being practised in those days. [Numbers 25:9](#) tells us that about twenty-four thousand people died as a result of that plague:

9 Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand. – [Nu 25:9](#)

Paul tells the Corinthians that twenty-three thousand of those who died died in a single day from that plague.

The apostle describes how these rescued enslaved Israelites from Egypt turned to sexual immorality and idolatry (Baal worship). We have seen that Corinth, as a city, was also quite immoral. What would it take for the people of God to be tempted, like Israel of old? Paul gives these examples as a warning for the Corinthians.

Verse 9

Notice the warning of Paul to the Corinthians here: "*We must not put Christ to the test.*" We certainly saw how Israel did this in verse 8 by their sexual immorality. The testing Paul refers to here, however, relates to another incident recorded in [Numbers 21](#). At that time, God destroyed some people "by serpents."

The story begins in [Numbers 21:5](#) when the Israelites began to

Speak against God and His servant
Moses:

5 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 we loathe this worthless food."

The Israelites show their contempt for God's purpose here by telling Him that they loathed the worthless food He was providing and did not trust His leading and provision. This resulted in God sending a plague of "fiery" serpents among them. These snakes bit and killed some people, so they died. This was God's judgement upon them for their contempt.

Again, Paul shows how God's people had come to a place where they turned from God and forgot all His blessings.

Verse 10

Paul challenged the Corinthians not to be like their ancestors who grumbled and were destroyed by the "Destroyer." Who is this destroyer? The context seems to indicate that this destroyer came in many different forms. In one case, a great plague killed twenty-three to twenty-four thousand people because of sexual immorality. In another case, it was a plague of serpents that bit and killed others. God may use many different destroyers to exercise His vengeance upon evil-doers.

This destroyer was sent to those who were not content with the will and purpose of God. They grumbled, complained and rejected His purpose and chose their way instead. This is called rebellion. The wrath of God will be revealed against rebellion. The challenge of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians is to submit to God and His

purpose and not to be like their ancestors who rejected God and His ways.

Verse 11

The immorality, idolatry and rebellion of Israel's history, according to Paul, were recorded for instructional purposes.

Their failures were meant to warn those who followed. The problem with humanity, however, is that it seems bound to repeat the errors of the past.

Notice the phrase "on whom the end of the ages has come." The end of the age refers to the time after the coming of Jesus Christ. It reminds us that His second coming could come at any moment. This time, however, He comes to judge. To prepare us for that day, He has left us a record of the dangers and failures of the past so that we can learn and not repeat those errors.

Verse 12

It is all too easy to let our guard down. Satan does not give up. The flesh is hungry for satisfaction. When we least expect it, the deadly arrow of temptation will be hurled at us. Not one of us is spared from the enemy's sights. The closer we are to Christ, the more the foe delights to see his arrow strike.

We dare not cease being vigilant. We must wear our armour at all times. We must be constantly on guard.

Understand that any one of us could fall. No soldier is careless in the midst of a battle, for that carelessness could mean death. Your rank means nothing to the enemy bullet. The great can fall as quickly as the weak. Be watchful, therefore, for that arrow could strike you next.

Verse 13

Having warned the Corinthians to be vigilant and to learn from the record of failures recorded in the Scriptures, Paul moves on to give them a word of encouragement. The apostle has three things to say here.

First, Paul tells the Corinthian church that no temptation overtook them that was not common to man. The idea seems to be that they were not the first to face these temptations. From the beginning of history, human beings have been tempted in many different ways. There is no temptation faced today that has not already been encountered in one form or another by another person before us or around us. We are not alone in our trials and temptations.

Second, the apostle reminds the Corinthians that God's faithfulness to them is such that He will not let them be tempted beyond their ability to endure. God knows what we can

handle and carefully watches over us so that no temptation will be too much for us to bear.

Understand that this does not mean we will never fall. The apostle has warned the Corinthians about being careful lest they fall. The temptations that come their way, however, would not be beyond their ability to endure because God would only allow what they could bear.

Even Jesus, the perfect Son of God, was tempted by the devil. Like Him, we can overcome as we trust the Lord and walk in obedience to His Word. We have no excuse for falling into sin. When we do, we must confess our failure. We cannot blame God, however, for He only allows what He knows we can endure.

Finally, the temptations we face will not last forever. The Lord will provide a means of escape. We might be able to

endure a temptation for a while, but that same temptation might wear us down to such a point that we finally give in. God watches over this matter as well. He knows what we can endure, but He also knows how long we can endure and will not allow the enemy access to us beyond our strength. He will provide an escape for all who are faithful lest they be crushed by the weight of temptation and overcome.

Temptations are a normal part of life. The question is, what are we going to do with them? God promises that He will watch over us in temptation. He will assure that only what we can endure will draw near to us. What we resist will ultimately strengthen us in our faith.

Verse 14

One of the temptations for the Christians in Corinth was idolatry.

Notice that Paul tells them to flee from this sin.

What is interesting here is that while Paul told the Corinthians that God would not allow anything to tempt them that was beyond their ability to endure, he also told them to flee from these temptations.

God does not expect us to sit in our temptation until He provides a way of escape. We are called here to flee. We are to be active in the process of resisting temptation and sin. We are to push it away, discipline ourselves to run in the opposite direction, or do what is required to correct our actions and thoughts. If you find yourself in the enemy camp, surrounded by the enemy, do what needs to be done to get out of there lest you be overcome.

I have met individuals living in sin who have chosen to do nothing about it. They say, "If God didn't want me in this

situation, He would stop me.” This is not what the Bible tells us. In this verse, the apostle tells those living in sin to pack their bags and flee. Remember here that idolatry is anything or anyone who comes before God and His purpose in our lives.

Verse 15

What the apostle Paul had to say here was basic common sense. Should a Christian confess only one God and then be involved in idolatry? Should Christians commit to living a godly life and not flee temptation? Will the God who sent His son to die for our sin allow that sin to be too much for us to endure? What would be the purpose of Christ’s death if that were the case?

Paul seems to be challenging the Corinthians to open their minds to consider the wisdom and common sense with which he was writing.

Verse 16

In verse 15, the apostle challenged the Corinthian believers to flee from idolatry. To show them why this was important, he brings up the Christian practice of the Lord's Table.

Paul told the Corinthians that the cup they drank together was a cup of blessing. As they drank at the table of the Lord, they testified to the benefits of that cup to them. The cup symbolized the blood of Jesus, poured out on Calvary. That blood was their forgiveness and a demonstration of the extent to which Jesus was willing to go for their forgiveness and reconciliation with God. By sharing that cup as believers, they reminded themselves that the death of Jesus Christ set them free from sin and evil and granted them forgiveness and eternal life in the presence of their Creator and Saviour.

The bread they ate together at the table represented the body of Christ that was broken for them. The blessing of forgiveness and pardon was costly. It required the death of a perfect lamb. Only Jesus Christ was worthy to make such a sacrifice. Because He died, we have received pardon and an eternal inheritance. As often as they ate this bread, the Corinthians reminded themselves of the cost of their salvation and forgiveness.

The Lord Jesus reached out to a people caught up in the darkness of idolatry and opened their eyes to the one true God who sent His Son to die for their pardon and eternal life. The table of the Lord was a constant reminder of this wonderful reality and privilege.

Verse 17

When the Corinthians shared in the table of the Lord, they did so with a

single loaf of bread. That bread was either passed around or broke into pieces for them to share. While there were many participants, they all drew their life and salvation from one source. There was only one bread, just as there was only one God and Saviour through whom they lived. Every human being depends on that one bread to live. Every Christian drew His salvation from that one source. The idols that filled the city of Corinth did not offer this life and salvation. Only Jesus could supply this.

Verse 18

Having stated that there is only one bread and one source of salvation and life, Paul moves on to remind the Corinthians of the Old Testament law that gave the priests who offered a sacrifice a portion of that sacrifice for themselves. Consider the law of Moses as recorded in [Leviticus 7:14-15](#):

14 And from it he shall offer one loaf from each offering, as a gift to the LORD. It shall belong to the priest who throws the blood of the peace offerings. 15 And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his offering. He shall not leave any of it until the morning. – [Lev 7:14-15](#)

The priests who offered sacrifices benefitted personally from those sacrifices. Imagine the altar as a table. The priest takes the animal to be sacrificed, offers it to the Lord first, and then takes a portion for himself and eats it in the presence of the Lord. The picture is one of communion and sharing a meal with the Lord. It is also a picture of the benefits that belonged to the priest as he brought those sacrifices to the Lord. He shared the meat as He ministered on God's behalf. There is communion, fellowship,

generosity, and forgiveness offered in this picture as the priest shares this intimate meal with the living Lord God.

Verse 19

The apostle now gets to the point he is making. The matter relates to the food offered to idols. Paul has already stated that it was possible for a believer to eat food offered to idols without sinning.

4 Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." –
1Co 8:4

The apostle clarifies that idols are nothing and that food sacrificed to nothing is not an issue in itself.

There is a contrast here between the fellowship experienced by the priest offering a sacrifice and the pagan

priests providing the same thing to idols of wood and metal.

Those who shared in the Table of the Lord symbolized the life-giving Bread and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for their salvation. But those who sacrificed to idols offered their gifts to "nothing."

Verse 20

The pagan idols of Paul's day were pieces of wood or metal. They could not speak or think. They had no power in themselves. There was, however, something much more devious under the surface. Behind these idols were deceiving spirits, drawing these worshippers into rebellion against the one true God. In reality, the power behind the paganism of the day was not in the idols but in the deceptive demonic forces of hell. It was to those

demonic forces that pagan sacrifices were being offered.

Paul shares this insight into idolatry so that the believers in Corinth can understand what was behind this deception. He concludes the verse with the phrase: "I do not want you to be participants with demons."

The word translated participant in the original Greek language is κοινωνός (koinōnós). The term refers to a partner, partaker or companion. The idea seems to be that Paul did not want the Corinthians to be partners with the demonic forces of hell in this deception. He did not want them to have fellowship or anything to do with the work of these evil spirits who had set themselves against the Lord Jesus and His purpose.

Paul teaches the Corinthians here that there was an invisible force behind the pagan idolatry of the day. That same

force can be found behind many other things in our day as well, drawing people into addictions, immorality and evil of all kinds.

Verse 21

Having shown the Corinthians that there was a demonic force behind the idolatry of the day, Paul then applies this truth to the church of Corinth in the words:

21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. –
1Co 10:21

Notice the reference here to the “cup of the Lord.” This seems to be a reference to the cup they drank as they shared in the Lord’s Supper. That cup was a represented their fellowship with the

Lord and identification with the sacrifice
He made for them at Calvary.

Those who worshipped and participated
in the cup of the Lord could not at the
same time participate with the demonic
forces of hell. The cup of the Lord
represented the victory He had
procured over sin and the devil. Can
anyone who has been set free from the
demonic chains of hell celebrate those
forces? Can anyone who has
experienced the salvation of God, ever
return to the evil from which they were
delivered? You cannot enlist in the army
of the Lord and fight for the enemy?
Those who partake of the cup of the
Lord, cannot now celebrate at the
devil's table.

Verse 22

Paul asks two questions of the
Corinthians here.

The first question is this: *Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy?* The Greek word jealousy (παράζηλόω parazēlóō) is derived from two other words. The first word, pará, implies the movement of something toward a certain point. The second word, zēlóō, speaks of zealousness or desire. The combination of these words suggests the movement toward a point of zeal. Zeal, in this sense, is not always a positive thing. It could be expressed in anger, vengeance or judgement. In other words, sacrificing to an idol would arouse the jealous zeal of the Lord so that He responded in anger or wrath. What Paul is asking here is whether it is a wise thing to incite the jealous rage of the Lord by participating with demons in their ungodly schemes.

The second question is related to the first: *"Are we stronger than he?"* In other words, what chance would we

have if God turned against us? Could we withstand the jealous rage of God? Will we blaspheme His name by serving idols and have no fear of His wrath?

Verse 23

The phrase “all things are lawful” should not be misunderstood. Paul has just pointed out the fact believers were not to eat at the table of demons (verse 21). He told the church that it was unwise to provoke the jealousy of the Lord (verse 22). Some actions would stir up the rage of God against them.

The phrase “all things are lawful” does not license believers to do whatever they want. Instead, Paul refers to practices that, under the law of Moses, were condemned, such as eating certain foods or the celebration of certain days. Christians were no longer under the Law of Moses and free to eat

things condemned by the law or to refrain from celebrating days that they were compelled to observe under Judaism.

Notice, however, that while Christians had a newfound freedom under Christ from practicing the Law of Moses, they were to be wise and discerning. Just because they were free to do something did not mean they should. Some things were not helpful. Other things did not serve to encourage or build up the body of Christ. It was conceivable that an action they were free to practice might create a stumbling block for another believer. Our freedom must be exercised with great compassion and wisdom, lest it be harmful to the testimony of the church or the spiritual well-being of its members.

Paul gives us an important principle here in the exercise of our freedom. Ask yourself if what you are free to do

as a believer is helpful and will build up those who see you practice that freedom. If it will not, be willing to sacrifice the freedom for the greater good of the church and its testimony. The well-being of the church and its advancement is more important than any individual freedom we may have.

Verse 24

As believers, we are not to live for ourselves. The opposite is true; we are to live for the good of our neighbour. Jesus lived a life of service and sacrifice. He gave His life so that we could be forgiven. He lived His life devoted to the needs of those who constantly surrounded him, pleading for help. This is the example we are to follow. Every decision we make is to take the interest of others into account. We are to be willing to sacrifice what we have for the blessing of those around us. The word neighbour

is ἑκάστος (hékastos) and can be translated by the phrase, everyone. My neighbour is not just my Christian brother and sister. Nor is it the person who lives in the house next to me, but everyone I encounter. I am to actively seek the good of every person I meet throughout my life.

Verse 25

There were believers in the church of Corinth who were very concerned about whether the meat sold in the marketplace had been offered to idols. They did not want to participate in the paganism of that day and felt that by buying meat offered to demons, they would be compromising their faith.

Paul told these believers to buy and eat what was sold in the marketplace without concern. They were not to disturb their conscience about whether

or not the meat had been part of a pagan ritual.

Imagine that you were the individual concerned about the source of your meat. You could not eat anything until you were assured that it had not been offered to idols. Is it not conceivable that you could become so tied up in this concern that you place yourself under the law again? The concern for the food you eat could become your primary focus, taking away from your freedom in Jesus Christ.

If believers unwittingly eat meat offered to an idol, it will not hurt them. They are not worshipping an idol if it is not in their mind. We can become so focused on the devil and his demons that we create problems that do not need to exist. We can become so bound up in a system of legalism that we no longer experience our freedom in Christ.

We can make issues of things that are not issues at all. In doing so, we fall into the hands of the enemy, divide believers and lose sight of the cross.

Verse 26

Notice that the verse begins with the word “for.” This connects with what Paul told the Corinthians in verse 25. That is to say, they were to eat whatever they purchased in the marketplace without any concern about whether it was offered to an idol or not. They could do this because, ultimately, the whole earth and everything in it belonged to the Lord. The phrase, “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof,” is possibly taken from [Psalms 24:1](#):

1 The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein – [Ps 24:1](#)

The concept, however, was not original to the psalmist. We have a very similar thought in [Deuteronomy 10:14](#), which reads:

14 Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. – [Dt 10:14](#)

How can something that belongs to God be considered impure? Whatever we eat comes from the Lord God and is a gift from His hand. For this reason, it can be taken with a thankful heart. If this is our attitude, then it does not matter what other people have done with the food before purchasing it at the market.

Verse 27

Because the earth and everything in it belong to the Lord, believers do not need to be overly concerned about

what they buy at the marketplace. The same principle applies when a believer is invited to an unbeliever's home for dinner. They are free to eat whatever was placed in front of them without any concern about whether it was offered to an idol or not. They are to eat *"without raising any question on the ground of conscience."*

This phrase, *"without raising any question on the grounds of conscience,"* is important and merits further consideration. While our conscience is designed to guide us in moral and ethical concerns, it is not always correct. In [1 Corinthians 8:7](#), the apostle tells the Corinthians that the human conscience can be weak and defiled.

7 However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol,

*and their conscience, being weak,
is defiled. – 1Co 8:7*

The human conscience needs to be trained by the Word of God and pricked by the Holy Spirit if it is to be a true guide. It is quite possible to do something long enough that it no longer bothers our conscience. It is also possible to have our conscience disturb us over something legitimate. The human conscience is also affected by sin, and unless it is in tune with God, it can mislead us.

Verse 28

Continuing with his illustration of a believer eating at an unbeliever's home, Paul adds the following statement:

*"But if someone says to you,
This has been offered in sacrifice,"*

The individual making this statement is concerned about the food. Their

conscience bothers them because they know it has been sacrificed to idols. They believe that they would be sinning against God by eating this food.

What should the believer invited to the meal do in this case? Paul tells the Corinthians that, even though they may have the freedom to eat this food themselves, they were not to do so for the sake of the weaker brother or sister. It was better not to eat than to offend a brother or sister in Christ or risk having them do what they believed was a sin before God.

Paul concludes this verse with the phrase, "*and for the sake of conscience.*" He explains this in verse 29.

Verse 29

Verse 28 sets the background for our understanding of verse 29. A believer is invited to the home of an unbeliever

who serves them food. As the food is placed on the table, someone says, "*This has been offered in sacrifice.*" This individual feels that by eating, they would sin against God, and their conscience does not permit them to eat what was sacrificed to an idol. The apostle tells the believer who is at liberty to eat the food that they were to refrain from eating for the sake of the conscience of the person making the statement.

According to Paul, while the conscience is not always an accurate indicator of sin, it would be wrong for someone who truly believed they were sinning to act against their conscience. It would be equally wrong for one believer to encourage another to act against this conscience and risk sinning against God in their heart. We must respect the conscience of a fellow believer, even if it is contrary to our own.

Notice here that while believers are to respect the belief of another brother or sister, that conscience is not the guide to what is right or wrong. Paul told the Corinthians that their liberty in Christ was not determined by someone else's conscience.

The idea is that not all believers will be convinced about acceptable behaviour. One believer may be free to eat all food, but another does not have this liberty. One believer may consider all days to be the same, while another treats certain days as holy. There is nothing wrong with abstaining from certain foods. Nor do we sin by eating all food. What is important here is not who is right but whether we can accept the differences among members of the body of Christ and love each other as Christ loves us.

The fact is that we will never resolve all our differences in this life. We must,

however, learn to respect our differences.

Verse 30

One believer may eat food with thankfulness, unconcerned about whether it was offered to an idol. Another may feel that they were sinning against the Lord if they did so.

If I believe that I am sinning against the Lord by eating certain food, is it not wrong to go ahead and do it anyway? Would I not sin if I disregarded these thoughts and did what I believed to be sinful?

At the same time, if I am free to eat all foods and do so with a grateful heart, should a brother who does not have this freedom denounce me? Should he accuse me of sinning because he does not have the same freedom?

Understand here that this does not leave us as the judges of right and wrong. The Word of God is our guide in this matter. Not all brothers and sisters, however, are at the same place in their understanding of that Word. In Paul's day, this was especially true regarding the place of the Law of Moses in the believer's life. Many Jewish background believers had grown up with laws about what they could eat, what was pure and impure and what associations they were permitted to have with Gentiles. These individuals still struggled to understand their freedom from the law in Christ.

Those who did have freedom from these laws were to respect brothers and sisters who were still trying to understand. Those who were still under the law were also, however, to respect those who did not see things as they did.

In the church of our day, none of us are at the same place. We are all growing in our understanding of our obligations and responsibilities before God. We will not all see things the same way. We will not all have the same priorities in life. What is important is that we grow in our understanding of God's heart for us through His Word, the leading of His Spirit and the wise and godly counsel of brothers and sisters in Christ. Though we are not at the same stage of our journey, we are still on the same path.

Verse 31

Paul gives the Corinthians a word of advice here. He has been speaking about the differences among believers over eating food sacrificed to idols. He challenges them to make the glory of God the central focus of what they ate or drank.

The implication is that not all believers would come to the same conclusion, but they were all to act with a common motivation. If a brother chose never to eat meat sacrificed to idols, he was to do so to the glory of God in his life. If, on the other hand, another believer chose to rejoice in his freedom in Christ and partake freely of all food, he was also to do this to the glory of God.

We must understand that it is possible in some situations that two contrary actions both bring glory to God. In this case of food sacrificed to idols, one believer chose not to eat or have the least association with idol worship. He did so out of respect for God and His honour. On the other hand, his brother chose to rejoice in his freedom in Christ and gave no thought whatsoever about idols when he ate, for in his mind, these idols were nothing. This, too, was for the glory of God.

Verse 32

Paul challenges the Corinthians not to give any cause for offense to either the Jews, Greeks or to the church. The word used here is ἀνρόσκοπος (apróskopos). It is derived from two words. The first is the word, a, meaning, not. The second is proskóptō, meaning to strike at or to trip. The sense here is that believers were not to give any cause for another person to trip or fall due to their actions and decisions.

How this is worked out will be different in each situation and depending on the person we are associated with at the time. For example, if a believer were eating with a Jew, he would likely have to refrain from eating foods contrary to the Law of Moses. He does not compromise his faith by choosing to do so, and he respects the Jew by not eating “unclean” food in his presence.

If, on the other hand, this same believer is eating with Gentiles and refuses to eat what they offered him because it might be sacrificed to an idol, would he not offend the Gentile by coming to his house to eat but declaring his food to be unworthy of eating?

The same principle applied to the church. If what I do offends a brother or sister, then out of respect for them, I should not do this in front of them. It is better to sacrifice our freedom than risk offending a brother or sister in Christ.

Understand here that this principle does not apply to the message of the gospel, which cannot be compromised. That message will be an offense to those who choose not to believe:

7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the

cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.- 1Pe 2:7-8

Verse 33

This principle of not giving an offense has one goal in mind. That is to keep the door open so that the message of the gospel can strike its mark. Sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ begins with respect for those with whom we share. All too many believers feel obligated to take on the role of the Holy Spirit and convict people of sin and their need.

We indeed need to understand our condition before we can understand the gospel. How do you convince a person, however, that he is a sinner when he is convinced he is not? Isn't this the role of the Spirit of God? Sometimes, we feel we must change a person

completely before they can come to Christ. We are convinced we need to pull them out of their sinful ways because how could Christ ever accept them if they still live in sin? We feel compelled to correct their theology because somehow, deep down inside, we believe that if they only had the right theological understanding, then they could be convinced to come to Christ. The reality, however, is that Christ accepts sinners when they are at their worst. He transforms people whose worldview is contrary to His Gospel.

You don't have to convince people of your opinion about food offered to idols for them to accept Christ. Respect them and don't offend them. Be willing to get a bit dirty by associating with them. Jesus sat at a table with sinners, to the horror of the religious leaders of His day. He associated with the ungodly and treated them with dignity. He did

this to demonstrate the heart of the Father. He did this so that they would be saved.

CHAPTER 11

Verse 1

While chapter 11 begins with this verse, it likely should be part of Paul's thoughts in chapter 10. The apostle spoke there about not giving offense. This was how he chose to minister. Consider what he said to the Corinthians in [1 Corinthians 9](#):

20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might

win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. – [1Co 9:20-23](#)

Paul communicated the gospel in the culture of the people he lived with. He lived as they did and demonstrated how the truth of the gospel was worked out in their context.

Notice how the apostle challenges the Corinthians to imitate his example as much as he was an imitator of Christ. In other words, Paul took his example from Christ. Jesus left the glories of

heaven to live on this earth. He chose to be born as a man and live like we do. He suffered what we suffered and faced what we face. He did this so that we could understand the truth of why He came and be saved from our sins. How easy it would have been for the Son of God to come in all His glory and demand obedience. He did not do that. Instead, He became like us and demonstrated to us the power of God in human form. He showed us how the truth of the gospel could be lived out in the flesh. He humbled Himself to show us the way to God.

I see too many missionaries and pastors lifting themselves above those they serve. This was not the way Paul ministered, nor was it the way of Jesus.

Verse 2

Paul moves on to another topic that needs to be addressed in the church of

Corinth. He begins in verse 2 with a word of commendation. The apostle commends the church for two things here.

First, Paul commended the church because they remembered him in everything. To remember Paul in everything, in this context, seems to refer to his instructions and teaching. The apostle had spent time with the Corinthians teaching the truth of the gospel. The believers of that city had not forgotten what he had taught and were generally living in the truth he had communicated to them while he was with them.

Second, the apostle commended the church of Corinth because they maintained the traditions as he had taught them. The word translated, traditions in the original language is παράδοσις (parádosis). Parádosis refers to a tradition, doctrine, or teaching passed on to someone else.

The context of the chapter indicates that the traditions, teachings and doctrines Paul speaks about are related to the relationship between men and women in the church. The apostle will go on to explain this more fully in the chapter.

Verse 3

Paul moves on to another topic that needs to be addressed in the church of Corinth. He begins in verse 2 with a word of commendation. The apostle commends the church for two things here.

First, Paul commended the church because they remembered him in everything. To remember Paul in everything, in this context, seems to refer to his instructions and teaching. The apostle had spent time with the Corinthians teaching the truth of the gospel. The believers of that city had

not forgotten what he had taught and were generally living in the truth he had communicated to them while he was with them.

Second, the apostle commended the church of Corinth because they maintained the traditions as he had taught them. The word translated, traditions in the original language is παράδοσις (parádosis). Parádosis refers to a tradition, doctrine, or teaching passed on to someone else. The context of the chapter indicates that the traditions, teachings and doctrines Paul speaks about are related to the relationship between men and women in the church. The apostle will go on to explain this more fully in the chapter.

Verse 4

From his statement about how the church is to be structured, Paul then

speaks of a practical application of this in corporate worship. Part of the worship service involved praying and prophesying, talking to God and hearing from God.

There appears to be a certain amount of freedom in the church regarding praying and prophesying. People would pray out loud or bring a word from the Lord. It appears that much of this was quite spontaneous.

Paul gives an example of a man who prayed or prophesied in church with his head covered. Let's consider what the apostle is saying here.

When people covered their heads, they demonstrated submission, respect and humility. Some men felt it necessary to cover their heads when entering the presence of God. They did this out of respect for God and to demonstrate their submission to Him.

In this case, Paul tells men, however, that when they prayed and prophesied in public, they spoke with authority as God's representatives and were to demonstrate that authority by uncovering their heads. As God's spokesmen, they were to speak boldly and with power.

Notice that Paul tells men who prayed and prophesied with covered heads that they dishonoured their head. What was the head of man? Paul has already told us that the head of man is Christ. To represent Christ with shame and weakness does Him no honour. When men refuse to exercise their role as Christ's ambassador with pride and dignity, they misrepresent the Lord Jesus. They were to stand firm and proudly proclaim the truth of God. They were to uncover their head and boldly proclaim the Word of truth.

Verse 5

The apostle has just told the Corinthians that man had been given a responsibility and obligation to be a leader in the church. Women were to serve in submission to this leadership. Paul's argument for this is theological. Just as Christ submitted to God the Father, so woman was to submit to man (see verse 3). An example of this submission and headship is the relationship between the Heavenly Father and Jesus, His Son.

The second point we need to see here is that this submission was demonstrated in Corinth by the wearing of a head covering. That head covering symbolized a woman's acceptance of the role God gave her in the church under man.

Understand here that a head covering was no guarantee of acceptance of her role, but it was an outward sign in public worship. A woman could wear a head covering in public but rebel

against the authority God had ordained in her heart and show no such submission in her life.

Paul goes on to say that when a woman prayed or prophesied without a head covering, she dishonoured her head. The word head should not be seen as the biological part of the body attached to our shoulders. The Greek word κεφαλή (kephalḗ) also refers to a position of authority. Paul used the term in this context in verse 3 when he told the Corinthians that God is the head (κεφαλή) of Christ and that man is the head (κεφαλή) of woman. What the apostle seems to be saying is that when a woman took it upon herself to pray and prophesy in the presence of men without a head covering, she was dishonouring the men God had chosen to be her leaders. Out of respect for their position, the woman was to wear a symbol of submission.

Consider what the Law of Moses had to say about the responsibility of youth in the presence of an older man:

32 "You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. – Lev 19:32

Youth were to respect older people by standing up in their presence. In the same way, women were to respect their male leaders by wearing a symbol of submission to their authority in the church.

Paul tells the women of Corinth that refusing to wear a head covering when praying and prophesying in public was like having her head shaved. The New Bible Commentary has this to say about the shaving of a woman's head in those days:

"The shaving of the head of the woman who disgraces her husband by committing adultery was prescribed by Roman law which applied in the Roman colony of Corinth." - New Bible Commentary (NBC) "New Bible Commentary". Marion, IA: Laridian, Inc., 2004. © Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, Leicester, England, 1953, 1954, 1970, 1994.

Clearly, in the culture of Corinth, it would be a great shame for a woman to have her head shaved. The apostle seems to be saying that it would be equally as shameful for a woman to pray and prophesy in public without covering her head.

It is important to note that the apostle does not forbid women from praying and prophesying in public here. He tells them, however, that when they did,

they were to do so in submission to the church's leadership.

Verse 6

Paul feels so strongly about a woman covering her head in public worship that he tells the church that any who did not do so should have their hair cut off. The cultural context of this act is quite clear from the verse. It would be a disgrace for this to happen to any woman in those days. She would be publically shamed and forced to wear a head covering to cover her short hair.

This matter of headcovering is one that divides the church of our day. Some believe all women should cover their heads when they come to church. Others do not see this law as applicable to us today. How are we to understand the application of what Paul teaches the Corinthians for the church of our day?

We could apply what the apostle tells us literally. In other words, we require all women to wear a head covering when praying and prophesying in public worship. Having said this, we must also understand that a head covering does not mean submission. Any woman can wear a hat, but not all who wear a hat are submissive. To wear a head covering and not have a submissive heart would be hypocritical and make women guilty before God. In this sense, wearing a head covering would be a sin. Consider what the apostle Paul has to say about circumcision:

29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. – [Ro 2:29](#)

True circumcision, according to Paul, was an act of the heart and “*not of the letter.*” It does no good to wear a head

covering if your heart is not in what you do. On the other hand, if your heart is one of submission to God and the leadership of the church, then you are honouring God more than those who wear a headcover but who do not submit.

Verse 7

According to the apostle Paul, man was not to cover his head since he was the image and glory of God. Woman, on the other hand, was the glory of man. We need to break this down to see what Paul is saying.

Paul tells the church in Corinth that while women were to cover their heads in worship, men were not to do so. Paul's words are quite clear, and from a legal point of view, we have no problem understanding what he is saying. If you are a man, don't cover your head. If you are a woman, cover your head.

From this perspective, what Paul says is not complicated to apply. Notice, however, that the apostle explains that there was a theological reason behind this regulation. This is where matters become more complex.

Man was not to cover his head “since he is the image and glory of God.” Let’s examine these two words to understand what the apostle is saying.

The word image in the Greek language is εἰκών (eikōn). It means to be like or to have the likeness of something else. What is important about this word is that it always assumes that the object is not just a copy but draws its source from the original object. I can look in the mirror and see my likeness, but that likeness would not be in the mirror unless I were standing before it. The likeness depends on my presence. It is not a copy that is independent of me.

What Paul seems to be saying is that man reflects the authority of God on this earth. The Creator has endowed him with this responsibility and is to reflect this in the church as His representative. Just as the mirror reflects my likeness, man is to reflect God's authority in the church. Understand here that this authority is not in himself but in God. Man merely reflects the image God has placed on Him. That image of God, however, is to be honoured and respected.

The word glory, used here is δόξα (dóxa). The term means to think or suppose. It carries the sense of having a favourable opinion of something or someone. This, of course, leads to respect, honour and praise. In the case of God, His glory refers to His value and excellence of character that inspires reverence, awe and respect.

Paul tells us that man also reflects this glory of God. Just as a masterpiece

demonstrates the artist's skill, so man showcases the genius of God in creation. He was created from the dust of the earth by His Creator.

Having said that man reflects the image of God's authority and glory in the church, Paul moves now to speak of woman. He tells the Corinthians that she reflects the glory of man. Absent in this phrase is the fact that woman reflects the image of God.

According to [Genesis 1:27](#), God made man and woman in His image.

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. – [Ge 1:27](#)

The Hebrew word for man here is a generic term that could be translated as humanity or humankind, implying that both male and female were created in God's image.

Paul's omission here reflects what He is trying to convey in this passage. There are various aspects to the image of God in human beings. The context of this verse indicates, however, that Paul is focusing on one of those aspects, the authority of God, as reflected in the church. While women reflected the image of God in many other ways, this authority image was to be reflected by man. He was to take responsibility for the kingdom's work on this earth. He was accountable to God for this and would answer to Him as His representative.

The fact that man was not to cover his head shows us that everything he did was openly exposed to God, and He had a great obligation to honour Him in every matter he undertook.

Paul ends the verse by telling the Corinthians that woman was the glory of man. We have seen that the word glory (δόξα, dóxa) refers to one's

thoughts toward another that lead to honouring and respecting. The challenge here is to discern what “*glory of man*” means. There are two ways we could understand these words.

First, glory refers to the woman. That is to say, man thinks honourably of her and respects her for her role. She should, therefore, wear a head covering as a symbol of submission to one who honours and values her.

Second, the glory referred to here belongs to the man. That is to say, the woman was given as a helpmate to stand with the man for the kingdom’s purpose. She was made for him so that he could accomplish the purpose for which God had called him as a representative. The glory of man is in his being set apart for God’s service. A woman’s glory is her role as a helpmate and associate in this great purpose.

Verse 8

To this point, Paul taught the Corinthians that the woman ought to wear a head covering as a symbol of submission because of the order that God had created. He now gives a second reason for this submission in verse 8. The second reason woman was to submit to man was because she was made from him. Consider the story of how woman was created:

20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a

woman and brought her to the man. – Ge 2:20-22

God could have created the first woman as a separate and individual being from the dust, but He did not. Instead, He chose to take her from man and then presented her to him as a “helper fit for him.” There was a theological implication to this for the apostle. It was inconceivable that the one created for and from man by God should then take authority over him.

Verse 9

Paul emphasizes the point here that man was not created for woman but woman for man. Genesis 2 tells us that woman was created to be a helper for man. God created man to be a caretaker of the garden where He placed him. Woman was created to stand by his side as a helper in this great task.

20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. – [Ge 2:20-21](#)

[Genesis 2:20,21](#) clearly states that God created a "helper" fit for man. This concept is quite offensive today, but it does not change God's original purpose, as recorded in [Genesis 2](#). Paul believed, many years later, that this fact still had an implication. Women were to accept this role gracefully and be content to be what God had created them to be.

Admittedly, this truth is difficult for a modern world to accept. The idea that man should be the head and woman

should be under him as a helper is deeply offensive today. As part of this modern culture, I feel this tension. The fact of the matter, however, is not what I think but what the Scriptures teach. The fact that I am a sinner is also offensive to me, but I cannot change that reality and must accept my need for a Saviour. Paul bases his argument for the submission of women not on culture but on the purpose of God in creation. He encourages the Corinthian church here to get in line with the intention of God and not let their culture or personal feelings get in the way. That is quite a challenge for us today as well.

Verse 10

In the last few verses, Paul has been giving the Corinthians a theological reason why women were to be in submission to men. He concludes here by stating that it was based on God's

purpose in creation that a woman should have "*a symbol of authority on her head.*"

In the case of the church of Corinth, the "*symbol of authority*" was a head covering. Some believers today feel that this is still a necessity for women when they come to worship. This is a perfectly acceptable practice. Having said this, however, a head covering does not guarantee a submissive spirit. Many years ago, in my culture, women loved to wear hats to church, and the fancier, the better. These hats had nothing to do with submission but, in some cases, attention seeking. This use of a head covering was not what God intended. This has led other believers to believe that the "*symbol of authority*" is an attitude of the heart. Writing to the Romans, the apostle Paul said this about circumcision:

29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. – Ro 2:29

True circumcision, according to Paul, was a matter of the heart. This would have been difficult for a Jewish believer to accept. To think that a Gentile, who had never been circumcised, was of equal standing with God as a circumcised believer was radical. Is it possible that a woman who wears no head covering is as submissive as one who does? The true evidence of submission is not in a covering but in the heart. First, get the heart right before God, and then He will show you how to apply that in real life.

Notice the phrase “*because of the angels.*” Paul tells women they were to have a symbol of authority on their heads because of these angels. This

phrase has perplexed commentators from the beginning, and there are various interpretations proposed.

First, the Greek word Paul used here is ἀγγελος (ánggelos). It refers to a messenger sent to announce, teach or proclaim a message. These messengers can be human, angelic or even demonic. In [Revelation 2-3](#), we have a record of seven messages being sent to the angels of the churches. These angels appears to be responsible for the work that was taking place in those churches. Many see this as the human leader who received the message from God and was to take it to the church and address what was necessary. On the other hand, [Matthew 2:13](#) recounts how an angelic being (not a human) came to Joseph in a dream with a message from God.

Having established that the word ἀγγελος can refer to either a human or angelic being, we are left

with the matter of how to interpret what Paul tells us about these messengers. There are two possibilities we need to consider here.

First, if the word, angel, refers to human messengers from God, it may then be a reference to the leaders of the church of Corinth. If this is the case, the woman was to wear a symbol of authority out of respect for them as God's chosen representatives in her church. I would base this interpretation on the references to angels in [Revelation 2](#) and 3, as mentioned above.

Second, consider what Scripture teaches about angels as celestial beings. Speaking about little children, Jesus says:

10 "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels

always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. – [Mt 18:10](#)

Jesus seems to teach that He has assigned angels to care for His children. The writer of Hebrews confirms this when he writes:

13 And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? – [Heb 1:13-14](#)

Angels, according to [Hebrews 1:13-14](#) are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.

God promised the Old Testament saints that His angels would guard and watch over them:

11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. – [Ps 91:11](#)

7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. – [Ps 34:7](#)

From these verses, we understand that the angels of God minister to those who belong to Him. These ever-present angels watched over and cared for the women in the Corinthian church. Paul encourages women, out of respect for these angels, to walk in the purpose of God for their lives by living in submission to God and His purpose.

Verse 11

While the apostle Paul takes a strong position on man's authority in the church, he tells the Corinthians that "in the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor man of woman."

The word independent is χωρίς (chōrís), which means separate or by itself. Paul seems to be saying that man cannot function without woman and woman cannot without man. They depend on each other for the work of the kingdom of God. Each sex has to fulfil its role if the purpose of God on this earth is going to be fulfilled. One position is no more important than the other. Nor is their relationship with the Lord any different. Both are equal partners in their walk with God.

Verse 12

Notice how Paul illustrates this interdependence between men and women. According to the creation account, the woman was created from one of the ribs of a man. Now, however, man is formed in a woman's womb and comes from her. Woman owes her life to man, and man owes his life to woman. They need each other.

Paul concludes his thought here by reminding both men and women that both sexes owe everything to God, who gave life in equal measure to them both. There is no room for any pride, for one sex cannot function without the other, and neither could function without God.

Verse 13

Paul concludes his reflection on the role of women in the church with a question. He calls the Corinthians to judge this matter for themselves. In light of what the apostle has written about the creation of woman, was it proper for her to “pray to God with her head uncovered?”

By covering her head, the woman was demonstrating submission to God and His purpose. On a very basic level, Paul asks whether a woman ought to live a life of submission to God.

It is quite possible that women in Corinth were seeking to take on roles commonly given to men. This section of Paul's letter is devoted to helping these women understand that while they were equal to men, God had assigned different roles to the sexes. Paul encourages these women to accept their role and submit to God.

Verse 14

Paul uses an argument from nature in his discussion of head coverings for women. He begins by telling the Corinthians that nature taught that if a man wore long hair, it was a disgrace to him.

The Greek term translated "long hair" is κομάω (komáō). The word is derived from the word κόμη (kómē), which refers not just to the length of one's hair but also to its style and ornamentation. Imagine a man here

who was very concerned for his long flowing hair and decorated it with flowers, ribbons and jewellery. What Paul is telling the Corinthians here is that while this may be natural for a woman, it would not be for a man. Many men would lose their hair and end up bald.

Verse 15

While it was not natural for a man to glory in his long, flowing and elaborately decorated hair, this was not true for women. A woman's hair was her glory. The word used for glory here is δόξα (dóxa), which means to think or recognize, especially in a positive way. In other words, she thinks about her hair and values it. Hair styling for women is a big business in many countries of the world. This is perceived as something very natural.

Paul tells the Corinthians that a woman's hair was given to her as a covering. Scientifically, while women's hair is no different from men's, their body chemistry is such that it generally grows longer and falls out much slower. Paul tells us here that God created this difference between men and women for a reason. That reason, according to Paul, was so that women could have a natural head covering.

Verse 16

The apostle ends his discussion on head covering and submission with the statement:

If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God. – [1Co 11:16](#)

Notice a couple of details in this verse.

First, observe the phrase, *"if anyone is inclined to be contentious."* The apostle understood that what he taught would not be well received by everyone in the church. This is still the case in our day. The idea that there are differences between the sexes is offensive to many. It appears that this was equally true in Paul's day. Despite the controversy his teaching would cause, Paul remained true to what he believed was the purpose of God.

Second, consider the phrase: *"We have no such practice, nor do the churches of God."* The apostle speaks of two different groups in these words. The first group is referred to simply as "we" and seems to refer to the apostles. The second group is the churches of God. He reminds the Corinthians that both the apostles and the churches of God agreed.

What were the apostles and churches of God in agreement about? It was

about the absence of a certain practice — “*We have no such practice.*” The question we must ask ourselves here is what practice did the apostles and the churches of God reject. The answer lies in the context.

Paul has been speaking about head coverings as a symbol of being under authority. He tells us that there would likely be those who became “*contentious*” about this matter. There was no contention about this matter among the apostles, however. They were of one heart and mind with Paul on this issue. The churches of God, established in the various regions of that day, also agreed with the apostles on the different roles God had given to men and women in the church. What Paul taught on this matter was accepted by the apostles and the church, wherever it had been established, as being the will and purpose of God.

Verse 17

Paul moves now to the topic of the Lord's Table. He begins with a word of reprimand to the Corinthians about their gathering for this purpose. While one would think that gathering for the Lord's Table was always a good thing, the apostle tells the church that it was "*not for the better but for the worse.*" He goes on to explain what he meant by this in the next verses.

Verse 18

The reason their gatherings were not for the better, but for the worse was first because of the divisions among them as believers. This was not something Paul had personally witnessed. Likely when he was with them this was not the case but as time went by the church of Corinth had allowed these divisions to creep in. These divisions hindered their

fellowship, and set one believer against another. This took their focus off the Lord and His purpose for their lives.

While Paul had not experienced this division in person, he believed what he had heard about it because of other things he knew about the church. He explains this further in verse 19.

Verse 19

The apostle speaks to the Corinthians about the factions that had developed among them. The word translated factions in the English Standard Version of the Bible is αἵρεσις (haíresis), which can be translated as heresy. It refers to an opinion that is different from that which is commonly believed to be true. In other words, there were individuals in the Corinthian church who had turned from the truth of the gospel. This turning was not necessarily a complete denial of Christ and His work

but diverse ideas and doctrines not based on the truth taught by Jesus and the apostles.

Notice how Paul tells the church that there "*must be factions among you.*" The idea here seems to be that this is what the Lord had revealed to them as apostles. Consider, for example, the predictions of Peter and Jude in this regard:

2 that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,

3 knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. – [2Pe 3:1-3](#)

18 They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." 19 It is these who

*cause divisions, worldly people,
devoid of the Spirit. – Jude 18-19*

According to these apostles, there would be division and diverse doctrines and practices in the last days. False prophets and teachers will come seeking to divide the church and weaken the impact of the truth. We must be prepared for this and do our utmost to walk faithfully in the teaching of Christ and the apostles.

While these factions must come, according to New Testament prophecy, they would bring genuine and sincere believers into the light. These believers will not follow the teachings of darkness. They would stand out as a bright light in these times. They will willingly suffer and be scoffed at for the cause of Christ, rather than submit to the darkness of these factions.

Verse 20

Notice that while the Corinthians came together to share in the Table of the Lord, Paul tells them that it was really not the Lord's Supper they observed. The Lord's Supper was much more than a tradition. It had more to do with communion and fellowship with Him than mere ceremony. The church gathered and went through the ritual practice of the Table of the Lord, but because of the division and sin in their minds, the presence of the Lord was not with them. Can we observe the Lord's Table if the Lord is not in it? Is it his meal if He is not there? Is it to His honour if we do not walk with Him or come before Him with lives that do not bring Him glory?

Verse 21

This verse reveals that the Lord's Table was observed during a common meal. People were invited to attend this meal,

and during this time, they remembered the Lord in celebrating His Table.

Observe what was happening during this time. Paul tells us that people were going “*ahead with his own meal.*” The idea seems to be that people were coming and eating without waiting for others to arrive. These individuals were eating all the food so that others who came later were going hungry. They were also drinking all the wine and getting drunk.

When the time came for the remembrance of the Lord, there were people present who had nothing to eat because of the gluttony and selfishness of their brothers and sisters. Others had drunk so much wine that they were under its influence during this communion celebration. In the mind of the apostle, this was unthinkable. He refused to accept this as the Table of the Lord, for it brought no honour to His name.

Verse 22

The apostle rebuked the Corinthians for allowing these things to happen while celebrating the Lord's Supper. Why should people come to church and gorge themselves with food, leaving others with nothing? Why should they come to the Table of the Lord and get drunk? If they were going to be gluttons and drunkards, they should at least have the decency to do so in their own homes. This practice had no place in the church. By acting this way, they were guilty on two counts.

First, these individuals were guilty of despising the church of God. That is to say, they acted sinfully in the very place where God was worshipped. They dishonoured the name of God by their gluttony and drunkenness in His house.

Second, they were guilty of humiliating brothers or sisters who had nothing. The question we ask ourselves here is:

Who are the people who “had nothing?” This may refer to those who came to the gathering and found that the food and wine were all gone, thus feeling somewhat embarrassed by the situation. It may also refer to the poor who had no food and depended on this common meal to help sustain themselves. In either case, those who ate without considering the needs of their brother or sister were demonstrating their pride, selfishness, arrogance and lack of empathy and compassion. This was something for which these individuals should be truly ashamed.

Paul rebuked these drunken gluttons for their hypocrisy, selfishness and blasphemy.

Verse 23

The apostle takes the Corinthians back to when the Lord instituted the practice

of the Lord's Supper. He seems to do this to remind them of its significance.

Notice the phrase "*I received from the Lord.*" What we need to understand here is that Paul was not present at that first table. Nor was he a follower of the Lord Jesus at that time. The phrase, "*I received from the Lord,*" lets us know that somehow the Lord God communicated to the apostle what He intended in the practice of the Lord's Supper. Paul's understanding of the Lord's Table was something the Lord had given him. He tells the Corinthians here that it was what God had given to him as an apostle that he shared with them. In other words, it was not his opinion or idea but a revelation and command of God.

As he begins, Paul tells the Corinthians that it was the Lord Jesus who, on the night He was betrayed, took bread and shared it with the disciples at the table with Him. The Lord Jesus was the first

to practice the Lord's Supper. Paul is telling us two things about the Lord's Table here in this verse.

First, though he was not present at that first table, Paul had a revelation from God about its practice. In other words, this revelation assured him that it was the will of the Lord God that His Son be remembered in the church by this simple practice.

Second, not only was the practice of the Lord's Supper a command of God given by revelation, but it was also demonstrated in person by the Lord Jesus. Jesus instituted the practice when He was on the earth and commanded the church to follow His example.

Verse 24

Paul shares here what the Lord Jesus did at that first supper. The apostle told the Corinthians that Jesus took bread,

gave thanks and broke it. While Jesus could have passed a loaf without breaking it, He chose to break it Himself. The breaking of bread was a significant part of that service as it represented what would happen to His body on the cross.

Notice that Jesus compares His body to the broken bread through His words: "*This is my body, which is for you.*" The idea is that His body, like this bread, was broken for the disciples. This was the reason why He came. He passed that broken loaf to those present to symbolize their participation and identification with Him in this death.

Jesus told the disciples in that room that they were to celebrate this meal in remembrance of Him. In other words, this first celebration was to continue in the church. From that point forward, believers were to gather, take bread, break it and share it with those present

in remembrance of the sacrificial work of Christ, whose body was broken for them.

Verse 25

After breaking the bread, Jesus then took a cup. Notice that Jesus took this cup after supper. This first celebration of the Lord's Table occurred at a common meal. Jesus says three things about this cup.

First, the cup that Jesus shared that day symbolized a new covenant. This new covenant was unlike the Old Covenant, with all its sacrificial animals that could not forgive sin or change the heart. This new covenant was a new agreement between God and His people.

Second, this new covenantal agreement was through the blood of Jesus. In the Bible, any significant agreement between two parties required a blood

sacrifice to seal the deal. Consider the words of [Hebrew 19](#) in this regard:

19 For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you." – [Heb 9:19-20](#)

The new covenant Jesus established with His people was also sealed with a blood sacrifice. The death of the Lord Jesus sealed an agreement of pardon and reconciliation between God and His people. His blood is a seal of authenticity on the agreement between God and humankind.

Finally, Jesus tells His disciples that they were to: "Do this, as often as you

drink it, in remembrance of me." The cup of wine Jesus lifted before the disciples symbolized the blood that ratified the agreement between God and His people. The disciples were to remember this agreement by raising a cup of wine.

Jesus does not tell the disciples how often they were to celebrate this remembrance service. He tells them they were to remember His death and blood as often as they drank it. There was no one day for this celebration. Neither was there a required frequency for its practice. Jesus leaves this matter to the disciples. His only requirement was that they remember Him and His sacrifice when they did.

Verse 26

Jesus connects the breaking of bread and drinking from the cup into one service in the words "eat this bread and

drink the cup.” Both of these activities were to be practised in the Lord’s Table.

Notice also that Jesus does not give a frequency for the practice of this remembrance service. This was left to the individual churches to decide.

Jesus told His disciples that the practice of the Lord’s Table was to continue, at whatever frequency they desired, “until He comes.” This shows us that it was the will of Christ that the church continued this practice regularly until He returned as a way of remembering what He had done for them.

Verse 27

The apostle issues a warning about the Lord’s supper here. He tells the Corinthians that those who ate the bread and drank the cup in an unworthy matter would be “*guilty*

concerning the body and blood of the Lord."

Paul does not specify here in this verse what he means by eating and drinking in an unworthy manner. The context, however, speaks of individuals eating without concern for others and drinking until drunk. Certainly, this was an example of unworthiness to take the cup and bread. To sit at the Table of the Lord with a belly full of food while your neighbour's stomach was empty because you ate what he needed without consideration of his need was to act in an unworthy manner. To sit at the table in an intoxicated state was also to dishonour the Lord and His work on the cross.

There is a call here to examine our lives in light of the work of Christ for us on the cross. To sit at the table without consideration of the implications of Christ's work was to treat that table and the work of Christ with contempt.

Paul tells us that doing so makes us guilty before God and dishonours the work of Christ.

Verse 28

Lest an individual be guilty of irreverence to Christ and His work, the apostle challenges everyone who participates in the Table of the Lord to examine themselves. This examination involves the heart, attitude and life to be sure that they are in tune with the work, purpose and teaching of Jesus.

Understand here that not one of us will be perfect in this life. We are not looking for perfection but persistent sin in attitude or life. If you know that you are not living as Christ requires, then deal with this before eating. If your heart attitude is not right with God or a brother or sister in Christ, then be reconciled before you share in this table.

We all come in an unworthy manner to the Table of the Lord. However, Paul expects that we do not come with persistent or rebellious sins we are unwilling to address or recognize. We are to sit at this table with hearts open to God's Spirit and His conviction and a willingness to confess any sin He reveals. The Lord's Table is a place of self-examination.

connects the breaking of bread and drinking from the cup into one service in the words "eat this bread and drink the cup." Both of these activities were to be practised in the Lord's Table.

Verse 29

Paul tells us here that we are "to discern the body." The Greek word used here is ἀναξίως (ana0xíōs), which means unworthy. The term is translated differently by various Bible versions.

The King James Version, New King James Version and the New Living Translation use the word “unworthily.” The New International translates as “without recognizing the body of Christ.” Ultimately, the idea is that we are not to show disrespect for the work of Christ on the cross. It is one thing to be unworthy of the cross and quite another to celebrate that death unworthily. For this reason, the apostle calls all who would remember the death of Jesus Christ to do so with respect.

The apostle says that those who did not “discern the body” of Christ or consider His work in that body with deep respect, gratitude and admiration when participating in the Lord’s Table brought judgment on themselves. That is to say, they made themselves guilty before the Lord of dishonouring His work on their behalf by treating it with such contempt and carelessness.

Verse 30

The seriousness of what the apostle teaches is demonstrated here in this verse. There were individuals in the church of Corinth who did not “discern the body” of Christ. That is to say, they disrespected the work of Christ on their behalf by living in sin and celebrating the Lord’s Table without examining themselves. The apostle tells the Corinthians here that the Lord had judged these individuals in three ways. Some were weak, others were ill, and some died because of their disrespect and blasphemy.

While we should not see all weakness, illness and death as a judgment of God, the apostle did teach that there are times when this is indeed the case. It is for this reason that the church needs to be discerning.

The apostle James has this to say about those who were sick in the

church:

14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. – [Jas 5:14-16](#)

Notice the connection between a possible sin and sickness in the phrase, "*and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*" This phrase clearly shows that not all illness results from personal sin, but the elders before whom the individual presents himself were not to rule out this possibility.

Paul is telling the Corinthians that there were times when God's judgment manifested itself in weakness, illness and even death. He insinuates that in the church of Corinth, there were individuals who were currently under such judgment because, although they participated in the Lord's Table, they had not examined themselves with intent to confess and repent of sin.

Verse 31

Believers are to judge themselves. We are to do this as we seek the Lord in His Word. We are to examine our lives in light of the truth of Scripture and judge whether we live according to its standard. We are to listen to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and determine whether we are walking in obedience. We are to consider the rebukes of fellow believers to see if maybe they see something in us that we cannot see ourselves. When we see

that we have fallen short of God's purpose for our lives, we are then to confess this and seek His power and enabling to walk in obedience.

Paul tells the Corinthians that those who judged themselves regularly and truthfully in this manner would not need to be judged by others, for they have already been addressing their sin and confessing it before God.

Verse 32

The apostle told the Corinthians in verse 31 that if they judged themselves, they would not need to be judged by the Lord. He moves on now to speak about being judged by the Lord. He tells the Corinthians here that when the Lord judged them, they would be disciplined so they would not be condemned. Let's take a moment to consider the words Paul used here.

Note first the word judged. The term used here is κρίνω (krínō), which speaks of a separation. The idea is to separate or distinguish good from evil. The word also carries a sense of punishment for any sinful or negative behaviour.

Observe Paul's words here: "*But when we are judged by the Lord.*" The implication is that we will be judged. Nothing is hidden from God's eyes, and He will respond to what He sees. Understand that the apostle speaks to believers when he tells them God would judge them.

Paul tells the Corinthians that God would discipline believers He judged to be on the wrong path. The word παιδεύω (paideúō) used for discipline is used to speak of bringing up a child. The idea is that the parent or teacher trains them in what is right through correction. When God judges or determines that one of His children

has wandered from the path, he will correct this by rebuking or redirecting them. This discipline may not be pleasant for the child, but it will always be for their good.

There is a reason for this correction and discipline. Paul tells us that it is so that the believer will not be condemned along with the ungodly. The word the apostle used for condemned is κατακρίνω (katakrínō). The term is derived from katá, meaning against, and κρίνω, meaning to judge. The sense here is to pronounce a sentence or judgment against someone. It is to find them guilty. It is understood here that there is a final sentence passed on the condemned party.

What Paul seems to be saying here is that God will correct His children who are on the wrong path so that they will not suffer an even greater condemnation. He judges them for their good. We do not need to fear the

judgement and discipline of the Lord, for it will always be for our good. This, however, does not mean that His punishment will be light and easy.

Verse 33

Paul returns to his rebuke in verse 21, where he says:

21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. – 1Co 11:21

He challenges the Corinthian believers to wait for one another when they gathered for a meal. The reason for this was so that everyone had an opportunity to eat and that no one would go hungry. This was a very practical solution to the problem of selfishness and greed. It was not a final solution, for that was a matter of the heart, but it did remove the temptation

and provide food for all parties in attendance. When we can't solve a problem of the heart, we can sometimes remove the temptation.

Verse 34

Paul offers another solution to the issue of people going hungry at the common meals held by believers in Corinth. He tells them that if they were hungry, they should have something to eat at home before coming to the meal.

This would allow more food for those who needed it. This way, when they gathered, they would not be judged for eating more than was required and leaving people hungry. The idea here is that the Corinthians were to consider the needs of the other people in attendance. They were to be thoughtful and self-sacrificing in their relationships with each other. This was especially important as they sought to

demonstrate the attitude of Christ at the Lord's Table.

Paul had other matters he wanted to address with the Corinthians but chose not to burden them with these details here in this letter. Instead, he planned to visit them and give them these instructions personally.

CHAPTER 12

Verse 1

In chapter 12, Paul moves on to another topic of importance to the church in Corinth. This relates to the matter of spiritual gifts. There appeared to be some misunderstanding about using these gifts in Corinth. Paul did not want the church to be “uninformed.” The word used here is ἀγνοέω (agnoéō), meaning not to perceive, understand or to know. It was important to Paul that the Corinthians understood these spiritual gifts and learn how to use them.

Spiritual gifts are God-given tools for the good of the church. If the church is to be what God intends it to be, these gifts must be understood and used in a way that brings Him honour. It was important for Paul then to instruct believers in their use. We ignore these gifts to the detriment of the church.

Verse 2

Paul begins his instruction on spiritual gifts by reminding the Corinthians of their background of idol worship. As idol worshippers, they had been led astray to mute idols. Notice particularly the phrase "*however you were led.*" These words give us the sense that the Corinthians had sought direction and counsel from these mute idols. Admittedly, these creations of wood or metal could not speak, but they were the instruments through which demonic forces communicated to lead devotees astray. The Corinthians were quite

aware of how demonic forces communicated with human beings.

Verse 3

In verse 2, Paul reminded the Corinthians of how evil spirits had led them astray when they lived a life of idol worship. This, of course, immediately brought up an important question. If evil spirits communicated to human beings and led them astray, how could believers know if the leading they experienced was from an evil spirit or God?

To answer this question, Paul tells the Corinthians that "*no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!'*" The Spirit of God would never curse the Son of God. The Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ were always in agreement and never at odds with each other. In other words, the Spirit of Christ would always lead a believer in

the way of Christ and according to His teaching. If you want to know if the leading you are experiencing is from God, then ask yourself if it aligns with the purpose, character and teaching of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, Paul reminded the Corinthians that "*no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit.*" It is not in the interest of Satan and His demons to elevate the person of Jesus Christ and His purpose. In fact, according to Paul, Satan cannot bow down and worship the person of Christ. If you want to know if the leading you are experiencing is from God, ask yourself: Does it declare and affirm His Lordship over my life and circumstances?

Verse 4

According to Paul, there was a variety of spiritual gifts. That is to say, God

worked in different ways through His children. He did not give the same ability to every believer. Each person was gifted according to the purpose and plan of God for their life. While these gifts were different, they all came from the same Spirit.

The implication here is that we need to expect differences among believers. Not every believer will share the same passion and burden. This is as God intended. We must learn how to live with and embrace these differences.

Verse 5

Paul makes a distinction between gifts and services here in verse 5. The word, services is *διακονία* (*diakonía*). The term refers to a deacon or servant and, by extension, to a service or ministry. While a gift relates to a special ability, service refers to a role or responsibility in the church. An individual may

exercise the role of pastor and have gifts of teaching or prophecy. Another member of the church may exercise the role of deacon and have gifts of mercy and compassion. We should not limit the word "service" to official offices in the church, however. Someone may have a role of caring for the needy or ministering to the elderly. Paul tells us that there are many types of services offered to the Lord in the church.

While God has called people to various services in the church, there is only one Lord. The idea here is that every service is under the Lord, and every servant is accountable to Him for how they serve and must bring Him honour through their ministries.

Verse 6

In the church, we have various spiritual giftings (verse 4) and services (verse 5). The apostle adds another category

here. He tells the Corinthians that there are also various “activities.” The word used is ἐνέργημα (enérgẽma). The term is translated as workings and comes from the word ἐνέργεια, meaning energy. In other words, ἐνέργημα refers to the energy or power of God working in an individual in various ways. A believer may not have a particular ministry, but is still used to bring a word of encouragement to another in a time of struggle or pain. The Spirit may lead another to give a gift in a time of need.

Paul tells us that God empowers Spirit-led opportunities to bless, encourage and strengthen the church.

Verse 7

According to the apostle, each person is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the good of the body of Christ. The word manifestation

(φανέρωσις, phanérōsis) refers to making something visible.

What is the nature of the manifestation Paul refers to here? The context indicates that it is a gift, service or activity God empowers.

What does this manifestation make visible? Paul tells us that it is a manifestation of the Spirit. In other words, it makes the presence of the Holy Spirit visible to the church.

How is this manifestation of the Spirit for the common good of the church? It ministers to the needs of the body and reveals the presence of God.

Consider this for a moment. God's purpose is to reveal the presence of His Holy Spirit in and through you. Believers should demonstrate this divine presence through their gifts, services and activities. If the Spirit of God dwells in you, then there should be a demonstration of His miraculous

presence in your life for the church's good.

Verse 8

Paul gives some examples of the gifts, services and activities God gives to the church through the Spirit here.

The first manifestation of the Spirit is the "*utterance of wisdom.*" Understand that this wisdom, as a manifestation of the Spirit, is not human. The wisdom spoken of here is from God and reveals that the Spirit of God is working and giving insights that are not human in origin.

The second manifestation of the Spirit is the "*utterance of knowledge.*" Again, understand that this knowledge, as a manifestation of the Spirit, is given by that Spirit for the instruction and good of the body of Christ. While I do not claim to have this utterance of knowledge, there have certainly been

many times while writing books and commentaries that I felt the Spirit of God was instructing me in the truths I struggled to understand. I conveyed in writing what He seemed to be teaching me.

Both manifestations are from the Spirit of God, originate in Him and are for the good of the body.

Verse 9

Another manifestation of the Spirit is faith. Faith is translated from the word πιστις (pístis), meaning to persuade. Faith is an assurance or conviction of the truth. Humanly speaking, we exercise faith in various ways, even in our daily routines. We sit in a chair, expecting that it will support us. We turn the key in our car's ignition with the assurance that it will start the vehicle. Paul speaks here, however, about a faith that is a manifestation of

the Spirit in the believer's life. In its very basic sense, this faith is a conviction of the truth of the Scriptures and the person of Jesus Christ and His work. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring every believer to this point of faith.

Note, however, that Paul does not seem to be speaking of faith at this basic level. The words "to another faith by the same Spirit" indicate that the reference to faith, as a manifestation of the Spirit, is a special gift of God given to some individuals but not to all in the same measure. The faith spoken of here may be a special conviction given to believers about the purpose of God in a given situation. This faith carries them through the doubts and trials that stand in the way and enables them to persevere until they see fulfilment.

Next on the list of manifestations of the Spirit are gifts of healing. This is often interpreted to mean that certain

individuals have the power from God to heal the sick. I believe that this is true, but consider also that the healing in itself is a gift. Consider what happened when Jesus healed people in His day. Those who were healed were a living testimony to the power of God over sickness, death and disease. They shared the testimony of what God had done, bringing great glory to His name. People stood in awe of God and His work in the lives of these individuals.

In saying this, I do not want to undermine the reality that God has given the church those who minister medically and spiritually to the needs of the human body emotionally and physically. God is still healing and has people He burdens and empowers to minister to this need for the church's good and the glory of His name.

Verse 10

The next manifestation of the Spirit mentioned by Paul is the working of miracles. The word, miracles is translated from the Greek word δύναμις (dúnamis), which refers to power or ability. This power is not human but from the Spirit of God. Paul has already mentioned gifts of healings in the last verse, so the word miracles should be distinguished from this manifestation. Paul does not clarify what he means by miracles in this verse, but clearly, they are extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit through an individual, demonstrating the power of God over the normal flow of natural events and circumstances. The outworking of these events and circumstances seems to have no other explanation other than the extraordinary power of God.

Prophecy is the next manifestation of the Spirit. Prophecy, in Scripture, can refer to the prediction of future events but most often refers to speaking on

God's behalf into the present. The prophet shares the heart of God and speaks from God to His people. While there is certainly a teaching element to prophecy, the prophet's focus is not so much to instruct people in the general purpose of God as written in Scripture but to reveal His specific will in a given time and circumstance. This may come in the form of a reprimand or encouragement that seems to come directly from the Lord and speaks to the need of the moment.

Next, Paul speaks about the ability to distinguish between spirits. The word πνεῦμα (pneúma) comes from the word πνέω, which means to breathe. It can be translated by the words breath or spirit. *Pneúma* can refer to the human spirit that can live independently of our physical body and is the seat of emotions and reasoning. It also speaks of spirits as beings that do not have a physical body, such as

evil spirits or demonic spirits. It is used occasionally to refer also to angelic beings ([Hebrews 1:14](#)) or of the Spirit of God.

The idea here is that spiritual forces, demonic or godly, influence the spirit of humankind. Evil spirits seek to turn people away from God, while the Spirit of God and His angelic beings seek to guide them into the truth. The challenge is to know the truth from error. God gives to the church individuals who can discern when a spirit-inspired action or teaching is from an evil spirit or God. Understand that the devil will often come clothed in sheep's clothes, teaching what appears to be the gospel but with ulterior motives. Ananias and Saphira, in the book of Acts, came bearing gifts for the early church, but Peter could discern that their contribution was accompanied by deception and lies. This manifestation of the Spirit appears

to be the ability to see beyond the exterior to the spirit behind the outward show.

Finally, Paul speaks to the matter of various kinds of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. In the book of Acts, we see how the believers began to speak in the different languages of the people who gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. The people of that day heard the gospel preached in their language. On the other hand, Paul speaks of a manifestation of the Spirit where the mind of the individual speaking was unfruitful, and though they spoke words, they did not understand what they were saying unless someone interpreted these words for them (see [1 Corinthians 14:1-25](#)). The tongues Paul talks about here are words given by the Spirit of God. They may not even be understood by the individual speaking them, requiring interpretation. From the book

of Acts and the teaching of Paul in [1 Corinthians 14](#), we know these words are intended to build up the church when interpreted. They are also designed to build up the individual who speaks them. They may be spoken or sung. In the case of [Acts 2](#), they were words spoken and understood by the people of various languages, presenting the gospel of Christ to those who had never heard.

The interpretation of tongues is the ability to understand and proclaim the unfamiliar words given by the Spirit of God to an individual for the good of the body. In [1 Corinthians 14](#), Paul likens the gift of tongues and its interpretation to prophecy. In other words, God speaks to the church through an unfamiliar language. He then interprets that language to another person who communicates its meaning to the church for their good.

Verse 11

Notice what Paul tells the Corinthians about the manifestations of the Spirit he has just listed.

These spiritual gifts are empowered by "*one and the same Spirit.*" Observe two details here.

First, these gifts are empowered by the Spirit. What Paul speaks about here is a work of the Holy Spirit of God in the individual's life. While we can grow in our ability to be instruments of the Spirit, the source of these gifts is not of human origin. When we see fruit in the exercise of these spiritual gifts, the glory must go to the Spirit of Christ, who is the empowerment behind them.

Second, the apostle tells us that the empowerment for all these gifts is "*by one and the same Spirit.*" The point Paul seems to be making here was very important to the church in Corinth. He

reminded a church that struggled with division that each gift, though different, was for the common good. There was to be no competition here. The same Spirit gave each gift for the good of the body. Every gift had its role to play for the common good. No manifestation was more important than the other. Each of these spiritual gifts was to work together in harmony so that the kingdom of God could grow and have its impact.

Finally, notice that the Spirit who empowers “apportions to each one individually as he wills.” Again, there are two points we need to make here.

First, the Spirit “*apportions to each one.*” God has a purpose for each of His children. He gives a manifestation of the Spirit “to each one.” No one can say they are unimportant or do not have a role to play. God does not withhold gifts from anyone. The challenge is to be sensitive to the leading of His Spirit, for

He who gives the gifts will also provide the opportunity to use them.

Second, Paul tells us that the Spirit apportions to each one "individually." There is something very personal in the word "individually." He has a purpose for each of His children. He knows what He has for us and His purpose for our lives. He wants to use us individually. The gifts He gives are not generically dispersed but tailored to us personally. We have a vital role to play in the expansion of His kingdom.

Paul's last point is that these gifts are apportioned according to the will of the Spirit of God. As I consider my ministry and gifts from the Lord, I know one thing for sure. I would not have chosen the path the Lord has for me. The Lord has given gifts to me that are certainly not natural to me. I find myself in situations that are quite foreign to my personality. I am involved in ministries I would never have seen myself involved

in. What does this mean? It means that I must be willing to surrender to the Spirit of God and His will. I find great joy in this. I also know that if God chooses to use me in these ways, it is not because of my natural ability and strength but because He chooses to use and empower.

Verse 12

The use of spiritual gifts can be divisive in the church. Paul, however, reminded the Corinthians that the Spirit gave these gifts as He saw fit for the common good of the body. This seems to lead the apostle to discuss the unity that God intends for the church. He compares the church of God to a body with many members. Paul makes two points here.

First, the human body is comprised of many parts. These individual parts of the body are unique. The leg does not

look like the ear. The nose has no resemblance to the hand. Not only do each of these parts look different, but none have the same function. The stomach functions in one way and the heart another. If you were to look at each part individually, there would be no resemblance from one to another. Seen separately, you would not know that they had any connection with each other.

Second, while these parts look different and have unique functions, they are all part of a single body that cannot function without them. Each of these body parts forms a single, functioning unit. Individually, they depend on each other for the body to work as intended. The sum of all these individual parts makes up the human body as we know it.

The apostle's point is summed up in the words, "*So it is with Christ.*" In other words, the body of Christ, as illustrated

by the church, is comprised of many different people. God has gifted these individuals in different ways. They do not look the same, have the same ministry or even think the same. But each person makes up the church of Christ. Each individual is essential for the proper functioning of the Church as the body of Christ.

Verse 13

The apostle continues here to speak of the diversity of the body of Christ, the church. Notice that this body comprises Jews and Greeks, slaves and free. That is to say, we are from different nations and cultures. We are also diverse in terms of societal status. In Paul's day, free people and slaves worshipped together in the church as brothers and sisters. Paul says two things here about this cultural and societal diversity.

First, "*we were all baptized into one body.*" When individuals were baptized in the New Testament, they committed themselves to the truth and teaching of the individual in whose name they were baptized. The term seems to imply a work of God that drew these Corinthians into the family of God, of which their physical baptism was a symbol.

The apostle reminds the Corinthian church that though they were diverse in culture, status and gifting, they were all baptized into a single body through the work of Jesus Christ. There is only one door through which we all must pass. No one enters the family of God by any other means. This placed them all at the same level.

Not only were the Corinthians connected through their common baptism, but according to the apostle, they were all "*made to drink of one Spirit.*" The Spirit of God, who dwelt in

the free person, also lived in the slave. The same Spirit gave spiritual life to the Jew as He did to the Gentile. The same power and enabling was for all alike. The same fellowship was possible for all. God's Spirit made no distinction between rich and poor, slave and free, Jew or Gentile. The implication is that all had the same status with God. Any division they had in the Corinthian church was of human origin. It was not from God.

Verse 14

The human body could not function without its individual parts. Different as those parts may be, they are essential to the proper functioning of the body as a whole. So it is within the body of Christ. No one member is less important than the other. The health of each member is vital to the whole body's health. To minister to the least of all is to minister to the whole.

Verse 15

To demonstrate the importance of every church member, Paul uses an illustration of the hand and the foot speaking to each other. Imagine the foot saying: "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body." Have you ever felt yourself saying such things? Maybe you watched someone else in the church who has a wonderful ministry and thought that you were so inferior to that individual that you had no ministry at all. Maybe you feel that your gifts are so small compared to someone else's that you don't feel like you are needed.

Notice what Paul tells the Corinthians here: "*that would not make it any less a part of the body.*" The apostle tells the Corinthians that even if the foot felt so insecure in the body that it wondered if it were important at all, its doubt and questioning would not

diminish the reality that it is still a part of the body. We may feel insignificant, but that does not diminish the fact that you were placed in the body by a sovereign God, and you are as important as any other body member.

Verse 16

Paul repeats his illustration in verse 16 by using different body parts. This time, he speaks of the ear feeling insecure when it compared itself to the eye. Imagine the ear saying: "*Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body.*"

It is easy for us to see some gifts as being more important than others. We can feel insecure when we see someone with a very public ministry or one that seems to be bearing much fruit. I have seen, however, in my ministry that I could not accomplish what I do if it were not for the many

people who stood with me. Every individual who participates in my ministry shares with me in the reward. Can I take credit for what someone else has funded? Shall I lift myself above the one who prayed earnestly for blessing? Can I see myself as more important than those who give their time and energy to take my books to people in rural Kenya, Malawi, or Ethiopia? Will these individuals not share in the reward for a job well done? Will they not also reap the blessings of a fruitful harvest? God forbid that we should think that our role is any less important.

Verse 17

To illustrate the foolishness of lifting any one person or gift above another, Paul continues with his example of the human body. He asks the Corinthians to imagine the body as an eye and no other parts. The eye is sitting on a

table, seeing everything around it, but unable to move from that table, hear what people are saying, or even process what it sees without a brain. What good would that kind of body be?

He uses a second illustration here in the verse. This time, Paul asked the Corinthians to imagine the body as consisting of a single ear and nothing else. The ear sits on a table, listening to everything but unable to respond to the sound it hears. It has no sense of smell, no sight, no mobility and no way to process what it is hearing. Would such a body not be useless?

Paul's point seems to be that we need diversity in the church. Not everyone can be preachers, pastors or prophets. We also need prayer warriors, helpers and those with gifts of administration. If we are going to be what God calls us to be, we must embrace our differences.

Verse 18

God created our body with its parts, each designed for a reason. As each of these individual parts work together, they do so for the good of the whole. This is God's purpose. We need this diversity if we are to function efficiently.

Notice the phrase: "*God arranged the members of the body, each one of them, as he chose.*" Differences in personality and function are the purpose of God. Anyone who sings understands the difference between singing in unity and singing in harmony. When we sing in unity, we all sing the same notes. When we sing in harmony, we sing different notes, which blend to form a beautiful sound. We strive all too often for unity –everyone singing the same notes, doing the same thing with no variation. By embracing the differences God has placed in the body,

however, we experience a whole new level of sound. Each person expresses their devotion and love for God differently but blends in perfect harmony with brothers and sisters of common heart and purpose.

The differences we experience in the body of Christ are present because God has arranged it this way. It is by His design for the common good of the body and the glory of His name.

Verse 19

If the whole body consisted of only one part, how would that even merit being called a body? For example, if all there was to the body was a foot, could it be called a body? A body, by its very nature, requires more than one member working together in harmony with others.

Verse 20

A body consists of many different parts working together in harmony. This is how God designed a body to work. So it is in the church. Each body member plays an important role and has a specific function. If the body is to be healthy, each part must play its role.

Verse 21

Paul illustrates the importance of each body member by an imaginary conversation between the different body parts. He imagines the eye telling the hand that it did not need it and the head telling the feet it did not need them. As important as the eyes are, what happens if you remove a hand? The body can remain alive, but it certainly does not function as it was intended. It would be forever handicapped. The head is indeed vital to the functioning of the body. While the head may be truthfully declaring that it did not need the feet to survive,

the implication of losing one's feet is quite serious and will severely limit the body's capability.

What Paul is telling us is that while a body can function without a hand or feet, it will never work as it was intended. If the church is to accomplish what God intends, every part of that body must do its part.

Verse 22

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the importance of the body parts that seem to be weaker. He tells them that these parts are "indispensable."

We can indeed survive without certain body parts. But even those parts have a role to play for the good of the body. When any body part is unhealthy or removed, the whole body will suffer. We cannot function to our full capacity if even the smallest body part is sick.

God's intent is not that we merely survive but that we thrive as ministers of His kingdom. He has a passion for His church and wants to see it functioning as intended. I have a neighbour who has a classic muscle car he loves. He keeps it spotless. When even the slightest bit of dirt gets on that car, he washes it thoroughly. When even the smallest part of that vehicle is not functioning as intended, he will fix it. He wants that car to perform to the fullest of its capacity. Isn't God like this when it comes to His people? He wants us to be everything we were meant to be. He wants us to shine and perform to our maximum capacity. For that to take place, no member can be ignored. Even the smallest and seemingly most insignificant member must commit to its maximum efficiency.

Verse 23

Some parts of the body, according to Paul, are “less honourable” or “unpresentable” to others. What do we do with those body parts? We spend money on them to cover them up with clothes. In doing so, we treat them with greater modesty and respect.

If we treat our unpresentable body parts with dignity, modesty and respect, how much more should we treat those who work behind the scenes in the church? Do they not deserve even more honour for the role they play? Their gifts and roles may not be immediately visible to the other body members, but they function unnoticed by others for the good of the whole.

Verse 24

Some of our body parts are hidden from the public. These parts are covered up with fine clothing. Other parts need no such covering. The head,

though a vital part of the body, does not need to be covered or hidden from others.

Paul shows the Corinthians that those parts of the body that seem less significant are shown greater modesty and respect. These parts are protected and covered up with fancy clothes.

Those whose gifts are visible receive greater human praise. They are admired and honoured quite naturally. Those who work behind the scenes, unnoticed by others, however, are as vital to the kingdom's work as those whose gifts are visible. Just as we treat our hidden parts with dignity and respect, so we must never forget to honour those whose skills are used in secret. These individuals serve without human praise. They are, however, indispensable to the proper functioning of the body of Christ.

Verse 25

The apostle exhorts the Corinthians to honour those whose presence and gifting seem less significant than others so that there will be no division in the body of Christ. The more popular in the church are often cared for as they attract more attention. The less popular, however, deserve "the same care," for they are no less important. If each person is to receive the same care, the members of the body of Christ must be aware of those who need this attention. They also need to prioritize reaching out in genuine and sincere love to them in the name of Christ. No member is unimportant. Each body member must be cared for if the body is to be healthy and whole.

Verse 26

What happens when you hit your finger with a hammer or break your leg? This

injury has an impact on the body as a whole. The throbbing of that finger can sometimes be felt to the shoulder. The broken leg impacts what the whole body can do. One of the men in our church recently lost his wife to cancer. The church, as a whole, gathered around him and suffered with him in his grief. Another lady in our church shared one Sunday how the Lord gave her the ability to forgive another person who had hurt her many years ago. We rejoiced with her in this wonderful victory the Lord gave her. When the headache is relieved, the whole body relaxes and rejoices.

If we are honest with ourselves, our churches are not always at this place of genuine concern. We all too often have become accustomed to living with pain and mediocrity and hardly notice when things are not right. The healthy church, however, will not accept this mediocrity. It will strive for genuineness

and victory at all levels. It will grieve with others. It will rejoice without jealousy when any member prospers and is honoured. A healthy church is one where each member is deeply connected to the other. A church cannot survive if we value our independence more than each other, for we need each member to thrive.

Verse 27

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the point he is making in the illustration of the human body. He is not speaking about biology here but of the church of Jesus Christ. The Corinthians were members of the body of Christ. They belonged to Him and, as such, were functioning members of the church He had established. Each had a personal relationship with Christ and was part of His great purpose in their community and the world.

Verse 28

As members of the body of Christ, each person has a different function. God calls and appoints members of that body to different roles. Paul lists eight appointments in the church of Corinth:

1. Apostles
2. Prophets
3. Teachers
4. Miracle workers
5. Those with gifts of healing
6. Helpers
7. Administrators
8. Those with various kinds of tongues

The word appointed is *τίθημι* (*títhēmi*). It means to set or put into place. Paul tells the Corinthians that God made these appointments and placed each person in the role and function He intended for them. There are several implications to this truth.

First, if God puts each person into a position of responsibility by giving them a spiritual appointment, then the choice of what we want to do and our role in the church is not ours to make. I have met individuals who aspired to certain positions, but those positions were not God's appointment for them. To take what is not ours to take will only hinder the church's work.

Second, if God appoints, we must be willing to submit to that appointment. For many years, I resisted the idea of being a pastor. Only when I accepted my divine appointment could I truly experience the blessing of God. I needed to submit to a calling I did not want, but when I did, I found that my heart had changed, and I delighted in the appointment.

Finally, when we understand that God appoints and places individuals in our midst to accomplish His purpose, we will be more intentional in looking for

what God is doing and accepting it. The direction the church needs to take depends on the people God appoints to minister in that church. God often sends people to the church, but the church never recognizes that they have been sent for a reason. We can be so busy with our agenda and traditions that we fail to see what God wants to do. God appointed prophets to speak to Israel, but they often overlooked them or did not listen to what they said. A healthy church recognizes the appointments of God and opens their hearts to what He wants to do through them.

Verse 29

The apostle reminds the Corinthians that not everyone can have the same role in the church. Not everyone has been appointed by God to be an apostle. Only some are called and gifted by God to be prophets. Others

are to exercise the role of teacher. Still others have been specially gifted to work miracles. This is the intention of God for the body. Each person has their calling and role to play for the good of the whole. God determines that role. We must walk in obedience and faithfulness if the church is to grow and be what God intends.

The point Paul seems to be making here is that the church is made up of a diversity of gifts and functions. We must learn to be content with what God has given us to do. It serves no purpose to envy someone else's talent or calling. What is important is that we need to accept God's will for our lives and excel in that role by walking in harmony with those of different callings.

Verse 30

The apostle continues his thoughts from verse 29 here. He asks the church if everyone had gifts of healing, spoke with tongues or interpreted those tongues. The answer to these questions was quite simple. God gave gifts as He pleased. Some had a calling to heal the sick. This was their passion and role in the body. Others were given the ability to speak in tongues or interpret those tongues for the encouragement or strengthening of the church. This, ability, however, was not given to every believer.

While not everyone has the same gift or calling, believers must focus on what God has given them to do while fully appreciating the variety of gifts He has given to others in the body.

Verse 31

After speaking to the Corinthians about the various gifts in the body, the

apostle now challenges them to desire the higher gifts earnestly. The Greek word used here for “earnestly desire” is ζηλόω (zēlóō). The word is defined as zeal or to be zealous. In other words, the Corinthians were to be filled with a zealous passion for these higher gifts.

The word translated higher here is κρείσσων (kreissōn). It refers to something better, more useful or profitable.

While the various gifts God gave to the body were vital to its health, Paul challenges the Corinthians to seek after the most useful gifts. The thing about spiritual gifts is that they are given by God and are not natural to ourselves. This is what distinguishes them from natural talents and abilities.

I do not enjoy being in front of people, yet God has called me to teach the Word. I do this in writing, but I must

stand before people weekly and lead them into the truth of God's Word. For all my life, I have been shy. Yet when I am in a meeting, the Spirit of God pushes me to go from one person to another, praying, listening and encouraging them in their walk with God. These things take a physical and emotional toll on my body, and I often return home exhausted.

Why am I sharing these personal details? I do so because I realize that God has given me gifts that are unnatural to my personality. I don't have to be an outgoing person for God to use me. I don't have to be a naturally gifted speaker or writer for God to use my words.

What is the application of the understanding that spiritual gifts are from God and not natural to us? One implication is that we can ask for spiritual gifts when needed. Consider the words of Paul in [1 Corinthians 14:1](#):

1 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. – [1Co 14:1](#)

Paul tells the Corinthians that they were to “earnestly desire,” especially that they may prophesy.

Writing in [1 Corinthians 14:13](#), he says:

13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. – [1Co 14:13](#)

If someone has a gift of tongues, Paul tells them to pray that they would also have the ability to interpret what they speak.

Is it possible that God wants to give gifts to your church, and all that is required is for His people to ask? What are the “higher gifts” Paul refers to here? They are the gifts that are the most profitable for the church at any moment in time. Every gift is important,

but some are more required at times than others. All of this depends on the needs of the body at the moment.

Realizing the need of the church in any given time and place, where are those who submit themselves to God and ask that He would give it the gifts required for it to bring Him glory and honour? Where are those who will present themselves to God to be the instrument through which this takes place?

Paul concludes the chapter with the words: "*And I will show you a still more excellent way.*" In saying this, the apostle introduces the Corinthians to the subject of chapter 13, the way of love. Without this love, none of the gifts of God will have the desired impact. All the gifts Paul has spoken of here need to be saturated in love for them to be useful. He will explain this more fully in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 13

Verse 1

The apostle Paul has been speaking about the diversity of the body of Christ with all its gifts. The church of Corinth, however, had allowed these different gifts to divide them. Some sided with Paul, others with Peter or Apollos. Paul wanted to show the church that the differences in the body were essential for its health and productivity.

While accepting differences was important, Paul moved on to speak about the place of love in the body of Christ. Notice what he told the

Corinthians here. *1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. – 1Co 13:1*

Imagine an individual speaking in eloquent and flowing words before you. His phrases are beautiful and captivating. He paints a beautiful picture with His words that stir the heart and inspire great emotion. Among those who listen are people who know this speaker well. He is a man who shows no love or compassion in his relationship with those around him. In the audience are individuals who have been hurt by his words and actions. These individuals know the man behind these eloquent words. As they listen to the sounds that capture the hearts of those who do not know him, they hear something different. To them, his words are like a noisy gong and clanging cymbal that does not stop irritating the ears. All they hear is hypocrisy and

deceit. The flowing words do not hide his bitter and unloving character.

What Paul is telling the Corinthians here is that love is a vital ingredient in the use of any spiritual gift. When you stand up to speak on a Sunday morning, be sure that you love those to whom you speak. When you must correct a brother or sister in the Lord, be sure your heart is filled with compassion for them. Having stated this, we must now address the question: What is love? Paul will take the time in the remaining part of the chapter to answer that question.

Verse 2

Paul encouraged people to seek after the gift of prophecy:

1 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. – 1Co 14:1

As important as this gift of prophecy was to the church, the apostle tells the Corinthians that if those who had the gift did not have love, they were nothing. The idea seems to be that love was a necessary ingredient in the exercise of spiritual giftings. Without love, their prophetic words would be like a clanging cymbal, irritating the ears of the listener.

What Paul says about prophecy is true for other gifts in the body of Christ. Paul has several examples here in this verse.

The apostle speaks secondly about those who understand all mysteries and knowledge. These individuals have been given special spiritual insight into things hidden from others. The apostle John, for example, was given a glimpse into the future. He wrote about this in the book of Revelation.

The next God-given ability is that of faith. While faith is required of all believers, some have a greater measure imparted to them for the good of the body. These individuals can discern the purpose of God and step out in that purpose, knowing His provision and blessing. They can face tremendous obstacles with confidence in God and His intention. Paul describes the faith of these individuals as a faith that can remove mountains.

The ability to know the hidden things of God or the faith to remove mountains, according to Paul, means nothing if those who exercise them do not do so in love. Love is a necessary ingredient in the use of our spiritual gifts. Using these abilities without love brings no honour to the Giver of these gifts.

Verse 3

There are many things we can do in the service of the Lord God. I could give away everything I have and live a life of poverty. I could die a horrible death for someone else. What does this mean, however, if I do not do so from a heart of love?

Imagine a man so depressed that he determines his life is not worth living anymore. He gives everything he has to a poverty-stricken family he hardly knows and goes out and kills himself. He has no particular concern for the family to which he has given all he has. Nor does he have a specific interest in helping them. He wants to get rid of his belongings before he ends his life. Is his gift and act of loving concern or convenience?

Consider an individual giving to the church with the motive of being noticed or gaining some favour with God. This individual does not truly love God or even serve Him. The gift is given not

from a heart of love but rather for selfish motives. Does this lack of loving devotion to God and cheerful giving not depreciate the gift and render it meaningless to the Heavenly Father?

Verse 4

Having shown the Corinthians the importance of love, Paul now defines it. He says five things about love here in this verse.

First, love is patient. The word patient is translated from the Greek word μακροθυμέω (makrothuméō). The first part of the word comes from makrós, meaning long. The second part of the word comes from the Greek word thumós, which refers to wrath or anger. Together, these words imply an ability to endure for a long time under wrath or anger. In other words, the ability to endure through difficult and trying circumstances.

According to Paul, love will persevere when things get difficult. It will love when others do not love them. It will not give up on the object of its affection, no matter the cost.

Second, love is kind. The word χρηστεύομαι (chrēsteúomai) comes from the word chrēstós meaning useful. The word carries the sense of being useful or helpful to someone else. Love wants to be supportive of the object of its affection.

Third, love does not envy. The word ζηλόω (zēlóō) means to have zeal or to be zealous. Zeal can have both a positive and negative connotation. For example, I may be extremely zealous to have something that belongs to someone else. I may resent what they have because I have an ungodly passion and zealousness to have this for myself. Envy cannot rejoice with the blessing of another because it wants that blessing for itself. If I love

someone, however, I want to see them blessed. I will rejoice when they are honoured or experience the blessing of the Lord, even when I do not. I will sacrifice my desires for them.

Fourth, love does not boast. To boast is to lift one's abilities or possessions above someone else's. In doing so, the one who boasts sees themselves as more gifted or better than the other. This is not the way of true love. The focus of love is on the object it desires and not on itself. True love lifts the one it loves and values that person more than himself. It does not belittle or devalue but builds up and supports the object of its affection.

Fifth, love is not arrogant. The word used here is φυσιόω (phusióō). It comes from φυσιόō, meaning to blow or to inflate. Those who are arrogant puff themselves up to look bigger than they are. They are concerned about what others think of them and want to

impress people with their abilities or possessions. They find it hard to be genuine or to admit that they are not perfect. There is an element of hypocrisy in these individuals. They despise criticism and often are unwilling to change or admit wrongdoing. Arrogance and pride are not the way of love. Love is willing to accept wrongs and change its practices. It will listen to correction to make the changes necessary to become a better person for the good of the body of Christ.

Verse 5

Continuing from the five qualities of love in verse 5, Paul tells us sixthly that love is not rude.

The word translated, rude is ἀσχημονέω (aschēmonéō), which comes from the word *aschēmōn*, meaning indecent. To be rude is to behave in an inappropriate, unsuitable

or disrespectful manner. The one who loves treats the object of their love with respect and dignity.

Seventh, love does not insist on its own way. It does not put its own needs ahead of others but will willingly suffer loss for the one it loves. It will seek the good of the object of its affection at the cost of its own benefit.

Eighth, love is not irritable. The word irritable is παροξύνω (paroxúnō). *Paroxunō* comes from the word παρά, meaning, at the point of or movement toward. The second half of the word is oxúnō, meaning to incite or irritate. The word παροξύνω (paroxúnō) speaks of bringing a person to the point of irritation. It is to provoke a person to anger or drive them to frustration. True love will not actively seek to provoke the object of its devotion to anger. It will seek peace and greater harmony. While it must deal with the issues between it and the full expression of

love, it will not constantly seek to anger or frustrate the one it loves. It will seek instead to please and accommodate even if it means sacrifice.

Ninth, love is not resentful. The King James version of the Bible translates this phrase: "thinks no evil." The words translated here as resentful in the English Standard Version are λογίζομαι (logízomai) and κακὸς (kakós). The first word λογίζομαι (logízomai), comes from the word *lógos*, which refers to reason or a word. The second Greek word is κακὸς (*kakós*), meaning worthless, evil or wicked. The literal translation of these words would be to have evil or wicked reasoning or thoughts about another person. Once again, this is not the way of love. Love will address those sinful thoughts and correct them. Where there is wrongdoing, it will forgive. It will not continue in a resentful attitude toward a brother or sister.

Verse 6

The tenth quality of love, according to Paul, is that it does not rejoice at wrongdoing. The word translated as “wrongdoing” is ἀδικία (adikía). Adikía speaks of any form of injustice done to another. Justice is measured by the Word of God and His purpose for our relationships. To know if you are treating a person unjustly, ask yourself if you are walking in tune with God’s purpose as recorded in His Word.

Paul tells us that love does not rejoice in wrongdoing. The word “rejoice” is important here. The word rejoice comes from the Greek word χαίρω (chaírō). Chaírō refers to gladness and rejoicing. What Paul seems to be telling us here is that when we love someone, we find no delight in hurting, insulting, or mistreating them. Nor do we find inner satisfaction or pleasure when others mock or make life difficult for

them. There is no desire in love to get even.

The eleventh quality of love is a rejoicing in truth. The word used for truth here is ἀλήθεια (alētheia). This word refers to something that is what it says it is. Something is true when it is genuine and without deceit or hypocrisy. There is no pretense in love. You don't have to pretend to be someone else to be loved, for love accepts you as you are with all your blemishes and faults. True love comes from the heart and is a genuine expression of our whole being. It is easy to say you love someone or act lovingly but not truly love. True love is real and without deceit. There is no hypocrisy in love.

Verse 7

We discover the next four qualities of love here in verse 7. According to the

apostle, the twelfth quality of love is that it bears all things. The word used here is στέγω (stégō). It means to cover or conceal. Love recognizes the imperfections in the one it loves but chooses to cover them and refuses to allow these flaws to diminish its devotion.

The thirteenth quality of love is that it believes all things. The word believe, is πιστεύω (pisteúō). Pisteúō comes from πίστις, meaning faith. It carries the sense of trusting or having faith in the object of its devotion. True love flourishes in the context of trust and faith. For love to grow, it must do so in the context of mutual trust and faith.

The fourteenth quality of love is that it hopes all things. The word ἐλπίζω (elpízō) speaks of an expectant desire. There is an expectation in Biblical hope. It is not just a wish, but a confidence. We place our hope in Christ. This hope is an assurance that He is everything

He told us He is and will do what He told us He will do. We commit ourselves to Christ, knowing that He will not disappoint. Love commits itself to the object of its desire in a similar way. It takes a step of faith, trusting its life into the hands of another, expecting that they will be true to their word and faithful to the end.

The fifteenth quality of love is found in its endurance. True love “endures all things,” according to Paul. The word ὑπομένω (hupoménō) means to remain under or to persevere. Imagine an individual carrying a heavy weight. This person bears the burden of this load from its origin to its destination without giving up. Love will face many obstacles. It chooses, however, to persevere, bearing this load to the end. It will not give up on the one it loves despite the difficulties and trials. It will endure to the end.

Verse 8

The final quality of love, according to the apostle Paul, is that it will never end. Paul has been teaching the Corinthians about the importance of spiritual gifts and the exercising of those gifts in love. He moves on here to remind the believers that the day will come when the spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will no longer be needed. When we can speak with Jesus face to face, why would we need someone with the gift of speaking on His behalf? When we see things firsthand, why would we need someone to teach us? Will we need gifts of compassion when there are no needs? In a place without sickness or death, there will no longer be a need for gifts of healing.

While spiritual gifts will no longer be needed in the heavenly kingdom, love will remain. True and unadulterated

love will fill our hearts in the eternal kingdom. Love will never end. It will fill our hearts through all eternity. Paul makes this point to show the Corinthians how important it is to have and develop this quality of love.

Verse 9

The gift of prophecy was important to Paul, as were the gifts of tongues and knowledge (see verse 8). They were important because right now, we only see in part. We don't see the full picture and need these gifts to guide us. These gifts, as important as they are, however, are at best only a partial revelation of the purpose and plan of God. We cannot prophesy in full. We can only reveal glimpses of God's heart and plan for humanity. However gifted we might be, not one of us can know God's fullness and eternal purpose.

Verse 10

Paul reminded the Corinthians that, at present, we can only prophesy in part. We do not have a sense of the fullness of God, and there is much that continues to be a great mystery to us. There is, however, a day coming when perfection will be manifested. Sin, Satan and death will be defeated on that day. We will stand in the presence of Christ in a world untainted by sin, suffering or death. We will pass from the partial to the perfect. Everything will then be revealed. We will know Christ and see Him.

Verse 11

The apostle has been comparing what we know now about Christ to what it will be like when He returns. He uses an illustration of a child here in verse 11.

Paul told the Corinthians that when he was a child, he thought and reasoned

like a child. The child cannot understand difficult concepts or even accomplish complex tasks. This is what we are like here on this earth. We cannot understand the purpose of God and His ways. They are so far beyond us that we cannot comprehend what He does or has in store for us. Imagine entrusting a two-year-old child with the position of CEO of a large corporation. Some things are beyond the ability of a child to grasp. So it is with us. We cannot possibly comprehend the mind and purpose of God.

Paul goes on, however, to tell us that he grew up and became an adult man. As a man, he gave up his childish ways and thoughts. He no longer reasoned like a child. He began to understand what he could not know as a child. He took on tasks that no child was capable of handling.

Paul's point seems to be that though we are now children in the faith, the

day is coming when we will put aside that childhood, with all its limitations. We will enter the very presence of Christ and see what was impossible with our childish eyes. We will be matured in our faith and understanding and given a new body to experience what we could never in our immature earthly bodies.

Verse 12

Imagine looking into a poor-quality mirror. What do you see looking back at you? You see your reflection. That reflection, however, is merely an image of you as a person. It has no life in itself. You can't hold a conversation with that reflection. It has no life in itself. Imagine an individual sitting at a table with a mirror, trying to converse with the image being reflected back. What kind of relationship can you have with a poorly reflected image?

Compare this to sitting at a table and having a “face-to-face” conversation with a good friend. The difference is immense. We can interact with a friend, glean from their wisdom, and benefit from their insight and encouragement.

Paul seems to be using this illustration to show us the difference between what we have now and what we will have in the presence of Christ in heaven. As much as we know Christ and are blessed in our fellowship with Him, this cannot compare to being with him face to face. There in heaven we will know Him fully. We will experience the purpose of God as He intended. We will know Christ fully just as He has known us from eternity past.

Verse 13

Over the past few verses, Paul has spoken about “then” and “now.” He tells us that while the gifts of prophecy,

tongues and knowledge are in use now, the day will come when they will no longer be required. When the “perfect” came, then they would cease to exist. He speaks in verse 12 about looking now through a mirror, but then (when Jesus returns) we will see Him face to face. Also, in verse 12, the apostle tells us that now we only know in part, but then we will know fully.

Paul begins verse 13 with the words “so now.” He seems to speak here of the present day before the return of the Lord.

The apostle tells us that right now, faith, hope and love abide. The word translated, abide, is μένω (*ménō*). It means to remain, live, or be firm and steadfast. These three gifts of God rise above the other gifts He gives. The spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge should serve, encourage and strengthen our faith, hope and love. These three qualities are key to

our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. God has firmly established them in the church. They define what it means to be a believer with faith in God, hope in His promises and love for one another and our Creator.

Paul tells us that of all of these qualities, love is the greatest. What would our faith be if our Saviour did not love us? What hope would we have if our eternal expectation was not to be surrounded by His love for all eternity? What would the church of Jesus Christ be if it did not have love for one another? The love of God is our hope and confidence. Our faith is solidly anchored in the love that brought Him down from heaven to die for us.

CHAPTER 14

Verse 1

In chapter 13, the apostle had two important details to convey to the Corinthians. First, that love was the greatest of all gifts. Second, the gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge would one day cease.

It might be easy to gather from this that spiritual gifts were not important if we just loved one another. Paul addresses this matter here in chapter 14.

The day was coming when the gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge would no longer be needed, but that time was not yet. These New

Testament believers were to pursue love and earnestly desire spiritual gifts.

Observe first that the Corinthians were to pursue love. The word pursue comes from the Greek word διώκω (dióō), meaning to press hard after. The word seems to carry a sense of passion with it. It implies a pursuit with a zealousness to obtain. The apostle appears to be telling the Corinthians that they were to zealously seek after love as a quality to be obtained at all costs.

While the Corinthians were to be zealous for love, they were not to lose their passion for the spiritual gifts. Paul tells them they were to “earnestly desire” these God-given abilities. The word translated as “earnestly desire” is ζηλόω (zēlóō). Zēlóō means to be filled with zeal. Once again, there is passion in this word. Believers, according to Paul, need to be

passionate about the use of spiritual gifts in the church.

Notice, finally, that Paul tells the Corinthians that they should be particularly passionate about the spiritual gift of prophecy. Observe, however, that it was not just to hear or read prophecy that Paul encourages the believers to desire, but rather that they would themselves be able to prophesy — “that you may prophesy.” The gift of prophecy, according to Paul, was a very special gift given by God to the church. He will explain this more fully in the remainder of this chapter.

Verse 2

To explain why prophecy was so important, Paul compares it to the gift of tongues. Paul has three things to say about the gift of tongues here.

First, the one who speaks in a tongue does not talk to people but God. The

individual speaking in tongues is praying to God. The gift is not intended to communicate with brothers or sisters but to God alone.

Second, no one understands the person speaking in tongues. A person speaking in tongues speaks words that do not make sense to anyone hearing them.

Finally, the person who speaks in a tongue "*utters mysteries in the Spirit.*" It would be easy to assume that if the words spoken made no sense, they were useless. Paul tells the Corinthians, however, that these words were from the Spirit, for the person who uttered them did so "in the Spirit."

The apostle recognized the gift as being from the Lord. It was an ability to "utter mysteries in the Spirit" in words that were not understood by people hearing them. If no one understands these words, and they remain a mystery, then what is the use of such a

gift for the church? Paul has more to say about this later in the chapter.

Verse 3

Paul now moves on to speak about the gift of prophecy. Notice what Paul has to say about the gift here.

First, the person who prophesies, speaks to people. Unlike tongues, prophecy is directed to people.

Second, Paul tells us that the purpose of prophecy was to build up, encourage, and console the body of Christ. Let's examine these words individually.

First, the purpose of prophecy was to build up the body of Christ. The word used here is οἰκοδομή (oikodomē). It is used to describe constructing a building but can refer to advancing or maturing the body of Christ.

Second, prophecy was also for the encouragement of the church. The word used here is παράκλησις (paráklēsis). The term is derived from two others: pará, meaning to the side of, and kaléō, meaning to call. The sense of the word παράκλησις (paráklēsis) is to call someone to your side. The reason we call someone to our side is for support or encouragement. Prophecy is intended to encourage the people of God in their time of need.

Finally, prophecy was a means of consolation. The Greek word used here is παραμυθία (paramuthía). This is derived from the word mýthos, which refers to speech. The idea is to come alongside someone else to speak to them. In particular, to speak tenderly with kind and comforting words.

Understand here that prophecy, as a spiritual gift, refers to communicating the heart of God in a way that builds

up, encourages and comforts the body of Christ. The words spoken here are from God through his servants and speak directly to the moment's needs.

While the gift of tongues relates to speaking to God in a language unknown to the speaker, the gift of prophecy speaks directly to people and their circumstances. Of the two gifts, the gift of prophecy has a more direct impact on the body of Christ.

Verse 4

Paul tells the Corinthians that the one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself. This shows us that the gift of tongues does build up the body, but it does so by ministering only to the individual using the gift. This gift is quite personal and is primarily intended to be used between the individual and God alone.

Prophecy, however, is designed to build up the church as a whole. The words of a prophet are spoken to the body of Christ and, when received, bring comfort, strength and exhortation.

The apostle speaks in generalities here. Later in this chapter, he will describe how tongues can be used to edify the entire body of Christ. Generally speaking, however, tongues are a private matter between an individual and God, while prophecy was intended for the larger body.

Verse 5

While tongues are a private matter between an individual and God, the gift should not be despised. Paul tells the Corinthians that he wanted them all to speak in tongues. Paul is not issuing a command here but expressing his desire. In other words, he is not commanding every believer to speak in

tongues but telling them that he valued the gift and wished every believer could experience it.

Having expressed his wish that every believer could speak in tongues, Paul tells the Corinthians that he wished even more that they could prophesy. According to the apostle, prophecy had greater value for the building up of the body than tongues.

Paul makes an exception to this statement in the words, "*unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.*" In other words, it was possible to interpret tongues. If someone could interpret the tongue spoken by an individual in a public setting, those words could also edify, comfort or build up the body of Christ just like prophecy.

Verse 6

The apostle illustrates why it was preferable for believers to prophesy in public rather than speak in tongues. He asks the believers to imagine him standing up in their church and talking to them in tongues. Of what benefit would this be to the believer who heard him speak? No one would understand what he was saying. If Paul wanted to minister to the people gathered in that meeting, he would have to talk in a language they understood. Notice that Paul lists four ways he could bring encouragement and blessing to the body of Christ by his words.

First, he could bring a revelation. The Greek word used here is ἀποκάλυψις (apokálupsis). The word speaks about an unveiling of something that is hidden. For example, the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation to unveil what was to come. Jesus also spoke of what would occur as His second coming

drew near. Revelation is an unveiling of the hidden things of God.

The second way the apostle could bless the church through his words was by imparting knowledge. The word γνώσις (gnōsis) means to know. The apostle speaks of bringing understanding to the minds of God's people here or opening their minds to grasp more fully the person and purpose of God as revealed in His Word.

The third way the apostle could bless and edify believers by his words was through prophecy. There is an element of foretelling future events in prophecy, but the prophet most often speaks the heart of God to His people for the moment. The Old Testament prophet, for example, warned the people about their sin and rebellion. They challenged them to walk in the purpose of God. God communicated his will through these prophets.

Finally, Paul could use his words to bring a teaching to the church. The term διδασχῇ (didachḗ) refers to the instruction given by one person to another. The individual teaching opens up the Word of God and explains it to make it understandable.

Verse 7

Paul illustrates his point about the difference between tongues and prophecy by using an illustration of a musical instrument. Suppose I picked up a harp as one who did not know how to play and began to pick at the strings. What would be the result? The notes that came from that instrument would make no sense. They would be off-key and discordant. I would not be able to play any melody that could be understood. If anything, the sounds coming from that beautiful instrument would be irritating. So it would be with the gift of tongues. The words would

make no sense. They would not benefit you and would very likely just be irritating.

Verse 8

When an army went out to war, they brought a bugle as a means of communicating the wishes of the commander. The soldiers understood each bugle call and knew what to do when they heard that particular sound. What would happen, however, if the army heard a bugle call, they did not understand? That call would make no sense to them. They would not know if they were to retreat or prepare for battle. It was of utmost importance that the bugle call made sense to the soldiers; otherwise, they would not know what to do. So it was with the gift of tongues. These words spoken in a tongue could be like an unfamiliar bugle call, only confusing the army.

Verse 9

Paul makes his point here. If you speak in words that are not understandable, no one will know what you are talking about. You will be “speaking into the air,” making no sense.

Paul is showing us that while the gift of tongues has its place, it is of little use in public, where the words spoken need to be understood if the body is to be edified.

Verse 10

There are many different languages in the world. I may go to a country where they speak a language different from my own. I may listen to the words spoken and not understand them. That, however, does not mean that the words are of no use. The people of that region understand what I cannot. The words make perfect sense to them. While I

may not know that language, it is useful for those who do.

Verse 11

I have had times in my missionary career when I have been in the presence of people who did not speak my language, nor I theirs. This was a very frustrating experience. We both wanted to get to know each other but could not communicate. We stood together, unable to talk or make sense of each other. Without the ability to communicate in words that made sense, we would remain strangers.

Verse 12

Paul recognized the eagerness of the church of Corinth for manifestations of the Spirit. The Corinthians did not lack a passion to know the work of God's Spirit among them. Paul encouraged

them in this but challenged them to *"excel in building up the church."*

There are many different motivations for desiring spiritual gifts. Not all of those motivations are godly. The apostle tells the Corinthians, however, that they should be motivated by a desire to build up the church. It is easy to want spiritual gifts for ourselves and our selfish ambitions. Paul tells us that we should desire these gifts for others.

Beyond this, understand that Paul has been comparing the gift of tongues with prophecy. He has told us that the gift of tongues does not have as much value for the public benefit. While, according to Paul, we should receive any gift the Lord gives, we should desire those gifts which will be of greatest value to the body of Christ where we worship.

Verse 13

Because spiritual gifts are for the good of the body, Paul challenges those who spoke in a tongue to pray that they would also be given the ability to interpret what they spoke. Let's consider what Paul is saying here.

The fact that the individual speaking the tongue needs to pray that "he may interpret" shows us that even the tongue-speaker does not understand what he is saying. He speaks fluently in a language he cannot understand.

The language spoken in a tongue, though not understood by the speaker, is not without meaning. These sounds can be interpreted, but the ability to interpret them is a gift from God.

Suppose the Lord grants the interpretation of a tongue, then those words can be both for public and private benefit. When interpreted, these tongues can be very similar to prophecy.

The fact that Paul tells those who speak in a tongue to pray for interpretation shows that God is willing to do this. It makes sense that those who speak what they do not understand ask God to explain it.

Verse 14

Paul adds another dimension to tongues here. While tongues, when interpreted, can edify the body of Christ, they can also be used in prayer. This is likely the most frequent usage of the gift.

Note that Paul tells us that if he prayed in a tongue, his spirit prayed, but his mind was unfruitful. The word for unfruitful is ἀκαρπός (ákarpos). It speaks of a plant that does not produce any fruit. Paul tells us that his spirit prayed to God, but his mind was disengaged. The words prayed were not the fruit of the human mind but

came directly from the spirit. The mind of the individual praying could not even understand what was being said.

Over the past years, I have come to a greater appreciation of what cannot be grasped by the human mind. We deal with a God who is bigger than our intellect and understanding. We do God great injustice when we reduce Him to what we can understand in our minds. His ways are beyond us. His person is beyond description. Just because we do not understand something does not make it any less real. Our mind is not the filter for all truth.

Verse 15

The apostle had just told the Corinthians that when he prayed in a tongue, his mind was unproductive. This brings up the question: If the mind is unproductive, should we bother to pray in tongues at all? What is the

purpose of praying when your mind is not engaged in that prayer? Paul asks the question: "What am I to do?"

He answers by telling the Corinthians that he would pray with his spirit, and he would pray with his mind, too. There are three ways we could understand what Paul is telling the Corinthians here.

First, some interpret what Paul says here to mean that all Christians should pray with understanding all the time. Paul tells the Corinthians that while he did not discourage praying in the Spirit, he also required the use of the mind to understand what they prayed. Those who see this interpretation would translate this phrase to say: "I will pray in the Spirit with my mind engaged to understand what I am praying." The problem with this is that this would require the gift of interpretation, which was not always available. Those who adhere to this position would,

therefore, require that unless the individual had an interpretation, they were not to pray.

This leads to the second position, which states that those who prayed in a tongue were to ask God for the ability to interpret what they prayed. This certainly agrees with what Paul said in verse 13:

13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. – [1Co 14:13](#)

God may or may not give the interpretation, but the individual should pray about this anyway.

It seems to me that the most likely interpretation here is that the apostle is telling the Corinthians that he would pray in his spirit in a language he did not understand, and he would also pray with his mind in words he did understand. He would pray both ways.

He would certainly ask God for an interpretation of what he prayed but would not allow the fact that he did not have an interpretation to hinder him from praying in his spirit in a private setting.

So far in this chapter, we have seen that tongues with an interpretation can be very much like a word of prophecy. Paul speaks here in this verse about praying in tongues. Notice next that he offers yet another use for the gift here. He told the Corinthians that he also sang praise in tongues. Those who sing in tongues express worship from their spirit to God. Tongues, in this sense, are a means of worshipping God from the spirit.

Paul tells the Corinthians that he worshipped God not only with his mind but also with his spirit. That is to say, his spirit expressed its delight in God through unintelligible words of praise. But it also worshipped with words

spoken with clear understanding and adoration.

Verse 16

The reason Paul did not always pray in tongues was because, if he did so in public, no one could say Amen to what he prayed. The word Amen in the Greek language means truth, trustworthy or "so be it." It is a statement of agreement. What Paul is saying here is this: How can anyone agree with your prayer if they don't understand it? For this reason, Paul chose to pray in public settings in words that those who heard could understand.

Verse 17

The individual who prayed in a tongue gave thanks to God. Paul does not question the validity of a prayer spoken in tongues. What he does

question is the way the gift was used. When a person prayed in tongues in public, it did not build up the body of Christ because they could not participate in a prayer that made no sense to them.

Paul shows us here that corporate worship should edify the whole body of Christ. If we gather in the same room and worship individually, the body is not edified. God has designed the church to need one another. Corporate worship is a time to focus on the whole body. It is a time when the church as a whole comes together and expresses its worship of God. It is the place where one believer builds up the other. Individualism does not have a place in public worship. When we gather as believers, we do so to build each other up in the Lord, not to be focused on ourselves.

Verse 18

While Paul discourages the use of tongues in public settings unless there is an interpreter, he still thanks God for the gift. He tells the Corinthians that he spoke in tongues more than any of them. It appears from this that Paul made frequent use of this gift in his personal life.

Verse 19

While Paul made frequent use of the gift of tongues in his private life, he tells the Corinthians that, in the church, he would rather speak five words with his mind than ten thousand in a tongue.

The reason for this is that those five words spoken with his mind in a language everyone could understand could instruct the body in the purpose of God. Nobody would understand the five thousand words spoken in a

tongue, and it would serve no useful purpose in edifying the church.

In verse 18, Paul told the Corinthians that he thanked God for the gift of tongues. He reminded them that the gift was a means of praying to God. It could also be used to worship God in song. The assumption here is that the individual with the gift was blessed in its use. As with all the gifts, tongues served a purpose. That purpose, however, was not so much in a public setting as for private and personal use.

Verse 20

There appears to be an issue with speaking in tongues in the church of Corinth. This may be the reason why the apostle takes so much time on this here in his epistle. He feels the need to instruct them in the proper use of the gift.

Notice how he challenges the members of the Corinthian church not to be children in their thinking. Children can think only of themselves and their desires and fight with brothers and sisters if they don't get their way. As children mature, they begin to understand that they need to learn how to work with others and respect their wishes as well. They start to realize that they cannot always have their way. Paul encourages the Corinthians to adopt a more mature view. They were to respect each other in the church and learn to minister to one another in the Lord.

Notice how Paul told the Corinthians that they were to be infants in evil. There is a certain innocence in a newborn infant. The immature mind of the child has not developed its ability to be jealous or lustful. It has not come to a place in its development where it plans to get even with someone who

has caused him harm. They have not learned to swear or curse the Lord God. The seeds of all these things are in the human heart, but it takes a certain time to reveal themselves. Paul appears to be telling the Corinthians that the one place they were to develop a certain immaturity was in the matter of sin and evil. They were never to allow these characteristics to mature in them.

In their way of thinking, however, Paul encouraged the believers in Corinth to be mature. They were to demonstrate their ability to care for each other, control their words, and take captive evil thoughts.

Verse 21

Paul has been teaching the believers of Corinth about the proper use of the gift of tongues. It appears that they were misusing the gift in their public worship service. He challenges them to grow up

and mature in its use and not be like infants seeking their own way and trying to impress each other with their abilities.

By way of warning, the apostle quotes from Isaiah in this verse. In [Isaiah 28:11](#), the prophet warned the people of his day that because they had not listened to the word of the Lord and continued in rebellion and evil, He would send people to them who spoke in a foreign tongue to conquer and oppress them because of their sin. The foreign tongues spoken here, though different from the gift of tongues, were still incomprehensible words spoken in the presence of rebellious people who refused to listen to God. They were words of judgment expressed by the foreigners who invaded the land of Israel. When Israel heard these words, they know that their judgement had come.

Verse 22

Verse 21 speaks of a people who spoke in foreign tongues, invading the land of a rebellious people. When these rebels heard these strange tongues, they knew that their judgement had come.

Paul goes on here to tell the Corinthians that the gift of tongues was, in this sense, a sign for unbelievers. The gift of tongues was a sign from God. The prophet Joel predicted that in the last days, the Lord would pour out His Spirit:

*28 "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.
29 Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. – [Joe 2:28-29](#)*

Signs would accompany the pouring out of God's Spirit in the last days. God would empower His people for the task before them. When the unbeliever saw this, they would know that the day of their judgment was drawing near. The gifts of tongues, like the presence of the strange languages of [Isaiah 28:11](#), were a warning to all who chose to rebel that the day of the Lord was approaching.

Prophecy, on the other hand, was a sign for believers. God sends His prophets to direct His people in the way they should go. They reveal to those who believe in the purpose and heart of God. They challenge and encourage them in the path they should take. They bring words of comfort and assurance to believers when they walk through deep valleys. As for unbelievers, they will refuse the prophets of God. They will continue in

their evil ways and resist the voice of God.

Verse 23

In verse 22, the apostle told the Corinthians that there was a sense in which tongues were a sign for unbelievers. At the same time, however, these same unbelievers would be confused by this sign. He illustrates this by asking the Corinthians to imagine outsiders and unbelievers coming to their church while they all spoke in tongues. What would their response be to what they heard? They would not understand what was being said and leave the church in confusion, believing its members to be fools. Their tongues would not bless, teach or communicate at all to these visitors.

Verse 24

While the gift of tongues would have no benefit for the outsider or unbeliever attending church, prophecy, on the other hand, could have a tremendous impact. If the outsider or unbeliever attended a church where all were prophesying, that individual would be convicted or called to account. These prophets spoke from God into their lives in a language the outsider could understand.

Paul is not trying to diminish the gift of tongues here; he is just showing the believers that each gift has its place. The gift of tongues was more useful in a private setting, whereas prophecy benefitted those who gathered in a public meeting.

Verse 25

Prophecy, according to Paul, revealed the secrets of the heart. Because God inspires the words of a prophet, they

can speak to the hidden issues of the heart that no one but God could know.

Unbelievers or outsiders, hearing these prophetic words, would recognize they were from God and be moved to fall on their faces in repentance and worship, recognizing His presence in their midst.

We understand from this that the prophetic gift, at least in part, exposes hidden secrets. This understanding is not natural to the prophet, but revealed by God for the benefit of the body of Christ or society in general.

Verse 26

Having shown the Corinthians the purpose and use of the gifts of tongues and prophecy, the apostle shows how these and other gifts could be used in the church worship service to benefit its members.

Paul begins with a list of five possible ministries that could take place in any given worship service.

The first opportunity was to sing a hymn. We see from this that the early church saw music as an important part of corporate worship. Notice here the phrase "*each one has a hymn.*" It appears from this that these hymns were not necessarily preselected but spontaneous expressions of praise.

The second item Paul lists here is "*a lesson.*" The Greek word used for lesson is διδασχῆ (didachḗ), which means to teach. In other words, the believers incorporated teaching the Word of God into their regular worship times.

Thirdly, the worship service might also include a revelation. The word revelation is the Greek word ἀποκάλυψις (apokálupsis). It refers to an unveiling or uncovering of

something that has been hidden. This appears to be prophetic in nature, as in the case of verse 25, where God spoke through a prophet to the secrets of the visitor's heart. It might also be something God had opened up for believers regarding their Christian life shared with others in the body. The early church incorporated a time to share and speak to each other in their worship service.

Fourthly and fifthly, the early church did provide time for speaking in tongues with an interpretation in their worship. While these tongues needed to be interpreted to benefit the church, they were permitted in corporate worship.

Worship in the early church provided time for God's people to speak to Him through their hymns and prayers, to speak to each other through a lesson or revelation and to allow God to talk to them through a prophetic word and tongues with interpretation. All of these

things were to be done to strengthen believers in their relationship with each other, with God and their society.

Verse 27

Paul lays out particularly how speaking in tongues was to work in a public meeting. He makes two points here.

First, in any given meeting, there were only to be two or three people permitted to speak publicly in a tongue. Paul talks here about the public use of the gift and not about the quiet prayer of an individual speaking between himself and God alone. While many may be speaking quietly with God in a tongue, only two or three were permitted to speak out loud to the church. This limitation allowed for more orderly worship and people with other gifts to share.

Paul's second regulation on the public use of tongues was that they were to

have an interpretation. Without this interpretation, there would be no benefit to the body of Christ. No one was to speak out loud in tongues in a public meeting without an interpretation so that all could understand.

Verse 28

When used in public, all tongues were to be interpreted. If no one could interpret, the speaker was to keep silent.

Notice that when there was no interpreter, Paul encouraged this individual to speak instead to himself and God. Paul does not forbid speaking tongues quietly between an individual and God in a public worship service. His prohibition relates to speaking in tongues out loud to the church when there is no one to interpret for the benefit of the body.

Verse 29

The apostle moves now to speak about the use of prophecy in the church. As with tongues, the number of prophets to speak in any given worship service was limited to two or three. This allowed for the use of other gifts and maintained a certain control of what was taking place in the meeting.

Notice that when the prophet spoke, others were to weigh what he said. The idea is that the prophecy was to be confirmed by others. These individuals were to examine his words and verify they were from the Lord. This created a sense of accountability between prophets and church members and assured that the word was from God.

Verse 30

When a prophet spoke in a public meeting, his words were to be weighed to confirm their authenticity. This

provided a safeguard for the church against false prophets.

In this verse, Paul puts another safeguard in place. He tells the Corinthians that if a prophet was speaking and another prophet sitting in that meeting had a revelation, the first was to be silent and let him speak. There may be several reasons behind this.

First, it could be that the Lord could give clarity or confirmation through another prophet. This second prophet may shed further light on the subject being proclaimed.

Second, it may also be possible that the second prophet may reveal that the first was not speaking the truth. By demanding that the first prophet be silent, Paul reduced the possibility of false prophecy spreading in the church.

Finally, another possible reason for asking the first prophet to be silent may

be so that one person did not take up all the time and not give anyone else an opportunity to speak.

While prophecy was incorporated into the worship service, Paul knew that not every person who claimed to speak from God was genuine. For this reason, safeguards were put in place to confirm that what was said was from God.

Verse 31

In the last verse, Paul encouraged the use of prophecy in church but placed some safeguards on it to ensure it was from the Lord. In verse 31, he requires a certain discipline in the use of prophecy in church. Prophets who had a word were free to share it, but they were to do so "one by one." That is to say, they were not to be speaking all at once. When a prophet spoke, everyone was to listen and learn what God had to say to them. When that prophet

finished speaking, another would have their turn. If all spoke at once, there would be such confusion that the body could not be encouraged. The fact that Paul has to mention this may show us what was happening in the Corinthian church and the chaos that may have existed in their worship services.

Verse 32

Paul tells the Corinthians here that the spirits of the prophets were subject to prophets. The term “spirits” in the Greek language is πνεῦμα (pneúma). It means breath but, by extension, refers to the spirit or life of an individual. It is the part of us that can live independently of our physical body and will go to be with the Lord upon death. It can reason and think and direct the physical body in what it does.

When prophets spoke, God communicated with their spirits, and

they relayed what He was saying to those who would listen. The prophet's spirit, then, is that part of them that received the word from God.

Paul goes on to say that the spirit of each prophet was to be in submission. There are two ways we can understand this.

First, each prophet was to be in control of his spirit and the word that God gave to that spirit. In other words, he was to seek the Lord about when and where he was to share the message received. In the case of the church of Corinth, that time was not when another prophet was speaking. Instead, the prophet was to wait for the appropriate time to share what God had given.

It may have been that prophets in Corinth were not exercising control of their gift or seeking God's timing and use of the gift. Instead, they were all speaking at once. The prophet was to

control himself and speak the words given at the appropriate time and place.

The second possible interpretation of this verse could be that prophets were to be in submission to each other. For example, when one prophet spoke, others examined his words to confirm they were from the Lord.

Verse 33

The exercise of control in the use of prophecy was important because, according to Paul, God is not a God of confusion but of peace. Imagine what a church service would be like if everyone who felt they had received a word from the Lord suddenly began speaking. Someone else may be talking, but another starts speaking over the first. A third begins to prophesy over them both. The result is chaos, and the church is not edified because those

present cannot understand what one person is saying over another. This, according to Paul, was not from God. Prophets and tongue speakers needed to exercise control and respect each other in the worship service. They were to wait their turn to speak so that each person had the undivided attention of the church members. Because God is a God of peace, this should be reflected in church worship.

Verse 34

Paul moves now to speak about women in the church worship service. He tells the Corinthians that women were to "*keep silent in the churches.*" They were not permitted to "*speak*" but to "*be in submission.*"

First, Paul tells the Corinthians that women were to "*keep silent in the churches.*" We need to understand this silence in the context of the rest of

Paul's teaching. Consider, for example, his words in [1 Corinthians 11:5](#):

5 but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. – [1Co 11:5](#)

Paul does not object to women praying or prophesying in public as long as they wore a symbol of submission on their heads. We also have examples in the Old Testament of women singing in public. It appears that praying, prophesying and singing were all permitted for a woman in a public worship service.

We must ask, what is this silence Paul speaks about here? He may answer this, in part, when he writes to Timothy in [1 Timothy 2:11-12](#):

11 Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. – 1Ti 2:11-12

Writing to Timothy, the apostle tells him that this quietness was to be demonstrated by not teaching or exercising authority over a man. Paul seems to be conveying this idea in verse 34 when he says that women were "*not permitted to speak, but should be in submission.*" Paul addresses here a form of speaking that takes a position of authority. From what he tells Timothy, this refers to the public teaching of God's Word in a worship service. This role was reserved for the godly men God had chosen to be leaders.

Verse 35

According to Paul, women were prohibited from teaching in the worship service. A quick examination of the New Testament shows that these teaching sessions could be quite interactive. For example, when Jesus taught in the temple, people would publicly question what He said:

23 And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" – [Mt 21:23](#)

We see a similar thing in [John 7:14-16](#):

14 About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. 15 The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" 16 So

Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. – [Jn 7:14-16](#)

In both of these passages, we see the exchange of questions and answers as the leaders of that day challenge Jesus and the source of His authority to teach.

Paul did not want women involved in this type of public questioning. Instead, they were to wait until they were home with their husbands and discuss these matters with them. This way, they would not be perceived as publicly questioning the authority of the men God had put in place to teach and instruct in the word.

Verse 36

Paul has been speaking about the worship services in Corinth. Here, in this chapter, he calls the church to

establish order in what may have been a somewhat chaotic worship service. The apostle calls them back to the teaching of Scripture about using their spiritual gifts and the roles God had established. He reminded them that they were not the authority on right or wrong. The truth did not originate with them, nor were they the only ones it had reached. God had a purpose for them and their worship. They were to walk in that purpose, as were all the other churches of God.

Verse 37

Prophets were not to think more highly of themselves than they ought. It would be easy for a prophet to believe that his word was from God and that it established a new order for the church. Paul reminds them, however, that what he wrote to them was a command from God. No prophecy that contradicted the established truth of God's Word could

be considered to be from God. The measure of true prophecy was in how it agreed with inspired Scripture.

Verse 38

In verse 37, Paul warned the Corinthian church about prophets who saw themselves as “spiritual” and believed they spoke from God. The apostle told the Corinthians, however, that what he wrote as an apostle was the command of the Lord. The word of a prophet, therefore, was to fall in line with the teaching of the apostles.

Paul takes this teaching a step further here when he tells prophets that if they did not recognize this teaching, they should not be recognized themselves. In other words, if a prophet believed that his word outweighed that of the Scriptures as given by the apostles, then the church should not consider that prophet to be from the Lord. All

prophecy must align itself with the truth of God's word, as given by the apostles. If it does not, it is false and must be rejected.

Verse 39

Paul encourages believers to earnestly desire to prophesy. The prophet communicated the heart of God to His people. Prophetic words built up the church, exhorted believers when they wandered and encouraged brothers and sisters in their trials. It was a gift to be desired for the church's good.

Understand that while not all believers will have this ministry in the church, any believer can speak a word from the Lord in an hour of need. This seems to be what the apostle is asking the Corinthians to desire earnestly –to communicate the heart of God for the blessing or exhortation of the church.

Notice, secondly, in this verse, that Paul tells the Corinthians that they were not to forbid speaking in tongues. This is a clear command of Scripture through the apostle Paul. While this gift may not have the same impact in the church as the gifts of prophecy, in the wisdom of God, it too had a purpose and, as such, was not to be forbidden or ignored. Those who had this gift were to use it, as Paul outlined in this chapter, for the glory of God.

Verse 40

The apostle concludes the chapter with a challenge that everything was to be done decently and in order.

The word decently comes from the Greek word εὐσχημόνως (euschēmónōs), which speaks of something honourable or honest. The idea seems that everything was to be done with respect for God and His

people, integrity and sincerity of heart. They were to shun anything ungodly that was not in line with the purpose of God for the good and harmony of the church.

Secondly, according to Paul, everything was to be done in order. The word order in the original language is τᾱξις (táxis), which speaks of the arrangement or regulation of objects. There were times when the worship in Corinth was quite chaotic. Paul addresses this when he tells the Corinthians that prophets or tongue-speakers were to speak one at a time and not all at once. The apostle encouraged respect and dignity in worship, where each person was allowed to share while others listened.

CHAPTER 15

Verse 1

As we come to chapter 15, Paul changes the subject. He begins here with a reminder of the gospel he preached to the Corinthians. Paul says two things about this gospel here.

First, the Corinthian church had received the gospel he preached. The word received is translated from the Greek word παραλαμβάνω (paralambánō), meaning to take to oneself, embrace or take possession of something. Paul tells us here that when the Corinthians heard the message of

the gospel, they accepted it and made it theirs.

Not only did the Corinthians embrace the gospel message, but, according to Paul, they stood in it. The word “stand” is the Greek word ἵστημι (hístēmi). The word speaks of something that is set in place. It seems to carry the idea of standing firmly in something and not falling away. The Corinthians not only received the gospel, but they also persevered in that truth despite opposition and trials.

Verse 2

The apostle tells us here that the Corinthians were being saved by the message of the gospel he had preached to them. Notice how Paul speaks of salvation here as not yet complete.

There is certainly a sense in which our salvation has been accomplished on the cross of Calvary, and forgiveness has

been applied to our lives once and for all. There is, however, another sense in which the outworking of that salvation is ongoing. We are daily overcoming sin and the flesh. We are still coming to know the Lord Jesus and His person. We are still experiencing victory and healing from the effects of sin. While we have legally been pardoned and set free from the penalty of sin, we are only now experiencing the results and impact of that salvation and forgiveness in our lives. This is an ongoing process.

Notice, however, that the experience of that salvation can be hindered. Paul challenged the Corinthians to hold fast to the word he preached to them lest they fall into error. Maybe you have met believers who have fallen into the temptations of this world and lived for years in worldly ways, not growing in the salvation that had been given them through Jesus Christ. These believers

remain babes in the faith, never maturing and enjoying the victory God wants to give.

What good is it to experience the salvation of God but never grow in that salvation and intimacy with God? What benefit is there in never tapping into the blessings and power of that salvation to overcome the flesh, the devil and the world? What kind of life would it be if we never grew in our knowledge of Christ or opened our hearts to the transforming and empowering work of His Spirit? Those who know the salvation of God must learn to walk in that salvation, maturing in the faith and knowledge of the Saviour. How vain is the life that experiences the redemption of Christ but never matures and experiences the fullness and blessing of this wonderful relationship with Him? Like a millionaire living in absolute poverty, so is the believer who never experiences the

ever growing fullness of His salvation in Christ.

Verse 3

What is the message of the gospel? Paul lays this out very clearly for the Corinthians in the next few verses. Notice what he says here.

First, Paul reminded the believers in Corinth that this message was not of human origin. What he delivered to them was what he had received from the Lord God Himself. The Corinthians could be convinced of the truth of this gospel because it was the very word and purpose of God revealed through His Son and faithfully communicated by His apostles.

What was the message communicated from God? It was that Christ Jesus died for our sins in fulfilment of the prophetic words of Scripture.

Verse 4

According to verse 3, Christ Jesus fulfilled the prophetic words of Scripture by dying on the cross. The gospel's message, however, is not just about the death of Jesus Christ but also about His resurrection. Paul tells us that Jesus was buried but rose from the dead on the third day. The resurrection proves His victory over sin and death. Sin and death could not hold Jesus. He broke free from their grip and rose to live forever. This resurrection of Jesus was in "accordance with the Scriptures," which predicted Messiah's victory. Because Jesus conquered these two great enemies, we have hope through Him.

Verse 5

While the Scriptures prophesied the victory of the Messiah, that victory was also testified to by Cephas (Peter) and

the other apostles. These men saw the risen Jesus and communicated with Him after His resurrection. They did not doubt what they saw and preached about the living Christ who died and rose again.

Verse 6

The apostles were not the only ones to see the risen Jesus Christ. According to Paul, He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time. It is uncertain when this event occurred, but remember that Jesus remained on the earth after His resurrection, speaking to many people.

Paul reminds the Corinthians here that many of the five hundred individuals who had seen the Lord after His resurrection were still alive at the time of his writing. Along with the apostles, these individuals were living

testimonies to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Verse 7

Paul goes on to tell the Corinthians that after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to James and again to the apostles (see verse 5). We are not told the occasion of this time with James. We do have, however, a record of the last time He appeared to the 12 disciples:

50 And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. 51 While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. –

[Lk 24:50-51](#)

Verse 8

Finally, Paul tells the Corinthians that Jesus appeared to him as one “untimely born.” Paul does not appear until after

Jesus has been raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. He had not seen Jesus while He was on this earth but had a revelation of Him on the road to Damascus (see [Acts 9](#)).

This revelation of the presence of Jesus Christ was so powerful for Paul that it changed his life completely. He had been a persecutor of the church, but after that encounter, he became its strongest supporter and defender.

Verse 9

Paul never forgot his past. He believed he was the least of all the apostles because he persecuted the church of Jesus Christ in those early days. Understand here that Paul knew complete forgiveness of his sin. His actions, however, had caused much pain for believers, and this was something he could not forget.

What is important to note here is that forgiveness does not mean forgetting. Paul regretted what he did before becoming a believer. He felt shame because of the people he had hurt in those early days. It grieved him that his heart could have been so hard and his mind so deceived. These were things Paul would recall until his dying day.

While the memory of these events was shameful to Paul, this did not diminish the power of Christ's forgiveness in his life. The Lord Jesus pardoned his sin. It would never be held against him. He would stand before God cleansed and forgiven of all his crimes against the church. The apostle would live in awe and amazement at the grace of a God who would accept him and call him into ministry. The power of that pardoning grace only seemed to motivate the apostle to greater love and devotion.

Verse 10

Notice how Paul speaks of the grace of God to forgive one who had persecuted the church. Paul has three things to say about this in this verse.

First, the apostle tells the Corinthians that it was by the grace of God that he was who he was. Paul knew the path he treaded as a Pharisee. He was on a path to doing much harm to the church of Jesus Christ. He was lost in his sin and deception, not knowing Jesus Christ or the way of salvation.

Ultimately, he was following a path that led to eternal separation from God. He had no intention of turning to Jesus and, if left to his own devices, would have continued in the path of rebellion against God, believing He was in the right. It was the wonderful grace of God alone that stopped him on that path and brought him into the experience of new life in Christ and the forgiveness of sin. Everything good he

had become was due to the undeserved grace of God in his life.

Second, the apostle tells the Corinthians that the grace of God in his life was not in vain. His heart had been so transformed by the forgiveness and new life in Christ that he could do nothing less than devote his entire life to His service. He would be the hardest working of all the apostles, motivated by the grace that saved him from a path of darkness and shame.

Finally, Paul assured his readers that this hard work and productivity, motivated by the grace of God, was also upheld and sustained by that same grace. The passion to serve and the energy and drive to move forward in service were driven by the wind of God's grace. The apostle attributes every good work to the grace of God in him. He understood that without that grace, his ministry would be fruitless. He owed every blessing to the God

whose grace sustained, directed and empowered the ministry to which he was called.

Verse 11

In verse 9, Paul speaks of himself as the least of all the apostles. But for the grace of God, he would have been on a very different path. He concludes this thought here in verse 11, however, by reminding the Corinthian church that whether it was these other apostles or him, they all preached and believed the same message. What was the message they all taught and believed? It is recorded for us in verses 3-5:

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5

*and that he appeared to Cephas,
then to the twelve. – 1Co 15:3-5*

The message preached and believed by the apostles was that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead in fulfilment of prophecy. All apostles agreed on these vital truths.

Verse 12

The concept of someone rising from the dead was difficult for the Corinthians to digest. Some refused to believe in a resurrection at all. This is evident in Paul's question: *"How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"*

Notice Paul's argument here. *"Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead."* The idea is that if Christ has been proclaimed to be raised from the

dead, how can anyone believe there is no such thing as a resurrection?

How had Christ been proclaimed as risen from the dead? Paul has just declared this in verses 5-8, where he lists over five hundred people who saw the risen Christ. The physical evidence and sheer number of witnesses should have removed any doubt from the minds of these Corinthians about the resurrection.

Verse 13

Having pointed out the evidence of the resurrection from a legal perspective in the last verse, Paul moves now to a more logical and theological argument to demonstrate its necessity.

The apostle begins here by telling the Corinthian church that if there is no such thing as a resurrection, then not even Christ was raised from the dead. The fact that so many witnesses

testified to the resurrection of Christ proves that there is such a thing as the resurrection of the dead.

Verse 14

The apostle goes on here to demonstrate to the Corinthians just how vital the doctrine of the resurrection was to their faith. If Christ was not raised from the dead, according to Paul, then what the apostles preached was in vain. The Christian faith is in vain.

Our faith hinges on the truth of the resurrection. What hope would we have if we lived our lives and died with no expectation of eternal life? What confidence could we have if Jesus, who proclaimed He was the resurrection and the life, knew there was no such thing as a resurrection? If there is no resurrection, of what benefit is heaven or even hell? Why would we suffer for

the cause of Christ if there was no eternal expectation? Why would Jesus die if there was no resurrection? What would be the benefit of the forgiveness of sin if we died after eighty or ninety years and there was no more? As Paul says, without resurrection, our hope and faith in Jesus Christ is in vain.

Verse 15

The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians that his whole ministry was solidly based on the premise that there was a resurrection. If there was no resurrection, he misrepresented God because he testified and taught that He raised Jesus, His Son, from the dead. If there was no resurrection, Paul suffered in vain. He was beaten for no reason and devoted his life to a hopeless cause.

Paul staked his life and ministry on this foundational truth. He was willing to

suffer for this doctrine. He preached it and lived in expectation that the day was coming when he would rise to be with His Saviour.

Verse 16

This verse is a repetition of what the apostle told the Corinthians in verse 13. The argument is this: If the dead are not raised, then it would follow that no one was or ever will be raised from the dead. For this argument to be true, no one ever, in the past or all of eternity future, could ever be raised. It is disproven when even one person defies it and is raised to life.

Those who do not believe in the resurrection are forced to deny that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The denial of the resurrection of Jesus leads them to question whether there is any real spiritual victory over sin and the grave or any hope of eternal life at all.

Verse 17

If there is no resurrection, then Christ Himself could not have been raised from the dead. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then our faith is in vain, and there is no forgiveness of sin.

Our forgiveness depends on the substitutional death of Jesus Christ in our place. More than this, however, it also depends on His resurrection. Imagine that the Lord Jesus died on the cross for our sins but was defeated by death so that He could no longer rise. What hope would we have? What hope of forgiveness would there be if He did not conquer sin and its curse? It is because Jesus conquered sin and death that we have hope of forgiveness and eternal life.

Verse 18

If Jesus has not conquered death and there is no resurrection, then according to Paul, our brothers and sisters who have gone on before us have perished and are no more. They lived their lives and died, and that is all there is. The hope they had of eternal life would be vain. Their relationship with God would be fleeting and of no eternal consequence.

Verse 19

Paul moves now to reaffirm the truth about Jesus Christ. He tells the Corinthians with absolute certainty that the Lord Jesus has been raised from the dead. In this great truth, we can have confidence. Our Lord has conquered sin and the grave and offers that same victory to all who will trust in Him.

According to the apostle, Jesus is the
"firstfruits of those who have fallen

asleep.” The firstfruits were the first part of the harvest dedicated to the Lord. These firstfruits were a sign of more fruit to come. Imagine the first tomato on the vine beginning to grow. That first fruit gives you hope that there is more to come. You wait with anticipation for the rest. In a similar sense, Jesus is the firstfruit of the resurrection. His victory over death shows us there is a flood of victories to follow. Death will no longer be able to hold us. The dam has burst, and resurrection power has been released.

Verse 20

Paul moves now to reaffirm the truth about Jesus Christ. He tells the Corinthians with absolute certainty that the Lord Jesus has been raised from the dead. In this great truth, we can have confidence. Our Lord has conquered sin and the grave and offers

that same victory to all who will trust in Him.

According to the apostle, Jesus is the "*firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*" The firstfruits were the first part of the harvest dedicated to the Lord. These firstfruits were a sign of more fruit to come. Imagine the first tomato on the vine beginning to grow. That first fruit gives you hope that there is more to come. You wait with anticipation for the rest. In a similar sense, Jesus is the firstfruit of the resurrection. His victory over death shows us there is a flood of victories to follow. Death will no longer be able to hold us. The dam has burst, and resurrection power has been released.

Verse 21

Death was the penalty for Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. It may seem unfair that the sin of one

man would have such an impact on this world. Death, both spiritual and physical was the result of the actions of that one man. His sin brought death. He opened the door, and death flooded in contaminating every human being ever born from that time forward.

Such was our state when the Lord Jesus came to this earth. Sin and death had overcome us. We had no hope. The problem was sin. The curse of sin was death. The Lord Jesus addressed the root issue of sin. He paid the penalty by dying in our place, satisfying the demands of justice. As a sinless sacrifice, death had no grip on Him. Having paid for our sin, He rose victoriously over death. His resurrection from the dead is our confidence. With sin's penalty paid, we now have hope over death. The resurrection is made possible by Christ's victory over sin.

Verse 22

In Adam, according to Paul, we all die. Adam is the father of the human race. We are all descendants of this one man. What Paul is telling us is that every person born in the human race is under the curse of death. Apart from the Lord Jesus, there is no exception to this.

The death He speaks about here is both physical and spiritual. In other words, our bodies will only last for so many years before stopping. This, however, is not the only effect of death. Remember that death is the result of sin in this world. Sin impacts not only our physical bodies but also our spirits. Sin brings separation between us and our Creator. Fellowship with God is broken, and we are under His wrath because of our condition. Paul is telling us that every descendant of Adam is under the curse of physical and spiritual death. There is no exception to this rule.

Having stated the problem, Paul now moves to the solution in the Lord Jesus Christ. While in Adam, all die, in Jesus Christ, they are all made alive. To be “in Christ” implies being covered by His work or being in a relationship with Him. What Paul tells the Corinthians here is that those who know the Lord Jesus have been set free from the curse of sin brought by Adam. His death paid the penalty. His resurrection broke the power of death.

This life Jesus offers is not just eternal life in a new body but also a relationship and intimacy with Him that was not possible in our sin and rebellion. The life of His Spirit comes to dwell in us, to empower and draw us into fellowship with Him. This is true life.

Verse 23

The resurrection will take place, according to Paul, in two stages.

First, there is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He died and overcame the power of death. Raising from the dead, He went to be with the Father.

Second, there will be the resurrection of those who belong to Christ. The apostle tells us that this resurrection will occur "*at His coming.*" That is to say, the resurrection has not yet taken place but will become a reality at His second coming.

Verse 24

The resurrection will, according to Paul, take place at the second coming of Jesus Christ. The apostle says three things about that day here in verse 24.

First, the second coming of Jesus and the resurrection will mark "*the end.*" That is to say, the end of the

world as we know it. The resurrection and second coming of Christ will issue in the eternal kingdom of God, where He will rule without opposition in a righteous and eternal kingdom.

Second, in those days, the Lord Jesus will “*deliver the kingdom to God the Father.*” Jesus was given the charge of establishing the kingdom of God. He laid down his life to bring pardon to its citizens. Like a conquering King, He defeats Satan, who opposes that kingdom. Through His Spirit in the hearts of every believer, He is purifying and preparing His bride for the Father. Day by day, the lost sheep are being added to the fold. The day is coming when all this will be completed. People from every nation and tribe throughout many generations will be then presented to the Father as a finished work — a pardoned and cleansed people to bring Him praise for all eternity.

Third, Paul tells us that the destruction of every rule, authority and power would also be completed on that day. Let's take a moment to examine these three words.

The word "*rule*" is the Greek word ἀρχή (arché). Translated, it means beginning or initial cause. There is a sense of priority or significance attached to this initial cause because of the role it has played. For example, the founder of a movement will be honoured for his or her efforts. Not all causes, however, are honourable. Some have set in motion horrible circumstances that have trapped followers in demonic strongholds. Satan, by tempting Eve, unleashed a tidal wave of sin and rebellion that would devastate the human race.

The Greek word used for authority is ἐξουσία (exousía). It is derived from the phrase éxesti, meaning permission, authority or power. The term refers to

the right to overcome obstacles to accomplish its objective. Understand that not all rights are well used. You may have the right to speak your mind, but doing so will not always be helpful to those who hear what you say. Your right may deeply hurt a brother or sister.

When Adam opened the door to sin and rebellion, he handed the right to Satan. Satan was given legal authority over us because of sin. That authority demanded payment of death. Until that payment was made, there would be no release from his grip.

The final word used here is δύνามις (dúnamis). It is translated by the English word power. The word refers to the exercise or manifestation of power and strength. More than having a right, this power demonstrates itself through action to accomplish its purpose. Imagine an army sweeping through a helpless nation, conquering

and looting everything in sight, while the enemy stands helplessly by, unable to respond.

According to Paul, at the second coming of Christ and the resurrection, all such rules, authorities and powers will be crushed and brought into absolute submission to the Father. There will be no opposition left to oppose the righteous government of God the Father.

Verse 25

On the day of resurrection at His second coming, Jesus will destroy all rule, authority and power that has lifted itself above His kingdom. Paul tells the Corinthians that Christ needed to reign over all His enemies in this final kingdom.

Understand here that the Lord Jesus has never stopped reigning. He has always been God and King and will

always be so. There has never been a time when He was not in control. Having said this, there have been many enemies to His reign. Sin, Satan and unbelievers have opposed that rule in this world and their lives. Paul tells the Corinthians here that the day will come when all opposition will be finally addressed. The reign of Christ will then be uncontested forever. All enemies will be placed under His feet, never again to rise.

Verse 26

According to the apostle, the last enemy to be destroyed is death. The day of resurrection will bring a final blow to the grave. Those who rise on that day will be no more under its power. They will live forever. The grave will, on that day, be stripped of its authority and rule.

Verse 27

Quoting from [Psalm 8:6](#), the apostle shows how God the Father placed all things in subjection to Christ, with one exception. That exception is the one *“who put all things in subjection under Him.”* This was the will and work of the Father. To Him alone would Christ submit.

Verse 28

It is the work of Christ to prepare a people for the Father. He laid down His life to purchase their forgiveness. He sent His Holy Spirit to mature and empower those for whom He purchased that forgiveness. Every opposition to the kingdom of the Father will be broken, and He will present this great congregation of saints to Him with great joy. On that day, Christ will kneel in submission to His Father, having completed the work given to Him.

What will be the result? Paul tells us that God will be all in all. The word "all" implies everything and everyone. In other words, God will be everything to everyone. The term "everything" means that there is nothing else. He will fill our every thought. He will be our every delight. No one will be excluded from this. From the least to the greatest, God will fill and satisfy.

Verse 29

Verse 29 begins with the word "otherwise." The implication is that this connects to what Paul said in the previous verses. He has been speaking about the reality and importance of the resurrection and our eternal hope in the presence of God.

Paul begins the verse with a perplexing question: "*What do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead?*" Paul speaks of a practice that

the Corinthians were somewhat familiar with here, but there is no further mention of this in Scripture, nor any indication that the early church had any such practice. This has led some commentators to infer that the apostle speaks about a tradition observed by some people but not condoned by the apostles or Scripture. If this is the case, then Paul is telling the Corinthians that even people who do not practice genuine Christian traditions believe in a resurrection and are baptized on behalf of those who had died in an attempt to assure their salvation.

Other commentators see here a reference to the symbolism of baptism. That is to say, baptism is a symbol of death and a willingness to die to ourselves and the world to follow after Christ. In this case, the dead being referred to here are believers who have died spiritually to themselves to follow Christ. The problem with this

interpretation seems to be in the use of the Greek word ὑπέρ (hupér), translated as "*on behalf of*" in this verse. It could also be translated by the words for, on behalf of, for the sake of, on account of, or on behalf of. The inference in this word is that the baptism is for someone else.

Paul seems to imply this in the second half of the verse when he asks a second question: "*If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?*" The context of these questions is the resurrection of the dead and eternal life in the presence of God. Paul's point is that there are people in the world who are being baptized for those who have died. They do this because they believe that there is something after death. They believe that this baptism will have some impact on the afterlife.

Paul is not teaching a new doctrine here. He is simply showing the

Corinthians that even those who do not practise the faith as the apostles taught, believe in a resurrection and a life after death.

Verse 30

Paul asks another question: "Why are we in danger every hour?" Remember that the question is in the context of a discussion on the resurrection of the dead.

Often, when Paul uses the word "we," he is referring to himself and the other apostles. If this is the case here, he is asking the Corinthians why, as apostles, they would put themselves in grave danger if there was no hope of resurrection. What would be the purpose of suffering to such an extent if there was no life after death?

The reason the apostles were willing to give up everything in this life was because they chose to live for the next.

The strength of their belief in the resurrection was demonstrated in this commitment.

Verse 31

It was because of his hope in the resurrection that the apostle Paul was willing to suffer and even die for the cause of Jesus Christ. Notice here that Paul told the Corinthians that he died every day.

The apostle begins this verse with the phrase: "I protest." The Greek word is νῆ (né). It is a legal term used in the swearing of an oath. By using this word, Paul shows the seriousness and absolute truth of what He was about to say.

An oath or legal statement was usually guaranteed by something of proven value that backed up what was said. Notice what that object of value was

here — *"by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Paul had been responsible for the planting of the church in Corinth. He loved these Corinthians and what Jesus Christ had done in them and was doing through them. He swears here by the preciousness of God's work in the lives of the Corinthian church.

Notice what Paul swears to the Corinthians here: "I die every day!" There are two senses in which the apostle died daily.

First, he was in constant fear of death. He was persecuted for preaching the gospel and had many enemies. He lived each day not knowing if this would be the day he would have to lay down his life for the Lord Jesus.

Second, Paul had to die to himself, his sins and his passions daily. He sought to crucify the flesh and live in the purpose of God. He considered himself

dead. He encouraged the Romans to put to death the “deeds of the body” to live in the life of the Spirit. In other words, they were to live as if they were already dead to the flesh:

13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. – [Ro 8:13-14](#)

He repeats this same thought in [Colossians 3](#) when he says:

3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. – [Col 3:3](#)

The believer, who understood the reality of the resurrection, was to live each day as if they were already dead to the flesh.

Verse 32

The apostle speaks of the daily suffering he had to endure for Christ. To what purpose would all of this be if there was no resurrection? He pictures himself sentenced to fight wild beasts in a Roman arena in Ephesus because of his faith in Christ. Why would he put himself through this if there was no hope after death? Would it not make more sense to eat and drink and take in all the pleasures and riches this life had to offer? If there was no tomorrow, would we not be foolish to choose suffering and the chance of being sentenced to a horrible death?

The point Paul is making is that he was willing even to fight with wild beasts in an Ephesian arena because he knew that the death of his physical body was not the end.

Verse 33

Paul has been speaking practically about the doctrine of the resurrection. He has just told the Corinthians that if there were no such thing as a resurrection, then it would be foolish for him to die a horrible death. It would be more profitable instead to eat and drink and enjoy the pleasures life had to offer.

There was a problem, however, even with this type of lifestyle. That problem was summarized in a common phrase of the day: "Bad company ruins good morals." In other words, living a life that eats, drinks and takes in life's pleasures is not good for society. It will corrupt the hearts and minds of those who fall prey to such a lifestyle. Those who live for themselves and their pleasures hurt others and ultimately hurt themselves. So even the motto, "eat and drink for tomorrow we die," will eventually lead to despair and the destruction of society.

Verse 34

The apostle has some strong words for the Corinthian church here. Notice first that he challenged them to wake from their "*drunken stupor*." It may be that some were getting caught up in a partying lifestyle. Paul challenges the church to examine their actions and to live in a way that brings glory to the Lord Jesus.

Second, Paul tells the Corinthians that waking from their "*drunken stupor*" was only right. In other words, the Lord God has a standard by which His people are to live. As followers of Jesus Christ, free from the law of the Old Testament, New Testament Christians still had a standard by which they were to live their lives. Being free from the law did not imply lawlessness.

The Corinthians were not to go on sinning. There was sin in the church and Corinthian society. Believers were

to take a stand against that sin. They were not to allow the world's influence into their church or personal lives.

Notice why Paul told the Corinthians to wake up and stop sinning: "*For some have no knowledge of God.*" The idea here seems to be that there was sin among them because there were people in the church who did not even know the Lord God. These individuals claimed to know the Lord and circulated among the believers, but they demonstrated that they did not truly know Him by how they lived. As a result, there was sin and confusion in the church.

Notice the final words of this verse: "*I say this to your shame.*" The church had not addressed the sin in their midst. They had not dealt with the unbelievers circulating among them, causing problems and destroying their testimony in the community. Paul feels ashamed that these matters were not

being addressed for the glory of God in Corinth.

Verse 35

The doctrine of the resurrection is not an easy one to understand. Even in Paul's day, believers struggled to grasp the nature of a resurrected body. What would it look like? What kind of body would a resurrected body be? What will we be able to do in a resurrected body?

Beyond this, there would be questions about how the dead would be raised. Would God take the decomposed remains of an earthly body and make another body from those remains?

The apostle knew that there would be many questions on this subject and took a moment in this section to address this matter.

Verse 36

The first issue Paul addresses here is the difference between the body sown in the ground and what would rise to be with the Father. He uses an illustration of a seed planted by a gardener.

What happens when a gardener plants a seed? That seed is placed in the ground and decomposes. Out of that decomposition, however, life is created. The seed dies and gives birth to a plant that produces fruit.

Every seed we plant in the ground is proof of resurrection. After the death of the seed, there is new life. Shall we see this demonstrated in everyday life and not believe it for ourselves? For that new life to be born, the seed must first die.

Verse 37

There is a difference between what we plant in the earth and what comes back

out. We sow a seed in the ground, but a plant grows up. The seed and the plant have very different properties.

The apostle shows the Corinthians that their questions about the resurrected body came from their limited earthly understanding. Imagine examining a seed and determining what you would expect to come up from the earth. If all you knew were the seed, you would never anticipate the plant that resulted from its death. You would look for something that looked like the seed to poke its head above the earth. How surprised you would be to discover something very different. Similarly, we cannot understand a resurrected body by comparing it to the dead remains planted in the ground.

Verse 38

God alone determines the body He will give to each kind of seed. The lettuce

will look very different from the tomato or the seed that will sprout and grow into a great tree. So it is with the human body sown into the ground. God has designed the resurrected body as he sees fit. There is an element of mystery here. The resurrection alone will reveal the truth.

Verse 39

Even on this earth, we understand that there are different kinds of bodies. Human beings are different from animals, birds or fish. Each body has its abilities and limitations. Paul points out that this physical body will also differ from the resurrected body we receive.

Verse 40

Paul is making the point that just as a seed differs from the fruit it produces, our heavenly bodies will differ from our earthly bodies. Both are glorious in

their way, but they are not the same. We will not take this earthly body to heaven. The body we will have in heaven will be as different as a seed is from the mature fruit.

Verse 41

The word glory is δόξα (dóxa). It could be translated as honour, splendour or majesty. Can we look at the sun and not see its majesty and splendour? The stars and the moon are glorious but in a different way. One star differs from another as we examine them in the night sky. Each heavenly body bears its particular radiance. So, we can anticipate that each resurrected body will reflect the glory of Christ differently. Each will be unique and individual.

Verse 42

The resurrected body, according to Paul, will differ from our earthly body in that what we will be given at the resurrection will be imperishable.

The body we now have has been affected by sin. Sin, like a ravaging disease, destroys these earthly frames in which we now live. They are prone to sickness and the effects of ageing. Each one of them will ultimately die and rot in the earth. This is not the case with our new resurrected bodies. Age, sickness and death will not affect them. They will never perish but live on for eternity.

Verse 43

Our earthly bodies will perish in dishonour. If you have ever watched a loved one age, it is not a pleasant experience. The curse of sin cripples and disables them. The ability to hear and see diminishes. Mental capacities

are weakened. Those who were once strong and capable are now weak and incapable of caring for themselves. They go to the grave humbled by age, sickness and death.

Paul tells the Corinthians, however, that what is sown in dishonour and weakness will rise in glory and power. What rises from that grave will be very different. This new body will be glorious. Never again will it suffer the humiliating effects of sin. It will be raised in power, strong, healthy and victorious over evil and death to live forever in the presence of its Creator.

Verse 44

Paul describes the body that we bury in the earth at death as a natural body made from the dust of the earth. This body is cursed by sin and its effects. When planted in the earth, it will decay and return to dust.

What arises from the earth on the day of resurrection, however, is a “spiritual body.” The word spiritual here is πνευματικός (pneumatikós). It is a body filled with the Spirit and no longer affected by sin and its effects. We should not see the word spiritual to mean our bodies will not be physical. The resurrection implies that we will have a new physical body, but that body will be spiritual. It will be free from sin and its curse and filled with the glory and Spirit of Christ.

Verse 45

Paul quotes here from [Genesis 2:7](#):

7 then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. – [Ge 2:7](#)

The Lord created man from the dust of the earth. Adam lay there, a lifeless form, until God breathed into him the "breath of life." We see here the power of the breath of God in Adam. That breath made him a living, moving and reasoning creature. It was the breath that sustained him all his life.

Paul moves now to speak of a "last Adam." Adam was the father of us all. It was through him that we are all descended. While the first Adam became a living being, this last Adam is a life-giving Spirit. Notice the difference between the first and the last Adam here.

The first Adam received life, but the last Adam gave life. The first Adam was entirely dependent on his Creator for every breath. He could not live without Him. The last Adam, however, is the source of life. Listen to how the Lord Jesus describes Himself in [John 14:6](#):

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. – [Jn 14:6](#)

Consider also the promise of Jesus in [John 3:16](#):

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. – [Jn 3:16](#)

The Lord Jesus came to this earth as the last Adam. He was born as a man and lived among us. He tells us, however, that He was life. He came to give eternal life. Through the forgiveness He offered on the cross, we can experience this new spiritual life.

Notice second that the first Adam was a living being. The last Adam is a giving spirit. Adam existed in absolute

dependence on His Creator for every breath. Sin, however, would strip that life from him. As a living being brought under the curse of sin, he would suffer and die.

The last Adam, however, was a giving spirit. As spirit, Jesus was more than just a man; He was a sinless man who lived in the fulness of the Spirit. He was also God. As God, He was a gracious and giving spirit who willingly laid down His life to bring pardon and reconciliation with the Father. He offers life to all who will come to Him.

Through Him alone is forgiveness and new life. This is something that first Adam could never provide. While we are descendants of this first Adam, the life he passed to us was tarnished by sin. The life we received from him would perish and be separated eternally from God. The last Adam, however, offers eternal life and forgiveness.

Verse 46

God created the natural and physical Adam first. As he lay there, a lifeless lump of clay, God breathed into Him. With that breath of God came life, reasoning, emotion and movement. The power of God was breathed into human form. Similarly, God will again breathe into the dust of our decayed bodies and bring new life and hope. We will always be of the earth. We will always be dependent on God. As dependent earthly creatures, we will marvel at the grace of God to give life. More than this, however, we will be forever grateful that He would not only give life but bless that life of dust with His presence and fellowship throughout all eternity. The spiritual is breathed into the natural and earthly. Jesus came to give life to mortal and sinful creatures. He came as the solution to the problem of sin and death.

Verse 47

Adam was from this earth. He was created from dust. Jesus, however, though born among us, was not created. He existed in eternity past with the Father in heaven.

Verse 48

Paul shows the Corinthians that there is a difference between Adam and Jesus. Adam was a man of dust. He was created from dust, and God breathed life into him. He would, however, suffer the effects of sin in that body of dust. He would become tired, sick, age and die. His body would return to the elements from which it came.

The new heavenly body, however, will not return to the dust. It is not an earthly body that it should be so affected by sin and death. It will be a heavenly body free from these enemies.

Verse 49

As human beings, we have born the image of the “man of dust.” That image is one of sin, shame and death. These bodies will return to the dust to decompose. They rise momentarily but return to their natural elements to be no more.

If this were all there was, life would be full of despair and hopelessness. Paul goes on, however, to tell the Corinthians that there is more to life than just bearing the image of the man of dust. We can also bear the image of the man of heaven. The Man of Heaven is Jesus. We who belong to Him can also be a reflection of His person. This is possible through the Spirit He places in us. The Holy Spirit is the image of God in us. He is the life of Christ in mortal flesh in every believer.

Just as God breathed physical life into Adam so that He became a living

creature, the Spirit of God breathes spiritual life into us so that we have the life of Christ in us. This life is not just a change of mind or actions but the very life-giving presence of God's Holy Spirit living in us. God is our life. His presence in us is true life. This is the image we will bear forever in His presence. This is the life we will take into eternity –the very life of Christ in us that will never leave.

Verse 50

Paul has been showing the Corinthians that there is a difference between the body we now inhabit and the resurrected body. He goes on here to tell them that this body of flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

The flesh in which we live has been affected by sin. It is part of this sin-cursed earth and will never enter the

kingdom of God. It is destined to die, and nothing can change that reality. My soul and spirit will certainly be with Christ, but my sin-cursed flesh and blood body will not enter His presence in the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 51

Paul's statement that flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of God in the last verse brings up an important question. What if I am still alive when the Lord comes and have not shed my mortal flesh and blood body? Can I enter the kingdom of heaven?

Paul confesses that the answer to this question was still a mystery. It was clear that those who died had shed their mortal bodies and were ready to enter the kingdom of God. Paul, however, did not know how those who still lived in their earthly body would shed them before entering the

Kingdom. While not everyone would die, the apostle was convinced every believer would be changed. That is to say, even those who were alive in their earthly body at the return of Christ would be given a new body just as those who had died.

Verse 52

The process of receiving a new body, while a mystery to the human mind, was not difficult for God. Paul describes the resurrection as an instantaneous process. The last trumpet will sound, and, in the twinkling of an eye, the dead will rise from their graves and be given a new and imperishable body.

Verse 53

The apostle reminds the Corinthians that we cannot take a perishable body to heaven. The body in which we now live must die. All who enter heaven will

be given a new and imperishable body. From verse 52, we understand that this body will be given at the sound of the trumpet on the last day. In other words, those who have gone before us still await that new imperishable body.

Verse 54

Paul quotes a “saying” here: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” The origin of this “saying” is somewhat unclear. Some feel it is a loose translation of a passage in [Isaiah 25:8](#), which reads:

8 He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. – [Isa 25:8](#)

What is clear is that Paul was telling the Corinthians that prophecy would be fulfilled on the day of resurrection.

Death, which has cursed our mortal bodies, will have no more power over our new bodies. We will put on imperishable and immortal bodies and live forever in the presence of our Lord.

Verse 55

Paul shows the Corinthians how prophecy revealed that death would be swallowed up in victory. He continues here with this same theme by quoting a portion of [Hosea 13:14](#):

14 I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol; I shall redeem them from Death. O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes. – [Ho 13:14](#)

This prophecy of Hosea would be fulfilled on the day of resurrection. Victory would be stripped from death. It would have no more sting, afflict no

more pain and have no more power over those who received their new resurrected body.

Verse 56

Hosea 13:14 prophesied that the sting of death would one day be removed. Any one who has experienced death of a loved one knows that sting. Paul dives deeper into this pain, however, and tells the Corinthians the true source of this “sting of death.” He has two points to make here.

First, the sting of death originates in sin. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they brought the curse of sin upon this world. That curse was death. From the moment sin entered the world everything began to die. Sickness, disease, and death were the fruit of sin on this earth and on our bodies. This sin separated us from God and His blessings.

Second, the apostle goes on to tell us that the power of sin is in the law. If there is no law, there can be no law breaking. We can do what we please with no legal consequences. Law, however, places us under obligation and punishes anyone who refuses to obey. The law of the Garden stated that Adam and Eve were not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The consequence of disobeying that law was death. That is exactly what happened when they disobeyed. Sin ravaged the earth and imprisoned it in death.

Verse 57

The sting of death is the fruit of sin on this earth. Every human being who was ever born to flesh and blood has been cursed with this death and separation from God. Paul reminds us, however, that there is victory. That victory comes through the Lord Jesus Christ, who

alone has conquered sin and overcome the power of death. He offers that victory to those who will receive Him and His efforts on their behalf.

Verse 58

Because there is a resurrection of the dead and victory over sin and its fruit of death through the Lord Jesus, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to be steadfast and immovable in their faith. Their faith in Jesus Christ would demand suffering and tribulation, but they were to be inspired by the truth of the resurrection of the dead. They were to be willing to shed their earthly body for the new and immortal body promised by Christ to all who belonged to Him. The Corinthians were to abound in the work of the Lord without giving up. They were to press on, knowing that because there was life after death in the presence of their

Saviour, their efforts would not be in vain.

The truth of the resurrection of the body gives us great hope in trouble and shows us that there is purpose in our efforts.

CHAPTER 16

Verse 1

In this final chapter, the apostle has some practical and personal matters to address. One of these issues relates to a “collection for the saints.” It was a practice of the early church to minister to one another through financial gifts. We see this, for example, in [Acts 11:29](#):

29 So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. – [Ac 11:29](#)

The apostle Paul commends the churches of Macedonia and Achaia for their contribution to the poor in Jerusalem:

26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. – [Ro 15:26](#)

It seems quite likely that this "collection for the saints" was to go to Jerusalem to minister to the needs of believers there. We see this in verse 3, where Paul writes:

3 And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. – [1Co 16:3](#)

Paul encourages the church in Corinth to be mindful of the needs of believers around them and to make it their practice to put aside money to minister

to their needs. According to the apostle, he had directed the churches of Galatia to do this regularly.

Verse 2

Paul instructed believers to put something aside on the first day of the week. These early Christians considered the first day of the week to be the Lord's day. It was the day He rose from the dead and was held to be holy. Evidence shows that these early believers met together for worship on that day:

7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. – [Ac 20:7](#)

It is quite likely that the apostle is telling believers to put this money aside

as part of their worship of the Lord on that first day.

Paul tells the Corinthians to put this money aside "*as he may prosper.*" There was no set amount required. The apostle tells them instead to give whatever they could afford or to give as the Lord prospered them.

That money was to be saved until the apostle came to visit. This way, it would be ready, and there would be no need for a special collection when he arrived. That money was to be available at a moment's notice.

Verse 3

When the apostle arrived to visit the Corinthians, he would send individuals to carry the money they saved to needy believers in Jerusalem. Notice two details here.

First, the money was to be saved until Paul arrived in Corinth. While it is uncertain why Paul required that they wait until he came before sending the money, it is clear that the matter was not taken lightly. Notice that Paul told the Corinthians he would send the carriers personally – “*I will send those whom you accredit.*” It was a serious matter to carry these funds to Jerusalem. There were dangers along the way, and it required individuals who could be trusted. Paul showed the church this was a serious spiritual ministry by sending these couriers himself.

Second, the funds saved up for those in need in Jerusalem were to be sent by individuals the Corinthians accredited by letter. While Paul would be present on that occasion, he would not choose the people to carry the money to Jerusalem. The church would look among themselves for those they could

trust to accomplish this purpose. The Corinthians were also to write a letter for these couriers. We are not told the letter's content but assume that it would explain the purpose of the funds and possibly the amount they were sending so that there would be no questioning the integrity of the couriers and the intent of the gift.

Verse 4

Paul offers to go to Jerusalem with the couriers carrying the gift from Corinth. Notice, however, that this was only if it seemed advisable. The apostle seems to leave this up to the church. If they felt it would be good for Paul to go with the couriers, he was willing to do so, but he seems to leave the decision up to them. The Corinthians would certainly be able to trust Paul, and his presence would ensure their gift arrived safely. His presence would also be a blessing to the people in Jerusalem as

he would be able to teach and minister spiritually to believers there as well.

Verse 5

Paul shares his travel plans here with the Corinthians. He planned on travelling through Macedonia, and he intended to visit the Corinthians at that time. Macedonia is located in the general region of present day Greece. Corinth would be located in the south.

Verse 6

While the apostle had not finalized his plans, he suggested that he might stay in Corinth for the winter.

Notice also that he tells the Corinthians they might be able to help him on his journey. The nature of this help is unclear. He may have needed supplies and finances. Paul was certainly dependent on the generosity of believers to assist Him in his travels.

Notice here that Paul was uncertain where he might go after being with the Corinthians. While He was ready to travel, all of this depended on the leading of the Lord. Paul has already suggested that the Corinthians might want him to go with their representatives, bringing money to the poor in Jerusalem (see verse 4).

The apostle had plans, but he was flexible. He considered staying with the Corinthians over the winter if that was how God directed him. He could go with the couriers to Jerusalem if that seemed advisable. He planned to move on somewhere after spending time with the Corinthians, but he did not know where the Lord would send him. Paul's travel plans were flexible and dependent on the Lord's direction.

Verse 7

While the apostle was flexible in his plans, he did have his preferences and burdens. He did not want to see the Corinthians "in passing," but desired to spend quality time with them. Notice, however, that he submits this desire to the Lord in the words: "If the Lord permits." The apostle did not push his way but sought the Lord's purpose in all he did. He surrendered his desires and passions and willingly submitted to the greater purpose of God.

Verse 8

We discover from verse 8 that Paul planned to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost. He tells us why he wanted to wait until then in verse 8.

Some commentators believe that the apostle wrote this letter of 1 Corinthians while he was in Ephesus.

Verse 9

The reason the apostle wanted to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost was because of the open door God had placed before him. He describes this door as a "*door for effective work.*" The Spirit of God was opening hearts to Paul's message. There was evidence of God's presence in what was taking place in Ephesus, and the apostle felt compelled to continue in the work God was doing there.

Note also that there were also many adversaries. This appears to be another reason Paul felt compelled to remain in Ephesus. God was doing a great work, but the enemy was active, seeking to destroy what God was doing. Paul did not feel he could leave these believers in the hands of the enemy. He needed to fight with them until their victory was secured.

Verse 10

Paul informed the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4:17 that he had sent Timothy to see them:

17 That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. – 1Co 4:17

He anticipated that this letter would arrive before Timothy, as he would likely be ministering on the way. He advised the Corinthians to welcome him and make him feel at ease among them because he was a true servant of God.

Verse 11

The apostle speaks of Timothy's arrival in Corinth and advises the church on how to treat him.

First, they were not to let anyone despise Timothy. The Greek word Paul

uses here is ἐξουθενέω (exouthenéo), which refers to treating someone with scorn or contempt. The Corinthians were not to look down on Timothy. He was Paul's representative, but more importantly, he was a faithful representative of God and His obedient servant.

Second, Paul advised the church to help Timothy on his way in peace. The help Paul expected would come from supplies and provisions to enable Timothy and his companions to return to him. Paul depended on the generosity of the Corinthians to supply what was needed for the next stage of Timothy's journey.

Notice that the Corinthians were to send Timothy on his way in peace. The word peace used here is εἰρήνη (eirēnē). It carries several meanings. It can refer to the absence of war or discord. In other words, the Corinthians were to send Timothy on his way

without any hostility toward him or bitterness of heart for being required to support him.

The word εἰρήνη (eirēnē) also carries with it a sense of prosperity and general well-being. In other words, the Corinthians were to care for Timothy and send him on his way prosperous, healthy and abundantly blessed.

Verse 12

Paul's concern for the Corinthians is evident in his desire to visit them personally and send Timothy to minister. Here, in this verse, we see how the apostle wanted Apollos to spend time with the Corinthians as well. Notice that Paul "strongly urged" him to visit the church.

While strongly urged by Paul to visit Corinth, Apollos was not ready to do so then. We are not told why he did not feel he could, but Apollos committed to

seeing them when he had an opportunity.

Even though he was strongly urged to visit Corinth by the apostle, Apollos was free to make up his mind. Paul does not force him to do so.

Verse 13

The apostle offers four challenges to the Corinthians in this verse.

First, he tells them to be watchful. The word is γρηγορέω (grēgoreúō), which means to arise from sleep or to refrain from sleep. It implies being alert to the dangers or tactics of the enemy and being active in one's effort to walk faithfully. The implication is that the Corinthians would have to diligently pursue their faith in Christ lest the enemy cause them to fall short of God's standard.

Second, the apostle challenges the Corinthians to stand firm in the faith. The word στήκω (stékō) implies steadfastness and perseverance. The idea is that there would be opposition to their faith in Jesus Christ, but they were to hold fast without wavering or falling.

Third, the Corinthians were to “act like men.” The word ἀνδρίζω (andρίζō) refers to a fully mature male or a husband. This means that they were to act as mature and responsible adults. Men were also culturally understood to be courageous. The implication is that the Corinthians were to stand courageously against the enemies of their faith.

Finally, the apostle tells the Corinthians that they were to be strong. The word κραταίωω (krataióō) refers to something strong or established. A great oak tree, for example, will withstand the wind and weather. Paul

challenges the Corinthians not to surrender but to stand strong against the foe. They were not to give up but hold fast in the strength of the Lord.

Verse 14

Love was to be the motivation in everything the Corinthians did. This love was not only for one another but also for God. Consider the words of Jesus in this regard from [Matthew 22](#):

37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." – [Mt 22:37-40](#)

According to Jesus, if you loved God with all your heart, soul and mind, and your neighbour as yourself, everything else would fall in place. Love was the foundation upon which obedience, fruitfulness and spiritual intimacy would grow and mature.

Verse 15

Paul speaks to the Corinthians about a particular family here. The household of Staphanas were the first converts to Christ in the province of Achaia, of which Corinth was the principal city. Paul mentioned them in [1 Corinthians 1:16](#) when he told the Corinthians that he had baptized them:

16 (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) – [1Co 1:16](#)

The apostle saw this family as one devoted to the service of the saints. They were proving themselves useful to believers in the region. We are not told what the nature of their ministry to these saints was, but it was significant in the eyes of the apostle Paul.

Verse 16

The apostle tells the Corinthians to “be subject” to people like the household of Stephanas, who had devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints. The word translated, “be subject to” is ὑποτάσσω (hupotássō), which means to place in order or to arrange oneself under another. When we put ourselves under another, we do so to serve or care for. We recognize the value of these individuals and do what we can to bless and support them.

Notice that Paul expected this attitude not to be only for the household of

Stephanas but for every kingdom worker and labourer. These men and women can minister because of the support and encouragement received by the people of God. They deserve respect and blessing from the church for the efforts they make on its behalf.

Verse 17

The reference to the household of Stephanas seems to be occasioned by a visit Paul received from him along with Fortunatus and Achaicus. We are not told the purpose of that visit, but it was certainly a subject of great rejoicing by the apostle Paul.

Some commentators believe that these men brought a letter to Paul with a series of questions from the church of Corinth (see [1 Corinthians 7:1](#)). They also believe that they may have returned with the letter of 1 Corinthians to the church in response. While there

is no clear evidence of this in Scripture, it is possible.

According to Paul, having these three men with him made him a little less lonely for the Corinthians.

Verse 18

Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus refreshed Paul's spirit. They encouraged him as they spent time with him, reaffirming their love and devotion to him as an apostle. Paul seemed to need this kind of encouragement. His was often a lonely job. He was repeatedly rejected and beaten for the message he preached. He was not married and so did not have the companionship of a wife. Such visits seemed to lift his spirit.

Paul understood that not only did these three men refresh his spirit, but they also ministered in Corinth as well. As

part of their regular ministry, they refreshed the spirits of the saints.

Notice that Paul told the Corinthians that they were to recognize individuals such as this. They played a vital role in the kingdom and deserved all the support and blessing the body of Christ could give them.

Verse 19

Paul sends greetings from the churches in the Roman province of Asia, of which Ephesus was the capital. Many believe that it was here in Ephesus that Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians.

Note that Aquila and Prisca offered their home for the church in that region to meet. Paul met this couple originally in Corinth:

1 After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of

Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them – [Ac 18:1-2](#)

Aquila and Prisca would certainly have been known in Corinth, for they had lived there before moving to Ephesus. The couple fondly remembered Corinth as they sent “hearty greetings” in the Lord.

Verse 20

Greetings were extended not only from Aquila and Prisca but all the brothers. The word translated as “brothers” is ἀδελφός (adelphós). It comes from the word delphús, meaning womb. The term speaks of two individuals who shared the same womb. By extension, it refers to people who share something in common. For example, a church fellowship is a group of believers who

share a common bond around the person of Jesus Christ. A family shares a common father and mother. In this sense, the word “brothers” is not exclusively male but refers to the body of Christ (both male and female). The brothers and sisters of Asia sent their greetings to the church of Corinth.

It was customary for individuals familiar with each other to greet with a kiss. It was a sign of affection and love between the church members. Paul encourages such an expression as a token of genuine and holy love.

Verse 21

Note that Paul tells the Corinthians here that he wrote this greeting with his own hand. Paul likely had someone else write the great part of the letter as he dictated it. It was his custom, however, to write his greeting. He tells the Thessalonians that one of the reasons

for writing the final greeting of the letter in his handwriting was to confirm its genuineness:

17 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. – 2Th 3:17

The greetings were very personal, and the letter's authenticity could be proven, not only because of Paul's words to particular individuals but also by the handwriting. This may have been necessary because of letters circulating supposedly from Paul but written by others.

Verse 22

The words of verse 22 seem very strong. Remember, however, that Paul is addressing the church of Corinth. He is telling them that one of the key characteristics of the believer is that

they love the Lord Jesus. Anyone who is part of the church who has no such love is under a curse. Their traditions and doctrines will not save them.

Paul calls on the Lord to come. When He comes, He will reveal those who truly belong to Him. Those who do not love Christ will be judged and separated from those who do. The return of Jesus Christ will reveal those who truly love Him.

Verse 23

Paul's great desire for the Corinthians is that they experience the grace of the Lord Jesus. This grace is His unmerited favour, without which we could not know Christ or grow in our walk with Him. Paul's prayer is that this unmerited favour be showered upon the Corinthians, giving them victory over sin and maturity in Christ.

Verse 24

The apostle concludes his letter with a token of his love for the believers. *"My love be with you all in Christ Jesus."*

He wants to assure the Corinthians of his love for them all. Notice that this love was in Christ Jesus. That is to say, it came from their common bond in Jesus Christ. It was also a love from Christ through Paul to these believers and one that Jesus Christ put in his heart for them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

F. Wayne Mac Leod

F. Wayne Mac Leod was born in Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia, Canada and received his education at Ontario Bible College, University of Waterloo and Ontario Theological Seminary. He was ordained at Hespeler Baptist Church in Cambridge, Ontario in 1991.



He and his wife served as missionaries

on the islands of Mauritius and Reunion from 1985-1993 where Wayne was engaged in church development and leadership training.

Wayne is currently a full time missionary serving with Action International Ministries through the ministry of Light To My Path Book Distribution. You can learn more about this ministry at <https://www.lighttomypath.ca>